

**towards a foreign likeness bent**

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*towards a foreign likeness bent: translation* is published as duration : poetics number one,  
part of the durationpress.com e-books series.

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<http://www.durationpress.com>

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: translation

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Always in a foreign country, the poet uses poetry as interpreter.

--Edmond Jabès

Ammiel Alcalay  
Politics & Translation

A Discussion with Ammiel Alcalay, Esther Allen, Michael Henry Heim,  
Michael Hoffman, Susan Sontag, and Steve Wasserman  
Sponsored by PEN American Center at New York University

We tend to talk about translation in a very narrow context, comparing, for example, how few translations get done in this country as opposed to most other places in the world with similar or even fewer resources. Such an approach can buttress the idea that translations, ultimately, get done because of cultural importance or literary quality. Although this may occasionally be the case, it usually isn't. Texts that manage to sneak through the policing of our monolingual borders still only provide a mere taste — fragmented, out of context — of what such works might represent in their own cultures, languages, historical and political contexts. A single novel or book of poems by a single writer, removed from the cluster of other writers and artists from which it has emerged, without correspondence, biographies, gossip, debates or critical studies, more often than not just reinforces our uniquely military-industrial-new critical approach to the work of art as an object of contemplation rather than as part of a dense social, political, cultural and historical fabric. In other words, like so many other things in this country, we tend to talk about translation as if it was removed from either personal or collective politics, an approach that, unfortunately, reminds me of Paul Wolfowitz's recent comments in Iraq: "You don't build a democracy like you build a house," Mr. Wolfowitz said over tea, honey pastries and water buffalo cheese. "Democracy grows like a garden. If you keep the weeds out and water the plants and you're patient, eventually you'll get something magnificent."

The fact is that, like any commodity, texts cross various borders, checkpoints, holding pens and tariff stations along the way. And these are both internal and external, the picket lines we dare not cross in our own consciousness and imagination, and the very real political barriers that exist in the world. There are reasons why, for example, more translations from Hebrew are published by American publishers than translations from Arabic, despite the fact that there is one very small, partially Hebrew speaking country while there are more than a dozen larger Arabic speaking countries in the world. Those reasons can lead to great confusion

and misplaced emphasis, as when a prominent American book reviewer can write, in a major magazine, without debate, comment or consequence, something like this: “Choices and consequences are thrust upon the Israeli writer David Grossman, whether he wants them or not. There isn’t a more interesting novelist in the West today.” Given that Israel, situated along the Syrian-African rift, is actually in Asia, there is certainly geographical confusion; and one also wonders whether the choices and consequences thrust upon the Israeli novelist are of the same magnitude as those thrust upon writers living slightly to the southwest or slightly to the north, like former political prisoners Sunallah Ibrahim in Egypt or Faraj Bayraqdar in Syria or, for that matter, a neighbor in Palestine like Mahmoud Darwish, not to mention so many others.

Since the events of September 11th, oppositional voices in this country have mostly been concerned with exposing, publicizing or drawing attention to what THEY are doing, at home, in Iraq, occasionally even in Afghanistan and other places. But very little energy has been spent on examining how we got to this point, and whether we might take some individual and collective intellectual and political responsibility for it. Translation, it seems to me, and engagement with other parts of the world is a crucial aspect of this responsibility but the American system presents some real obstacles that must be thought through and struggled against on a number of fronts.

We all know, more or less, the saga of the consolidation and conglomeration of commercial publishing and the fact that we would hardly have any intellectual or literary life at all worth speaking of were it not for small, independent presses. We are a little more reticent to examine the function editing has as a form of censorship that enforces social and political assumptions and silences (the kind of editing, for instance, that allows an Israeli novelist to be Western). As far as translation and politics go, the freer space of independent publishing presents a whole other set of problems. On the literary side, we tend to privilege texts that seem formally innovative at the expense of texts that might appear more conventional but which emerge from a more radical political consciousness. This creates a kind of two-tiered set of literary neighborhoods in which there are “ethnic” or “political” enclaves and “experimental” or “sophisticated” downtowns. It is very difficult, as we also know, for translators to make a living without doing commercial work. This makes it almost impossible for small presses to support the translation of non-literary texts, since literary texts are often taken on by passionate writers and can, occasionally, be supported by grants.

In order to understand how crucial this element of the whole issue is, we have to consider the structures through which we sanction and legitimize knowledge — i.e. the university system, and its growth and disciplinary arrangement during the Cold War. To put it bluntly, the Western European languages remained the domain of “legitimate” culture, the “western” tradition, while most other languages, and the area studies accompanying them, were either completely exotic or functioned as an arm of the State Department and the C.I.A. The general abdication of responsibility by writers and independent intellectuals over other languages

and parts of the world helped create a vacuum that could be occupied by “experts” and become a breeding ground for disinformation, at worst, or mythology, at best. Thus, we have gotten to the point where a theory that was pretty much ignored or discounted, like Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*, has come to determine our understanding of the world, whether for or against. The extent to which this is true for things relating to the Middle East is astonishing and the massive failure and acquiescence on the part of American intellectuals, a true lack not just of responsibility but of response, on the human, creative, historical and political levels to the Arab world, Palestine, sanctions against Iraq, and so many other issues, has allowed ideologues and apologists to occupy disproportionate amounts of cultural and political space. Again, were even popular scholarly texts about the Arab world generally available from other parts of the world, the occupation of this space would have to be struggled for and not simply handed over. So what I am saying is there is a real need for greater activism and advocacy by writers. This means following and reporting on things happening in other languages, demanding to review books in other languages, advocating for the appearance of other writers — in short, giving up some of one’s own space to make room for others.

I would like to point out one of the great ironies about operating as a translator/writer/critic in this mass-media society. It has become very clear to me, through many years of experience working in and on different languages and different kinds of texts, that in order for translated work to be effective in this country, for it not to become a disposable item quickly consumed, it must challenge those writers who are, in effect, the custodians of our language. By this, I generally mean the poets who constitute the real mainstream of our poetic language but who have been relegated to the margins in terms of recognition and readership. Because of this, I’ve often preferred to work with small presses when I know a book will reach certain kinds of writers and readers. It is instructive to note some of the projects poets have been involved in, and the very disproportionate and deep effect their work in translation has had, if one is thinking only in terms of circulation or copies sold. Ezra Pound, of course, opened the English speaking world to China and Provence; the poet Paul Blackburn, was the first translator of Julio Cortazar, a writer who would soon constitute one of the foundations of what became the Latin American boom; Jerome Rothenberg, back in 1959, did *New Young German Poets for City Lights*, a book that included Paul Celan, Ingeborg Bachmann, Gunter Grass, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger; there are many other examples, where poets have brought a sensibility and experience that is strong enough to challenge our assumptions and, through this dissolution, begin the long task of shaping new ways of being in the world.

This strategy of finding the deepest influence through the smallest point of access becomes even more important when war or political oppression becomes the template through which we process translated writing. In these cases, as translators, we risk becoming collaborators, not in the good sense, by bringing texts that resonated with absolute meaning in their original contexts into a world of indifference or even hostility. Because of this, I think we have to seek poetic strategies that will help insulate such texts and attempt to re-enact some of the conditions of urgency that accompanied their original appearance.



My own sense of this is that, living, as we are, in the heart of the empire, we must discover new ways to both renounce and take up power. The insularity of American intellectual life presents very real political problems and writers have a crucial role to play in disturbing this deadly slumber. By repopulating cultural space with the banished and the obliterated, writers can reassert the absolute value of individual experience in a political context, as a political context, as a road block to be avoided or ignored at one's own peril. But even here, the act of transmission is not innocent and must be permeated with the kind of vigilance that recognizes, as the American poet Jack Spicer once put it, that "There are bosses in poetry as well as in the industrial empire."

Ammiel Alcalay  
September 2003

Charles Bernstein  
Breaking the Translation Curtain :  
The Homophonic Sublime

Translation is always a form of collaboration: between two (or more) poets and also between two (or more) languages. For me, the most important value is that the poem newly being written is engaging as a poem in its “own” “new” language, not a secondary representation of that which lives primarily elsewhere. Accuracy is the bogeyman of translation; for what can be accurately paraphrased is not the “poetic” content of the work.

Translation can be a goad to invent new forms, structures, expressions, textures, and sounds in the (new) poem being written. This is to acknowledge, but also go beyond, Walter Benjamin’s famous comment that mark of the translator should not be made invisible, or inaudible, in the translation. A certain strangeness from the original must necessarily be embodied in the new poem. When I translate, I want to keep as much of the syntax of the original as possible, especially if it goes against colloquial English: this might mean, for example, translating all the articles and genders that you have in French but not English. I realize this is a kind of mania: it is delirium, in Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s sense, induced by the ontological inscrutabilities of translation.

The poet/translator should be free to intervene in the process, assert her or his poetic presence, to let the poem mutate into fruition. I always start with the idea of homophonic translations, which I take from Louis and Celia Zukofsky’s translation of Catullus into English, translating the sound of the Latin over and above the lexical meaning. Letting the sound lead is crucial, or often crucial, for the sound may lead to the sense. Every translator knows that a translation requires doing an interpretation of the poem, for words or expressions ambiguous in the original need to be translated one way or another, while a reader need not make any such decisions. We must be wary of a translation that is less ambiguous than its original: the task of the translator is to maintain an economy of ambiguity or inscrutability, as well as of sonic dynamics, not devalue these features in the process. We have many examples of poems that are translated into a fluent or colloquial English that stand in sharp contrast to the marvelous influidities and resistances to assimilation of the original poem: a boring and reductive way to translate though I would have to say it is the “official” way, the authorized method.

Yes of course these remarks suggest just one way to translate. Nor do I intend them to apply only to poetry: philosophy in translation suffers perhaps more greatly than poetry if only because its readers are often

less conscious of the semiotic cost of translation (roughly 3.1459) and even less willing to cede significance to what is unrecoverable.

And perhaps, too, my remarks reflect an American perspective. Because American English is such a capacious language, incorporating the accents, syntaxes, and manners of speech of both many other languages and many varieties of our own, many translations are unable to bring across the innovative force the originals have for their own language. The originals, often set against a very fixed pattern of poetic practice, have decisive meaning for readers or listeners precisely in the departures from this fixed, or relatively fixed background. In American English, we have no comparable grid upon which these innovations can play, and as a result many of the poems heralded in the introductions, when translated in the conventional manner, seem like weak versions of any of a number of American poetry styles: one can only imagine what might be interesting about them.

Within this context, one might add a formal criteria to the evaluation of translation, taking translation as its own medium, not merely a genre of poetry: what is the translation doing that can't be done in any other medium?

Perhaps this also suggests the need for new formats for translation, using the new electronic technologies such as CD-ROM to allow, for example, for listening to the work read in the original language while looking at a translation – and for the possibly of extensive supplemental material, including multiple alternate figurative, conceptual, and literal translations, as well as a full range of notes. Indeed, the embedding of a translation with such a dense textual field intensifies the possibilities for cultural exchange that might motivate the art of translation while refusing a reductive idea of poems as lyric utterances, unfettered to specifics of location, language, style, and historical moment.

Disputes about translation are always a pretext for disputes about poetry. Translation theory is poetics by another name. If I am interested in a certain kind of translation it is because I am invested in a certain kind of poetry. And if I object to a certain style of translation it is likely that I also object to this style if it were written “originally” in the American. Yet under cover of “translation”, many things – ideas, forms, contents – can be smuggled into the “target” language that might not be allowed, or validated, if composed without justification in some authoritative original other. Of course, this makes translation a rich and valuable field for literary frauds (from Ossian to Akiri Yasusada). At the same time, attacks on translation for “unfaithfulness” are pretexts for a rejection of a style of poetry in the translators own language that the attacker find unacceptable, unfaithful to his or her sense of the proprieties of that language.

One of the most interesting recent homophonic translation is David Melnick's *Men in Aida*. While anything more than the most cursory reading of *Men in Aida* would move to its relation to Homer, the fact that this work is a homophonic translation of *The Iliad* has not been mentioned in the publications of the work. This raises the question of whether such works are meant to stand “on their own” or only in relation to their source. What happens when someone reads *Men in Aida* and doesn't recognize the Homer connection? Is the

reading invalid? Doesn't Melnick want to allow for this? Once again, it is the question of the original versus the secondary, for which Andrew Benjamin's idea of "anoriginal" is such a useful alternative. Is this like someone seeing *Clueless* but being clueless about Jane Austin? Us parents like to hope it sends the kids back to the book, but this is also preposterous. What really happens is that us Austinites are sent out to the movie. What is valuable, the original or the reproduction (Lori Chamberlin's engendering reading of that question [in Venutti's collection] intended): the source or the transfiguration of it, the product or the activity, the accuracy or the exchange? Or is what is valuable the relation of the original to the reproduction; or the first on it own, but not the second on it own (the father and the relation of the father to the child, but not the mother/reproducer)? Homophonic translation is significant because it can symbolize the revenge of the translator: no longer invisible but through the text's opacity making the "original" invisible (or occluded). (Though as Ben Friedlander has pointed out to me, this symbolic or categorical function can actually empty out what is actually interesting about any given homophonic or otherwise radically nonstandard translation.)

In reprinting Zukofsky's short poems, Paul Zukofsky, product of the reproductive act of the authors/sources LZ/CZ, prints only the LZ/CZ Catullus poems, dropping the Latin originals altogether, saying they get in the way of reading the work in itself, as original (as PZ told me in phone conversation, filtered through / translated by my memory and desire to make this point).

Stand on its own, eh? Just like you and ...

But I could never do that ...

Can there be a translation without an original? Interpretation without its object or subject? A beloved without a lover? Child without parent?

What is poetry?

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### Further Reading/Cited Texts

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Norma Cole  
Nines and tens :  
a talk on translation

I will tell you a terrible secret: language is punishment. It must encompass all things and in it all things must transpire according to guilt and the degree of guilt.

—*Ingeborg Bachmann*

The translation never takes place since the texts have nothing in common. The words are all different.  
Leap of faith.

Transcendence or encounter.

A record of the encounter. What is hidden and common to both. Nine nights. Ten nights.

Nine, *nones*, the prayer offered at the ninth hour, the Latin *nona hora*; origin of noon. *Nonariae* (in ancient Rome, prostitutes were called *nonariae* because their doors opened at nine).

Ten, a tithe, based on the ancient Jewish form adopted by both Christians and Romans, a tenth part of the harvest, *decimus*, what was due. Decimate meant exacting punishment from every tenth man in the legion.

In Bugali, New Guinea, the “number word” is the word for a specific body part. The body part becomes conventionalized as the number’s name: nine, ngama, left breast. Ten, dala, right breast. For Torres Strait Islanders, nine is sternum, ten left shoulder. In Papua, New Guinea, nine is right ear, ten right eye. Paraguay: nine, arrived at the other hand, two sides alike. Ten, finished, the hands. In the Zuni language, nine is *ten-a-li-k’ya*, all but one held up with the rest. Ten is *äs-tem-’thla*, all of the fingers.

The nine is imprisoned in the ten. The ten is implied by the nine.

There is red in the pink and they are distinct.

What, if anything, is the poem assuming? Supposing? Besides the words themselves, what could there be?

In a received world, the sign itself is nothing. Retrieve a morsel and build a mean around it. You mean steal, but steal what, Prometheus? This then is the crime. It has its suspense. To some extent, or in a certain way, we are all one-trick ponies. We do what we can.

We did what we could.

We did that which we have could. (*Fr.*)

We have done what we could done. (*Ger.*)

It casts back difference, the shadow you are walking in. You attempt to draw a dotted line around that shadow, an outline.

An outside.

An aside. There is a local painter who appropriates shapes from popular culture, from, say, magazine ads. The shapes are often of women, “heavily coded.” The artist then has friends, other artists, perhaps, assume these positions. The artist will then use these new images, these translations. What could these translations say about the originals? If the viewer a) is, b) is not, fluent in the original language.

“translate to keep the damage.”

Present what it is in the way of presenting what is not.

Make a shape around that by what is. Mirror to it its worst nightmare.

Expect the inevitability of violence, the violence of being excluded or expelled from the space, violence of ice.

An implied quest. There will be a struggle.

What kind of crime could it be? A theft? Of what?

A question or a theft. There will be a struggle.

Retracting a production, starting with a reading. A going towards, backwards.

If a word can be replaced by any other word, what is the shape or space into which these words configure?

Now that we no longer have the sewing machine on the operating table, now that we no longer have to raise metaphors from birth, we have the wasp, and the orchid, we have Rimbaud and Beckett, “*Le Bateau ivre*,” and “*Drunken Boat*,”

the nine and the ten.

There is no original of the encounter, only the encounter representing itself. The nine and the ten are close enough but not the same and can't help each other.

La tempête a béni mes éveils maritimes.

Plus léger qu'un bouchon j'ai dansé sur les flots

Qu'on appelle rouleurs éternels de victimes,

Dix nuits, sans regretter l'œil ni ais des falots.

—*from “Le Bateau ivre” by Arthur Rimbaud*

I started awake to tempestuous hallowings.

Nine nights I danced like a cork on the billows, I danced

On the breakers, sacrificial, for ever and ever,

And the crass eye of the lanterns was expunged.

—*from “Drunken Boat,”*

*Beckett's translation of “Le Bateau ivre”*

The first unanswered question, after all, or before all, really, is how does the listening get translated into seeing, into writing, the material visibility that exists. This is the first translation, or could be, a model

translation, depending on transcendence. Not that all writing comes from hearing, or overhearing. There is the writing generating itself from its own materiality. Space for time.

to transform what began as reading into a crime

—*Benjamin Hollander,*

*“In the Extreme of Translation: ‘writing without writing’:  
the character of an encrypted wound”*

Is it—language—makeshift after all? But then, makeshift for what?

What makes this circling, this avoiding—this this that is the ‘talking around’ language is—  
come through, surround us? —*ibid*

Avoid “avoidance,” in all parenthesis, and propose instead, in the territory described by Julia Kristeva, the chora, process far more violent, more of a struggle, an engagement different from the walking-around avoidance is. Than the emptying out, the draining. There is a life-and-death struggle between the fire and the lid.

Perhaps the very attempt to ‘put the lid on it,’ to make the choices, write the writing, all choices, is a way at the same time to make more visible the empty space, the vacancy. However, we are finding a lot of action in this vacancy, activity that is not at the point of condensation.

“Boiling point” would imply transcendence. Here we say “condensation” for the coolness of the surface. It is so cool that we say “we” for “I” here.

“Doesn’t the translator—doesn’t his [sic] translation not only say ‘see, this is what I heard’ “ (Hollander) and then expanding, we translators add, “see, this is *some* of what I read .“ This is evidence of the struggle, this is what has surfaced.

Hollander’s avoidance, André du Bouchet’s “inattention,” are descriptions of reading. Is reading the crime. As Hollander says, reading is creating a fiction of one’s own. As someone said, as one translator writing his memoirs about translation said, how pleasant to recreate one’s own experience of reading for the poor reader who can’t read it in its pristine original form.

Poor Beckett and his nine nights indeed.

How pleasant to live in a fiction of one’s own. Or what a bloody nightmare.

The judges go out onto the ice and examine the traces. The audience, at greater distance, imagines the traces.

“...and, in effect, nothing more was heard.” (Mallarmé) Or meaning as product, product of combining words, making meaning specific, particular, local, what did not preexist the combination. Untranslatable there. What becomes translatable there becomes the idea of meaning. The way a recorded performance of music communicates, for all to hear, for all time (until it is buried in the sand), the idea of the performance, which is, in itself, an idea (translation) of the music *as it is written*.

Everything begins to appear as inscription, caption. What is under or underneath. What is neath.

One of the twins identified what is socially coded as glamour as “fear of.” He was a sociopath, a killer whose taxonomy did not need to distinguish between amphibious arid reptilian. Was this a kind of personal transcendence. He had to literalize the murder. This was his crime. Emile Benveniste writes, in *Problems of General Linguistics*, about the power struggle that is central to the study of semiotics itself, herself. At a certain point, interest is pulled to the general, the rule, the language template, obliterating concern for the specific relations of denotation. On top of this will to order, to make transcendent order, semiotics denies that she is doing it. “It,” in the French, read “she,” renews metaphysics’ imperialism, ever drawn to wards transcendence. “She/it belongs to the family of grandiose projects.”

Materiality and praxis go together.



Hypogrammatically is one way to read, not deliberate, beside the point in that it might be inadvertent. Total materiality, viscosity of language breaking out of conventions, out of “The Code.” The genotext is busting out all over.

Saussure went from studying Saturnian verse metrically, prosodically, to scientifically combing this body of verse for the text within the text, for visual figures embedded within the text, like Jakobson’s sound figures.

And then, doing what he was so compelled always to do, proposed rules, the set of rules at work here.

Rules, extrapolated ordering principles, aspire to govern. At any rate, we have a set of them because Saussure made them and they are useful. Single letters recombined do not qualify as hypograms ((right away a kind of hierarchy presents itself, the hypogram valued above, more difficult to qualify for...)). Single letters recombined after the other ones drop out are ((only)) anagrams. Diphones make hypograms. So do triphones, multiphones; but not monophones, which make anagrams. Or “rien du tout,” nothing at all, he writes in his notebook.



Another manuscript which is supposedly kept in the Great Mosque of Tunis, but which is at present unavailable to us, one day perhaps will provide information with which we can further our studies.” (Samuel Stern, *Les Chansons mozarabes*) His wistfulness.

*The Story of the Jarcha*, or where does this fit into the history of the Middle East according to our master narrative. These manuscripts of 11th, 12th and 13th century writing from Al-Andalus, the south of Spain, particularly Cordova and Seville, had been carried all over the Mediterranean during “the expulsion,” during the Christian conquest. Stern knows of some that are kept in Tunis but he is not permitted to see them. Some were carried to Egypt and Palestine by fleeing Jews and Arabs. Since there was an interdiction prohibiting the destruction of writing, these pages, eventually not considered worth keeping, had been buried in sand. Thus they were preserved.

After WWII some were discovered in Egypt. They presented an incomprehensible text. In the early 1950s, Stern and other philologists began to make inroads after

discovering that they were written in “merged” languages: arabic, hebrew, romance (proto-spanish). Here were the combinations, generated by a “matrix of enunciation,” or “assembly of enunciation”—the distillation of lyric in its essential public, social function. The themes, love, praise, wine, etc., “set” into the voice of an other, a deliberate “I am not the poet” I, the proposed capital O Other, mostly or always set by a male poet into the female voice, a constructed female scaffold of enunciation. Or a drunk. Or a dove.

In vernacular, the *jarcha*, the appendage or tail, distinguished from the classical language of the body, the main text, the *moaxaja* to which it was appended.

“Brulante,” “burning like naphtha, like hot coals, like the talk of...artists” (from the 12th century treatise of the Egyptian writer Ibn Sana’al-Malk)

Estèban Pujals sends me Emilio Gomez Garcia’s book, a xerox of the Spanish text of the at present most complete collection of the *jarcha*, from Malaga, where he teaches, and I pretend to be able to read it, reading towards Jerusalem.

There are separate languages. We believe in them.

Quote from the questionnaire, it says here.

- Which is the networked implication of supplementing new thoughts with the same words?
- What conveys a line like ‘silence notes its own misreading’?

It is not known whether this questionnaire, devised by a Spanish teacher and publisher, was first written in Spanish and then translated by himself into English or written directly by him in English. The vocabulary is English, the “sentence melody” is not. Is the genotext, the engendering bloody struggle in the receptacle, languagized? culturized? Or does that happen during the differentiating warping and wefting that choosing words is?

The text that is presented is the enactment of two language experiences become one. Fusion. Verging and blending, postbinary blurring of overcoded infrastructure,

Then there is sentence melody; they sing your language before any “language,” any “message,” any “content.”

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar*

...by the advent of a semiotic rhythm that no system of linguistic communication has yet been able to assimilate.

—Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*

Contact before content.

Do you ‘come upon’ a thought? Do you take it as you find it? Frege, in his *Logical Investigations* has us suppose that “a sentence is written on paper,” and then that the “paper is cut up with scissors, so that on each scrap of paper there stands the expression for part of a thought.” Or bury the scraps in sand to preserve/hide them. And if they had never been found. If the interdiction had not been respected and followed “to the letter.” Would these poems in an amalgam of language and tradition, making an entirely new thing, would this new thing still have come to exist in some form?

Without understanding or even hearing the words, you can recognize, for example, the language of leavetaking.

This is real. If it exists before or beside or in the holding tank do we call it transcendence?

And then what is referred to as the “foreignness” in one’s own—as if we own it—language, the basic condition, a baseline irritation.

Communication occurred. Then the theory that constructs the official language, the process of regularization, occurred. There are conventions of use specific to time and place and other factors. Language is learned within a set of conventions. Then there is poetic language....

The translator takes a measure of the difference, takes a reading of the normative/non-nonnative relations in the written text, in the phenotext, the actual given-on-the page. The *differentia specifica* of “verbal art” is in its “set towards the message” qua message (Jakobson). Ordinary language minus social constraints equals poetic language (Kristeva)

The agreement.

The understatement.

“Society was now based on complicity in the common crime.” (Freud, *Totem and Taboo*)

Whatever this common crime is, past or hidden, the common language, used by agreement, becomes convention, and means repression and a kind of safety. Safety from being challenged. The social pact of

language becomes a law of silence. Excess, the unstructured, the unaccounted for, the rebellious, the delinquent is a threat. To control.

The well-known essay by Roman Jakobson about, primarily, Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov, is sometimes called, in English, “The Generation That Squandered Its Poets.” In Kristeva’s *Desire*, however, it has been translated as “The Generation That Wasted Its Poets” (translators Tom Gora and Alice Jardine). Here the origins of “waste” explode to the foreground besides “to use unprofitably,” or “to use without adequate return,” we hear “to ravage, to lay waste, to destroy.” These poets were not merely scattered or used carelessly, recklessly, as squander implies and says. They were “hit,” “knocked off.” They wore their colours. They were wasted.

Kristeva’s theory becomes method when she identifies two opposing factions: society, the one that “wastes” its poets, artists, “in order to reproduce itself,” and then the “we” who are “with” those whom society wastes in order to reproduce itself.

Murder, death and unchanging society represent the inability to hear and understand the signifier as such— as ciphering, as a presence that precedes the signification of object or emotion. . . The poet is put to death because he wants to turn rhythm into a dominant element...—*ibid*

The signifier exceeds the signified.

The text has more trying to push through than what it simply points to.

This is surplus or waste.

i.e. what’s most difficult to address in making translation.

One cannot then, the argument would run, begin by identifying the meanings which language produces and use this as a normative concept to govern one’s analysis, for the salient fact about language is that its modes of producing meaning are unbounded and the poet exceeds any normative limits. However broad the spectrum of possibilities on which one bases an analysis, it is always possible to go beyond them; the organization of words in configurations which resist received methods of reading forces one to experiment and to bring into play new types of relations from language’s infinite set of possibilities.

....

—Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*

Culler presents a passage from Mallarmé, with translation:

les mots, deux-mêmes, s’exaltent...

the words of their own accord become exalted jewels...

The passage continues. The translator is unable to “resist received methods of reading” and interprets Mallarmé’s lithe dazzle in terms of a flattened, normative reading, retro, dead in the water. He cannot go into the beyond, into the territory of Mallarmé’s desire. Waste not, want not: no excess, no surplus, no mess: no desire equals stasis.

The poet wants to free the sign from denotation and does. The word is released from confinement of denotation, and not arbitrarily—motivated by this “other thing,” this rhythmic thing.

There is a characteristic syntactic sound of, say, a political scientist, that is recognizable as such when he reads from his work, or when you read his work, regardless of the individual words and their semantic identities, histories. The texture of political science is a learned thing, a template through which drives, semiotic choric matter, what- have-you would be hard-pressed to pass.

Since poetry resists such received codes, it becomes the locus of “the struggle between rhythm and the sign system.” (Kristeva) This states and locates a version of the central violence of language.

Plato resisted setting spoken language into writing because it would no longer be fluid, it would be fixed. This is how we know Plato to be a poet. What Plato put off discussing was the ability of the written language to question itself, albeit in terms of itself, in metalinguistic terms; even so to put itself at risk before the accusatory social and political machine.

If writing things down runs the risk of “fixing” them, making them rigidified, petrified, translating runs a multiple risk, where fix means pin down, often pinning down meaning at the expense of the writing; and then repairing things that might have been expressed innovatively or unconventionally. Renovate that poem so it will be clear, and if it is not clear smoothed out, we-the-reader may say that it “reads like a translation.” If it is not “the same,” that is because the translator has chosen a nine for a ten. Brilliance beyond explanation. Great confusion at this point about what might be considered non-normative.

The symbolic order as a kind of survival mechanism, establishing difference, turning its back on desire, which always and forever takes it by surprise.

<i>genos</i>	offspring, EMERGING
<i>phenon</i>	shining, CLARIFYING
<i>typo</i>	the blow, the impression

We cannot get away from the violence. But we are now in the post-human. The photo in *Newsweek* (casually?) of a Haitian child eating a burnt morsel of Tonton Macoute.

It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable to accident or intuition, that the work proceeded, step by step to its completion with the precise and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem. —*Edgar Allan Poe*

An unprecedented word order makes us ponder over the materiality of the words themselves, and any meaning we may come up with will be inseparable from the physical arrangement of the words. For it is precisely in the originality with which words have been placed in relation to one another that we immediately recognize the poetic specificity of Mallarmé's language: it is the poetic message. —*Leo Bersani*

Consider that Mallarmé, as well as Baudelaire, was a translator of Poe's work.

Caught from some unhappy master who unmerciful Disaster  
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—  
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore

Of 'Never—nevermore.'

—*Poe, from "The Raven"*

... Quelque maître malheureux à qui l'inexorable Fatalité a donné une chasse acharnée, toujours plus acharnée, jusqu'à ce que les chants n'aient plus qu'une unique refrain, jusqu'à ce que les chants funèbres de son Espérance aient adopté ce mélancolique refrain: "Jamais! Jamais plus!"

—*Baudelaire's translation of the above passage*

... pris à quelque malheureux maître que l'impitoyable Désastre suivit de près et de très près, suivit jusqu'à ce que ses chansons comportassent un unique refrain; jusqu'à ce que les chants funèbres de son Espérance comportassent le mélancolique refrain de "Jamais—jamais plus."

—*Mallarmé's translation of the same passage*

Say you could calculate it, the impact of the combinations. One calculation per register And then perform the substitutions: one for each calculation of the sum of the registers, an equivalent. Register by register, or by totals? Factor in memory history, operating as a drive, as impulse, but prethetic, as precondition for the thetic. Engendering is eventually reduced to a choice, articulation occurs in terms of the choices.

The choice comes out of all possibilities.

"All possibilities" is another name for semiotic *chora*. *Chora* presents them all, then the other registers come to recognize. *Chora* continues to shove up against the thetic shield, the condensation of possibilities. *Chora* tries to break through, whence the charge, urgency. Choice of one, pressure of the rest.

(He opens a tome and begins.)

It says: "In the beginning was the Word."

Already lam stopped. It seems absurd.

The Word does not deserve the highest prize,  
I must translate it otherwise  
If I am well inspired and not blind.  
It says: In the beginning was the Mind.  
Ponder that first line, wait and see,  
Lest you should write too hastily.  
Is mind the all creating source?  
It ought to say: In the beginning there was Force.  
Yet something warns me as I grasp the pen,  
That my translation must be changed again.  
The spirit helps me. Now it is exact.  
I write: In the beginning was the Act.

—Goethe, from “Faust,” trans. Walter Kaufman

Force, *Kraft*, Hegelian negativity.

Τριτου... τη χωρας

...thirdly, the receptacle, now called space

...

...space, which is eternal and indestructible, which provides a position for everything that comes to be and which is apprehended without the senses by a kind of spurious reasoning and so is hard to believe in

—Plato, “Timaeus,” trans. Desmond Lee

(It is still hard to believe in, but perhaps the current model for this type of faith can be found in theoretical physics.)

—we look at it indeed in a kind of dream and say that everything that exists must be somewhere and occupy some space, and that what is nowhere

(What is nowhere?)

and that what is nowhere in heaven or earth is nothing at all. And because of this dream state

(that writing sometimes is)

we am not awake to the distinctions we have drawn and others akin to them, and fail to state the truth about the true and unsleeping reality. —*ibid*

Hem is part of that last sentence translated by Reverend Bury:

...we are unable also on waking to distinguish clearly the unsleeping and truly subsisting substance, owing to our dreamy condition, or to state the truth....

In truth I was dreaming about having all these pages of notes in my hand but not remembering anything about what was in them, and that the red sweater I wore overtop the yellow one was full of holes.

...the geno-text can be thought of as a device containing the whole historical evolution of language and the various signifying practices it can bear. The possibilities of all language of the past, present and future are given them, before being masked or repressed in the pheno-text.

—Kristeva, *Semiotike*

A system is a kind of damnation pushing us to perpetual abjuration; it is always necessary to make up another one, and that tiredness is cruel punishment.

—Baudelaire, *“Crime and Punishment”*

The young deaf man called Idelfonso in Susan Schaller’s fascinating account, *A Man Without Words*, copied the movements and gestures of American Sign Language, as he saw it practised, but with no inkling that these signs *signified*. (Is this *his* sentence melody? Or true materiality of the sign as object not function?) He had to sign for it. He did not understand “sign for.” “Sign for it.” He had (at least for the first 60 pages of his life, the first 26 years of this book) never entered the Symbolic Order. It seems truly astounding that at this moment there exists sufficient agreement that we can refer to a Symbolic Order at all.... Symbols exist by agreement if not consensus. Idelfonso acquired these movements belonging to others, but for him they were not signs, they were truly arbitrary. His symbolic order was a magical language of one, in which meaning was specifically generated by and belonged to, referred back to, his own particular experiences. Green elicited a fear response from him, and so on. The manipulation of numbers—since they refer to themselves?—came much more easily and quickly than the connection between sign and referent.

In a way, translating is writing without memory, stealing another’s memory. Is this the crime?

The advantage.

This is not appropriation but incorporation, the bloody struggle. Not avoidance. Entrapment, perjury. Ultimately, cannibalism.

Playing the disadvantage: an escape to writing  
and a relief

and confinement (remember when *confinement* meant birthing?): shackled back to back to the other, and our lifetimes are not congruent. “We’ve known each other for so long now”

Try to dare to tell it.

The grand intrusion. There is no social space between:

there is, however, an irreparable fault. Is this the crime?

“The author is saying that....”

This is not translation, this is the *New York Times* book reviewer explaining the book to you in a way designed to let you know you want to buy it. (“What Mr. Ellis is evidently trying to say is that Patrick Bateman lives in a morally flat world” etc.)

Absolute speed, which makes us perceive everything at the same time, can be characteristic of slowness, or even of immobility. Immanence. It is exactly the opposite of development, where the transcendent principle which determines and structures it never appears directly on its own account, in perceptible relation with a process, a becoming.

—Claire Parnet, from *Dialogues*,

a blended account of a conversation between her and Gilles Deleuze. In fact, an account of “the between.”

At first I didn’t know how to read that second set of relationships: did the “it” of “It is exactly the opposite of development” belong with the following subordinate clause beginning “where?” Or was the “where” referring to “development,” its opposite? The opposite of absolute speed, that is.

This seems to propose development as an alternative to the Platonic dreamspace, the Receptacle, the Enclosure-without-bounds. Out of bounds. What is out of bounds depends on who’s the referee. Who calls it.

A bloody encounter.

“thought’s reason”

*thème* (Fr.) translating from the mother tongue, or native language, into a foreign language

*version* (Fr.) translating from the foreign tongue into the native language

Finally,

in the last book of the *Aeneid* a treaty is made. It has been known for a long time that the newcomers, the Trojans, having escaped the fiery destruction of their city, have come to live their fate, found the new city, here. The indigenous people have been fighting this fate, these attackers, and they are losing, so they make a truce. The terms of their agreement: Aeneas can marry Lavinia, the king’s daughter, and will take over as ruler, but the indigenous people will keep their name and their language. “The people” is inseparable from



their language. The last aside: elsewhere in the *Aeneid*, Nisus to Euryalus, or was it the other way around? “Is it the gods who give us these divine orders or is it we who make our ideas into gods?”

Coleridge asks “If you take from Virgil his diction and his metre, what do you leave him?”

“Transcendental signified” could be that the signified is transcendental or that the transcendental is signified, the difference being in the direction of the action, of our understanding of the action.

In medieval terms, translation was the transfer of an empire. Later it referred to a transfer of learning from one center, say Athens, to another, such as Paris.

Social and political stasis and calcification are represented by and are a function of the code’s fear of and refusal of the surplus of signification, the thing that moves, that breathes, that pivots, that makes rhythm, the message that moves like revolution kept outside the palace gates by the text, the telos, manageable, managed, ordered by syntax, semantically controlled by convention of the symbolic order. The space exceeds the container, constantly threatening to spilt over. The overdetermined text bears witness to the struggle.

It is easy to see how translation runs the risk of being doubly overdetermined.

*Delivered as part of a panel on translation at  
the Kootenay School of Writing, Vancouver, 1991*

Marcella Durand  
What Makes It New :  
The Secret Springs of French Poetry

At this point in our century of experimentation, innovation has precedent and it is renewing to examine that precedent. However, here we run into an interesting situation: Much of our—and I say “our” to indicate a certain community of innovative poetics—precedent comes from poetry not unexpected, but obscure in that it is in a language other than English. As such, the newness of that work becomes constant in our American poetic present and even into our future as works are translated and retranslated in English. Alternate versions of early experimental poetry continue to re-enter our linguistic spectrum, providing an ongoing source of discovered and rediscovered innovation.

In this movement of slow transfusion lies poetry’s evolution—as it is slowly over the years translated and retranslated, it becomes “new” all over again. In essence, a catalytic linguistic and cultural dissonance arrives via a continuing exchange. I’m referring to a large and diverse body of work created mostly in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the later parts of the 19<sup>th</sup>, over a large geographical area ranging from England to Russia. However, for this particular essay, I will focus on the French Symbolists because through the narrow conduits of communication between the continents that existed and still exist, it was primarily French Symbolist poetics that were first disseminated into American experimental poetics. To be more precise, those narrow conduits consisted of a few choice figures—Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and T.S. Eliot—who were among the first to “bring over” French ideas on prosody.

Marjorie Perloff has stated that the “French connection”<sup>1</sup> is the missing link in understanding the two primary strains of contemporary American poetry—that American poetry stemmed from a divergence in thought between T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, who in turn were respectively influenced by their readings in Mallarmé and Rimbaud. While I don’t find it easy to separate Mallarmé and Rimbaud into two distinct and directly causal lineages—many “experimental” poets are interested in Mallarmé and Eliot, while many “conservative” poets are interested in Rimbaud and Pound, and besides, direct causality rarely exists in any field, including poetics—I do agree that this missing connection is often ignored when the precedents of

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<sup>1</sup> Perloff, Marjorie. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Princeton, New Jersey: Northwestern University Press, 1983.

American poetry are explored. I've found it to be a common assumption that everyone working in innovative poetics is fascinated by pre-WWII French poetry and that there is some large mysterious pool of translators and scholars busy working away on translating that oeuvre. However, once you've gotten past the initial and standard translations of Rimbaud, complete translations of some of the major French poets are surprisingly scarce, often out of print, and scholarly work on these poets *in English* even scarcer. I make this claim because beyond my normal—or perhaps abnormal—interest, I have been forced by a variety of different projects to try to locate many of these materials, only to find that they are not there. In fact, my own small library is what I have been forced to turn to most often, and books that I assumed were in wide circulation are in fact difficult to find.

In the course of this research, I've discovered three things: French poetry is undertranslated; the engine of translation often drives innovation; and many of the poetic ideas of early French modernism have had enormous influence on American poetry, but a largely unexamined one. It's very possible that these techniques and ideas have largely *not* been studied, have *not* been translated, because of linguistic bias, and that's a whole complex and controversial question—and it gets tiresome to reiterate the bias against non-English languages and cultures in this country. Anyway, at this point I'll skip over explaining *why* so much has been left untranslated, and delve into the poetics themselves.

I'm not going to conduct an exhaustive survey of early French modernism—because it is so incredibly rich, and one could devote volumes to the intricacies of linguistic innovation found in these poems. Instead, I've been particularly intrigued by an essay by one Clive Scott, in a compendium of essays on Modernism<sup>2</sup>. I've appreciated this essay because it is so specific: he discusses how Mallarmé permitted an art that owes more to forms than to the poet: “Form multiplies meanings even as it articulates them; the poem becomes a multitude of unified, total utterances.” Moreover, Scott talks about Mallarmé's explosions of nouns, and I think immediately of the explosive effect that reading Rimbaud's poem, “Vowels,” had on me as a young poet—after the “meaningful” narrator-directed English language poetry loaded onto me through high school and college, here was a poem in which the medium of the poem was the highlight, words were broken down into their components, thus, in a sense, making space for a modernist recreation of the word, colors, all sculpted, yet left open, decentralized, unresolved. No “story,” just language—and here is the poem in entirety because it gives me such pleasure:

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,  
One day I will tell your latent birth:  
A, black hairy corset of shining flies  
who buzz around cruel stench,

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<sup>2</sup> Scott, Clive. “The Prose Poem and Free Verse.” Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane. Eds. *Modernism, 1890-1930*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1978.

Gulfs of shadow; E, whiteness of vapors and tents,  
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, quivering of flowers;  
I, purples, spit blood, laughter of beautiful lips  
In anger or penitent drunkenness;

U, cycles, divine vibrations of green seas,  
Peace of pastures scattered with animals, peace of wrinkles  
that alchemy prints on heavy studious brows;

O, supreme clarion full of strange stridor,  
Silences crossed by Worlds and Angels:  
—O, the Omega, violent beam from His Eyes!

I retranslated this poem a little bit from an otherwise excellent translation by Wallace Fowlie<sup>3</sup>, who, like so many other translators of French Symbolists, are uncomfortable with the Symbolist habit of capitalizing nouns. In this particular translation, Fowlie reduces *Mondes* and *Anges*, both capitalized in the original, to lowercase worlds and angels. Contemporary poets don't often capitalize nouns, and not the least for the same reasons that French Symbolists capitalized them—that is, to make ordinary things symbolic objects indicative of the existence of another kind of imaginative reality. However, I can't help seeing a certain similarity in this emphasizing nouns—whether by capitalizing them or by using exclamation points after them, which is another Symbolist habit—with a certain *activation* of language seen in Stein and continuing today. There's an exciting transition from world-to-language going on that still informs contemporary poetry. I also wonder if this Symbolist habit of capitalizing nouns has some echo in the New York School habit of placing proper nouns in their poems, bringing reality to the poem and the poem to reality, and dispensing with the tedious idea of the poem as a representation, a mimesis, of some sort of outer reality. It's interesting to pause here for a moment, and think about the idea of “verbless” space in which language is multi-dimensional, rather than sequential, and one in which elements are juxtaposed in a simultaneous way. In the original French of “Vowels,” the verb “bombinent” is translated as “buzz” in “shining flies/Which buzz around cruel stench.” The closest thing to any kind of temporal action in “Vowels,” “bombinent” could also be translated as “which are buzzing around cruel stench” because that tense, the present participle, is a kind of descriptive time, the closest equivalent being a gerund in English. Therefore, there is no linear progress, but only the simultaneous and abstract plane of the poem, in which all the “action” is contained within the language itself.

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<sup>3</sup> Fowlie, Wallace. Translator. *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Scott says, when analyzing the capitalization of le Cygne, or the swan, in one of Mallarmé's *Plusieurs Sonnets*, or "Multiple Sonnets," says "the indication being, not that the swan has become a personification of the poet, but that a particular swan has somehow become its own paradigm. Cygne joins a higher order of words whose references lie not outside and accessible to everyone, but within, in the world to which they as words are the only key." While I don't particularly like the poem that the Swan appears in, and can indeed see in it the over-meaningful Eliotic tendencies to which Perloff refers, I think the idea of a non-apparent world of words is a particularly important counterpoint to American cultural tendencies towards accessibility, transparency, towards *salesmanship*. American poets are drawn to French poetry because it so contradicts that relentless popular movement that everything needs to be somehow "sold" to as many people as possible, each work thus demanding a clear and accessible narrative that ignores the glorious incomprehensibility of language. Rather, in the French Symbolists, poetry can be *secret*. It, not we, demands a certain obscure, often inaccessible, space for creative interaction.

One poet I've been recently intrigued by is Jules Laforgue, otherwise known as the Father of Free Verse. To my knowledge, no complete translations of his work exists in English—rather, he is sandwiched into various anthologies, and then there is this one strange book published by Penguin with a collection of his work in French and barely credited tiny-font translations by one Graham Dunstan Martin at the bottom of the pages<sup>4</sup>. Cited as a major influence on Eliot, one can see many of the more interesting aspects of Eliot in Laforgue's work—look, for example, at this English translation by C.F. MacIntyre<sup>5</sup> of Laforgue's poem, "Complaint of the Pianos One Hears in the Better Neighborhoods."

These young girls, what dreamy spells  
in the boredom of the ritornelles?

—"Walks in evening's glories,  
Christs of the dormitories!

"You go away and leave us here,  
you leave us and go off as you please,  
we can take down and put up our hair,  
and do eternal embroideries."

Pretty or hazy? still pure? sad or profound?  
O days, do I care? World, what do I want now?

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<sup>4</sup> Martin, Graham Dunstan. Translator. *Jules Laforgue: Selected Poems*. London: Penguin, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> MacIntyre, C.F. Translator. *French Symbolist Poetry*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1958.

And so virginal, at least of that kindly wound,  
knowing what fat sunsets have the whitest vows?

God, what do they dream about in these places?  
About some Roland? About laces?

Aside from the apparent similarities in stanza construction and rhyme scheme to Eliot, as the translator very faithfully rendered the French rhyme scheme into English, there is the at-the-time revolutionary insertion of regular conversation, as well as a very intimate, conversational tone between poet and reader (Personism, indeed!). In his notes on Laforgue, MacIntyre writes, “of the perverse three [the three being Laforgue, Rimbaud and Corbière], Laforgue was the foremost proponent of *logodaedaly*, *tripotage*, and *steganography*.” Online at brainydictionary.com (this irresistible trio of words was not to be found in Webster’s), *logodaedaly* is defined as verbal *legerdemain*: a playing with words. (Interesting that *legerdemain*, literally, “lightness of the hands,” is itself a French expression). *Tripotage*, a French word, is translated into English as “fiddling,” but actually has a strong connotation of mishandling and illegally fiddling with money, as well as sexual connotations. *Steganography*, aside from being a computer term meaning “the art of hiding signals inside other signals,” also means hiding a meaning inside another meaning. Therefore, such logodaedalic, tripotageous, and steganographic work would lend itself to multiple translations and mistranslations, sure to grant a time-release of disruptive ideas into the complacent currents of the “master language” of the U.S.A. And this, my dears, is our precedents!

*This essay was originally given as a talk as part of “A Night of New Translations” at Kelly Writer’s House in Philadelphia, PA, on September 17, 2003. Many thanks to Caroline Crumpacker for curating the event and thus giving an excuse for the essay to be written, Eugene Ostashevsky and Olivier Brossard for their input on the essay, and the staff of the Writers House, especially Tom Devaney and Jennifer Snead.*

Forrest Gander  
Homage to Translation

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I approach the self-obliterating ecstasy of translation with trepidation. The more so because my own language derives from a Europe whose history of military and economic conquests deprived so many other cultures of their indigenous languages.

I may hope that my own translations are less colonial raids into other languages than subversions of English, injections of new poetic forms, ideas, images, and rhythms into the muscular arm of the language of power, but I know they are both.

One corollary of the fifth century “barbarian” invasions was the gradual shift from Greco-Roman to Christian art. During the Renaissance, a strong Byzantine influence helped effect the transition from Christian to European styles. And it was contact with Oceanic and African sculpture which provoked, in part, the leap from European to Modernist art.

I look to translations to refresh American English.

The maverick Progressive Era writer Mary Austin became convinced that environmental rhythmic patterns are translated into the physiology of people attuned to them. So the prosody of the Gettysburg Address, as she reads it, expresses the rhythms of a man who spent many hours splitting rails.

When children died in rural pueblos in Mexico, they were sometimes buried with silk handkerchiefs over their faces. It was thought that worms, respecting silk because it is a part of them, would refrain from eating a child's face.

The translator preserves something of the original with a gesture made out of another language. The original is veiled, but it doesn't disappear.

As a translator of Mexican poet Pura López Colomé, I look for a line that is equally flexible and propulsive, one that might accommodate the architecture of successive clauses that modify perceptions in process, actively, without dragging, so that when a sentence ends, the lineal arrangement and the syntax and the rhythm all conspire to draw the reader forward. This is part of the contour and momentum that I feel in the Spanish.

The thoughts that are expressed to me by music that I love, wrote Felix Mendelsohn, are not too indefinite to be translated into words, but on the contrary too definite.

Petrarch, himself a translator as well as a poet, observed that what the translator writes should be (in Nicholas Kilmer's version) "similar, but not the very same; and the similarity, moreover, should be not like that of a painting or statue to the person represented, but rather like that of a son to a father, where there is a shadowy something—akin to what painters call one's air—hovering about the face, and especially in the eyes, out of which there grows a likeness that immediately, upon our beholding the child, calls the father up before us."

As a translator, I try to make something equivalent, not equal.

Emily D, #842: The Fox fits the Hound—

Chaucer's attention to the rhythm of the French alexandrine surely inspired his own shift of convention from tetrameter to pentameter verse lines.

I am not above inventing rhyme or wordplay in translation where there is none in the original in order to make up for wordplay or rhyme that is lost elsewhere. But a translator can justify such "recoveries" only as acts of faith, by translating not individual words, but the poem as a whole.

In an oversized notebook, Picasso translated the poems of Gongora into *remarques*, figural embellishments across the page and in the margins of the poems.

Even mistranslations have spurred significant developments. The supposedly newly-discovered poems of 3<sup>rd</sup> century warrior-poet Ossian—in translations forged by Scot prankster-poet James MacPherson—fueled Joseph Herder's Romantic re-conception of German identity.

And like Herder, the American poet Ezra Pound launched a new literary movement stimulated, in part, by translations based on a mistaken interpretation of the nature of the Chinese ideogram.



*Cunt*: from *queynte*, aka *bele chose*, “lovely thing”.

The colors of Giotto’s painted mountains are derived from crushed stones excavated from those very mountains. Just so in translation: words are obliterated to allow for new words suggestive of more and less than the original meanings.

In 1944, prior to “D Day,” the BBC broadcast to French Resistance fighters a code based on a phrase from Paul Verlaine’s poem, “Chanson d’Automne.” The first line, translated as “The long sobs of the violins of autumn,” announced that a British and U.S. invasion was imminent. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, a phrase from the second stanza, “Wound my heart with a monotonous languor” alerted the French Resistance fighters to the invasion at Normandy and allowed them to coordinate their own attacks.

In contemporary Mexican poet Pura López Colomé’s art, wordplay is an integral part of the intended meanings of the poems. When she writes, in “Los Cachorros” (“The Cubs”):

Siluetas que se arrastran  
por el mármol,  
el mar del mal,  
la mía entre ellas

—the words might be translated to stress semantic meaning as:

Silhouettes that drag themselves  
through the marble,  
the sea of evil,  
my own among others.

But what would be lost in a literal translation of Lopez-Colome’s lines is essential to the poem in Spanish. In English, we lose the rich sounds in Spanish, the repeating r’s, m’s, and l’s. Even worse, the deformation of *mármol* into its constituent near-phonemes, *mar* and *mal*, introduces a Kabbalistic inquiry, one which is central to Pura López Colomé’s poetic project, one which links the sounds and spellings of words to orbits of mystical, moral, and spiritually-and-imaginatively transformative possibilities.

Transformative possibilities...: as the glow generated by light-producing organs on the undersides of some fish acts to countershade them, erasing the shadow cast when they are viewed from below against the lighted water above.

So the translator must disappear.

In my translation of Lopez-Colome, I choose to alter the literal meaning in order to stress an equivalent degree of linguistic play and complication. I translate the lines as

Silhouettes dragged  
through granite hills,  
grey-nets of hell,  
mine among them.

Now, I don't think that quite works either.

Plutarch's translation of an epigraph on a statue of Isis: "No mortal hath lifted my veil."

Lopez-Colome co-edits a literary magazine called *Gato por Liebre*. Cat for Rabbit. You ask for a rabbit, but they give you a cat. How would you translate that into English?

*I asked for water, you gave me gasoline.*

I think John Ashbery might be referring to the meeting between author and translator when he writes, "In the presence of both, each mistook/ The other's sincerity for an elaborate plot."

Frederiche Holderlin rendered an entirely literal translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, word for word. And Louis Zukofsky translated classical Greek poems homophonically (though not always regardless of literal meaning) and in his book *A*, render Japanese haiku into Yiddish?

The translator may disappear that the author might reappear, but though something does indeed appear, the author does not.

Bill Marsh  
Poetry in Gesturo-Haptic Translation

**Poetry in Gesturo-Haptic Translation**

Writing is a type of dance, a specific movement of the body toward expression. This idea, central to a well-defined calligraphic tradition, is often lost in the equation of writing with the trace it leaves behind. But can dance leave a similar trace? Not so much as a mark upon a page but as a pattern of movement, which can be both captured and recaptured. This proposal begins in that possibility: writing the gesture in a performance of gestural, dance-based writing, the two in combination as a translation of voice, signs, and movement, as an assembly of actions.

We describe our experiment provisionally as 'poetry in gesturo-haptic translation.' It begins in questions about form as addressed, for example, in Lyn Hejinian's *The Language of Inquiry*.

One makes a form, sketches it out, looks to see it, and pursues the suggestions it has made. The initial step is a gesture—or the result of a gesture. In writing, one writes out a word or phrase (less often, a sentence or paragraph); in music, a first sound or texture of sound. These initial objects of one's alertness serve as the points of departure for a foray into the world and back again. (14)

In making a form, one sketches it out in the prefiguring and pre-formative gesture. In writing, a word or phrase. In music, sound or texture. And to adapt the formula: In dance, a first movement, an acting toward. Where the word is present—also a prefiguring gesture, an object of alertness—an acting toward the word translated as body-sign. We pursue a gesturo-haptic form in this movement of translation.

The result is at once communication and activity, research and ethnography, poetics and poetry, and, finally, documentation and assembly. In some ways, the more modalities or motives we engage with, the more the project returns to itself in a large circle. These modes come into play as paths toward a similar communicative object. Communication, our broadly defined starting point, is the sharing of meaningful objects. The spoken, the written, the performative. These are distinct aspects or features of a single object,

and they all mediate a shared goal: the possible translation of that object across spaces, times, languages, traditions. We look to expand the modalities, extend the paths along which we all travel in approaching shared objects.

The gesturo-haptic performance—part alphabetic text, part sound, part image, part movement, all assembly—attempts translation as an extemporaneous convergence of meanings or systems of meaning. As communication display, the performance can also be read as a joint activity elaborating voice, word, and gesture. Sociologist Charles Goodwin describes the ‘mutual elaboration’ of talk and gesture as a kind of “activity in progress,” and one which “provides a relevant language game that can be used to make inferences about precisely which features of the complex perceptual field being pointed at should be attended to” (613). In making a display of communication, therefore, we highlight what “should be attended to” but also attend to those “initial objects” of form-in-the-making that sometimes appear out of the blue. In doing our gesturo-haptic performance, we stay ‘alert’ to what is lost and gained in the activity of translation “in progress.”

Something tangible in the book—one of the “noisy channels of communication” (Hayles 130)— gets translated into something equally tangible (if fleeting) in the channeling of noise and visual data. A language of new media finds in metaphors of linkage, circuitry, and network a new ontological framework for new forms “encoded and decoded, mediated and remediated” in the new spaces of an emergent digital culture (Hayles 130). Hayles finds a better “model for subjectivity” in the “communication circuit” than in “discrete individualism” (130). We like the language but still wonder what it all means.

Gesturo-haptic translation resembles more a mobile research unit than a new media artifact in need of structuring structures. Writing about ethnographic research, Emerson and Shaw describe fieldnotes as at once inscription, transcription, translation, textualization, and narration. One could identify in the methodologies of sociographic fieldnote-taking a new poetics of experiential writing, a new circuit-world interface to help breathe life into the tired forms and formalities of text-based poetry. Meanwhile, we recommend poetry in gesturo-haptic translation as a kind of ethnographic field research. On stage, in fact, we *are* fieldnotes in that our words, images, and gestures symbolize our professional/poetic identities in the movement of live translation. Jean Jackson makes this excellent point about fieldnotes as a form of translation:

It seems that fieldnotes may be a mediator as well. They are a ‘translation’ but are still en route from an internal and other-cultural state to a final destination. And because some anthropologists feel that fieldnotes change with each rereading, for them that final destination is never reached. (14)

Never reached, indeed. But more important, fieldnote mediation suggests a way into talking about—and thus performing—translation as a kind of transformation across ‘states’ of being or doing. Fieldnotes write

the experience of social activity as interactivity across and between languages, cultures, circuit-worlds. That interactivity, we want to say, is a translation.

As a theory of communicative activity, then, what we have called poetry in gesturo-haptic translation can also be read as a “relational poetics” in the sense envisioned by Kristin Prevallet.

Relational poetics, according to Prevallet, “looks at texts as being ... in a constant state of motion, dispersion, and permeability...” (24). Gesturo-haptic translation is always looking at texts in this way and, in our case, with the translation also in constant motion and dispersion. Performance understood as a method for translation makes room, we think, for this kind of dispersion that nonetheless takes on a readable form and becomes, as above, a “foray into the world and back again” with source documents (evidence) as the main mode of transport. We thus respect “what already exists” and “[translate] the content of the borrowed source into a form...” (24). In constant communication, though, we each compose the other as both translator and “borrowed source,” making the gesturo-haptic performance obvious for what it is: a collective exercise in “collecting evidence” (26) written and performed simultaneously “from several perspectives at once” (28).

Inspired by Prevallet’s “fertile contamination” of poetry, we find fertile ground in pursuing what she defines as the “jagged and disjunctive” assemblage of the poem as document (in performance). We also look to Sergei Eisenstein’s theory of montage to understand how gesturo-haptic translations might come to mean something to an audience, a set of readers, or a group of listeners and viewers. Eisenstein has famously described the film montage as that which “has to arise, to unfold before the sense of the spectator” (18). To make an image “unfold” requires the “construction of a chain of representations” which are then assembled into a meaningful whole by the perceiver (18). This “dynamism” of montage assembly suggests the spectator’s role as something akin to assembly technician. The user/viewer/reader not only sees the “represented elements” of the unfolded and arisen image but also “experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image...” (32).

For Eisenstein, the ideal assemblage reproduces the image as “experienced by the author” (32). Thus the ideal spectator, while crucial to the maneuver of montage assembly, is nonetheless removed from, even incidental to, the overall creative process. For the assembly work of gesturo-haptic translation we propose a dynamic reverse engineering of Eisenstein’s model. In our model, the emergence of the assembled translation takes as its prerequisite the status of “author” and “spectator” as mutual interlopers in the processual performance of assembly. Like the Brechtian *Lehrstücke* [‘learning-play’] (79) if not the film montage, gesturo-haptic performance requires the dynamic interlocution of perceiver and performer, actor and audience, teacher and student. A pedagogy of relational learning as well as a poetics of relational assembly (joint evidence gathering), gesturo-haptic translation therefore insists that everyone in on the act both does and does not know the answers. In this way, we garner meaning in the communicative activity of assembling a translation.

Eisenstein's spectator, in assembling the image, "achieves that great power of inner creative excitement" that distinguishes the artistic assembly from mere "information" (35). We humbly reject this distinction but also embrace the "creative excitement" made possible in a method that emphasizes the joint activity of translation and, therefore, the collective fact-finding that brings meaning to art. Performative translation thus adds technique to existing and emerging technologies of assembly. Everyone on hand for a given performance by default becomes a living technician of assembly, of communication, of language, of translation.

In his book *In the Vineyard of the Text*, Ivan Illich proposed that "the alphabet is an elegant technology for the visualization of sounds" (39). We end by proposing that gesturo-haptic poetry is an elegant technology for the actualization of translation.

Bill Marsh & J.R. Osborn  
San Diego, June 19, 2004

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Sawako Nakayasu  
Keeping it sounding real (strange)

Translation makes poetry strange. Poetry makes language strange. I never set out to become a poet, but I was writing and it was strange and so then it was poetry. Born in Japan, I was speaking Japanese and then moved to the U.S. and spoke English and was writing in English and it was strange. I was speaking with Kyong-Mi Park, Korean-Japanese poet, and she confessed she wishes she was making films instead. I confess I wish I was writing music instead. The strangeness of making films, writing music, via poetry.

I go to a Stockhausen performance and a pianist plays a section from the opera, *Luzifers Traum*. In the program notes: “This isn’t music anymore. It is an art that develops upon the stage. Please, absolutely do not receive this work as if in that narrow field of art that we call music.” Then the percussionist plays the piece *Zyklus 9* with the score projected on a screen above her, so that the audience could look up at the score, and pretend, or try, to follow along. This one piece of music undergoes an entire chain of translation – from composer to score to performer to audience. (That childhood game called Telephone.) Translation of poetry from one language into another is just as difficult, or strange, as translation across different media.

In that no-man’s-land in between: I wonder what a poem, or any kind of art, might *be* while in transit, between languages or media. Distilled into concept, or perhaps also a sensory experience of some sort, or perhaps not distilled at all but mauled by the elements, vulnerable to the dangers of interpretation by anything and anyone, until it finds a tenuous safety again in a home of some sort, the comfort of an established language, a medium, an institution of form. Every thought contingent to its vessel, language or otherwise. A poem has no independent existence, but is contingent upon its language, genre, culture, and so I worry about what a poem is being subjected to as it is transported, arduously and persistently, albeit with love and respect, all the way across to a new language.

The thought that anything (poetry, music, people, thought) might be most like itself when not subject to that heavy desire to know, understand, classify, own. (When is a person most like himself? herself?) Sometimes I am translating a poem and feel like I am translating an animal. (And then to transport an

animal: how much of its context can be brought along with it?) The shock of displacement. Schoenberg and his emancipation of the dissonance. A translation is dissonant, has trouble blending in harmoniously in its new language. To let go of the hierarchy imposed by tonal music, or that of the beautiful and sanitary state of the target language. I am reminded of my first years in the United States, wishing to be blonde and blue-eyed, wishing my name was Jennifer. (The translation of a six-year-old Japanese girl into the All-American Suburb.) Contingency of a person, of a poem, and an attempt at emancipation.

Choosing to translate experimental writing feels from the get-go like an attempt at something impossible, like playing a composition by Brian Ferneyhough, physically impossible to play accurately, and equally difficult to know if it is being played accurately. The more you can, the less you can. An endless nearing, endlessly almost there. (Where?) Paul Valéry: "A poem is never finished, only abandoned." Likewise a translation. This can shift the emphasis from product to process, a work that never allows its own completion. And then I am back to Stockhausen. Language poetry (Rejection of closure). When a work remains incomplete without the recipient, the reader, or the performer. Or audience. The translator is a reader first, and at that point 'completes' the text in one manner. Then the task: to remove that reception again in the translated product. Or does the reception necessarily get smuggled into the translation. This is visible to various degrees (some scholarly translations push an explication right into the poem), and so again, an endless approaching, an attempt to return the text to its original open state. Or, once closed at the point of reading, does it never open the same way again. Of course not, as the medium is different.

Because we can't translate every single aspect, the need to choose, prioritize, sacrifice. The stranger the work the more at risk. And so the need for a variety of translations, particularly between languages where the gap can be particularly wide. Assuming that translation begins with an interpretation of the meaning and its cultural context, as a text opens up I have to make some choices as to which other elements I will try to save. Often I choose sound because it is such a large part of what makes poetry feel like poetry, and because it is a large part of the pleasure I find in the task of translating.

The meaning carried in sound is endlessly rich: one walks away from a music concert and may not be able to articulate 'what it meant,' although it is far from a meaningless experience. Sound makes poetry a sensory experience, and so I would aim to translate the experience of poetry – its textures on the page and in the mouth, the way it resonates in the ear, performs itself in the space of a page. Its weight. Thickness. Taste. I go somewhere on vacation, and might bring back pictures and trinkets and stories, but would much rather come back with the thickness of the air, movement patterns of the people, the composite sounds of a city – other ways to articulate the real deal without being the real deal itself.

So I am forever challenged by the impossibility of truly articulating or expressing or describing or classifying – or translating – anything, which is also the cause, reason, for poetry itself. And amidst all this impossibility,

then, more issues of style, aesthetic, and sensibility: I recently discovered hip hop, and for as much as I love it, I have to admit that its language, style, a particular use of slang, will never be a part of mine. I think of the wonderful video piece by Adrian Piper called 'Funk Lessons' where she gathers a mostly-white crowd and gives them music and dance lessons, lessons in funk. Hard to make it come naturally, and likewise I can't imagine translating poetry with which I don't already feel some sort of affinity, where I can smell in the spirit of the original work something that resonates intuitively with my own. And so I shift my way through piles of Japanese poetry, knowing that much of this should get translated into English, all the while making nothing but a dent, a very strange dent at that.

Kristin Prevallet  
Risking It:  
Scandals, Teaching, Translation

In reviewing a new translation of *The Histories* by Herodotus and *The Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides, the poet Charles Olson makes an analogy to a Bulldog Drummond mystery in which a man, exhausted from a day of exploring the streets of a foreign country, returns to his hotel room only to find that any trace of his existence has disappeared—the concierge doesn't recognise him, the room he was staying in has a new number on the door, and his luggage is not to be found anywhere. He begs the concierge to hear his story, but without tangible evidence of his existence, he is no one—and the concierge refuses to help him. To Olson, this scenario sums up two opposing but magnetic approaches to history—on the one hand there is the concierge who, like the early Greek historian Thucydides, is determined that in order for any event to be legitimate, there must be facts, tangible evidence, proof that it happened. On the other side is Herodotus who, according to Olson, would have taken the man's oral word for it, and represented his story as fact. He would have, in other words, respected the man's *humanity*. Confused as he may have been, certainly he knew where he left his luggage and therefore was an authority on his own whereabouts. Herodotus relied heavily on oral accounts and rumours, ritualistic traditions and folklore and took plenty of imaginative leaps when evidence was lacking. It was his *humanity* that Olson appreciated, the fact that to Herodotus, “the voice is greater than the eye (343).”

With interpretation as their nexus, certainly history and translation have a lot in common—dealing on the ground level with how language itself works, both must consider the authenticity, the truth-value, and the inevitable subjectivity of source texts. Like the historian, the translator is faced with a decision: to be Thucydides saying, “stick close to what the original text is doing. Try and rearrange the furniture in the room to look exactly as it looked before you began muddling with it.” Or, the translator can choose to think like Herodotus who might say, “every translation is like being in a room that is constantly in the process of being rearranged. It is impossible to get the room to look exactly like it did originally. The furniture always has to be in a new place because any trace of the original room is itself subject to perspective.”

Given either model, the original text is going to be changed. No matter what, it will be put through a kind of time/space warp and come out altered, disfigured, marred; (or, in some cases made over, new-and-improved, fixed.) Translation, reliant as it is on interpretation, essentially engages language's limitations to

reveal either absolute authenticity or unbiased truth. Therefore, as the post-structuralists would say, the task of the translator is to reveal the play, the language games, at work in the act of translation itself. And yet, there are risks involved in straying too far from the text, from taking too many liberties, from imposing too much of our own human will—poetic imposition and play—on the remodelling of the text.

As the title of this panel (Promethian Risks: The Poet as Translator) suggests, perhaps these risks are related to the fate of the good-hearted but ultimately failed translator Prometheus, who thought that fire stolen from the Gods could work to further human knowledge. Tragically, (at least according to Shelley) instead of using it to develop science and culture, humans used it strategically in war to gain power over each other. Something was certainly lost in the translation, and for his faith in humanity, the translator had to pay with his liver.

How this mythological parable of tricked gods and selfish humans is being played out in current political events is yet another story of the risks of translation. After all, we're living right now under the rule of arrogant God-impostors, an administration of war-hawks who took enormous liberties in the manipulation and distortion of texts in order to justify an attack on Iraq, for which there was no solid evidence, and certainly no immediate urgency. Many documentary distortions were presented as Truth. There were pages of manufactured reports and twisted interpretations of texts and evidence: Although the actual document submitted by Iraq to the UN in December 2002 was 12,000 pages long, the Security Council's 10 elected council members only received 3,500 pages of it—and of those pages, crucial information regarding the sale of weapons by US and European countries had been "blacked out," according to the *Washington Post*. Then, On March 7, 2003, Collin Powell gave a speech to the U.N. in which he attempted to prove that Iraq was duplicitous, using forged documents fabricating some arms shopping spree in Africa, and a graduate student's paper from ten years (complete with spelling errors and inaccuracies) outlining Iraq's movement of weapons. A week before Powell's speech, there was a tape alleged to be the voice of Bin Laden which was broadcast throughout the Middle East (with the notable exception of Iraq). The tape was instantly translated and summarised by a variety of internet and cable news sources. MSNBC on-line reported that, "the message also called on Iraqis to rise up and oust Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, who is a secular leader." (The story I read on Yahoo had the headline, "bin Laden Calls Hussein an Infidel.") But an hour later, Powell comes up with a different spin: that in spite of bin Laden's disdain for Hussein, in fact this tape solidly proves the connection between bin Laden and Hussein. All Powell had to do was say the word, and the news agencies instantly rewrote the story, altering their original interpretation and ultimately deleting the "Infidel" sentence entirely. Amazing. When there are no documents, create them; and as for the documents that do exist but don't reflect the official version of history, destroy them. This is a post-structural joke of textual reflection in which the mirrors themselves can't figure out which one holds the original image.

But these are just a few of many examples of the textual risks that are still being taken by this supposedly God-fearing administration. Promethian risks (in which the assumption of high power is democratically distributed to the people) have been subtly transfigured into Satanic ones (Milton's Satan, Prometheus's alter-ego, who stole powers from the gods not to benefit humanity but to benefit himself). I



keep waiting for the good-gods, the ones we pray to for hope, not power, to descend and chain the real infidels to the Washington Monument, sending their battalions of eagles to slowly pick at the vile-infested hearts of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Wolfowitz. Or maybe Prometheus can come down from the mountain and return our fire to Zeus. Now that we're using it to build weapons and wage war over the existence or non-existence of weapons that may or may not be used to wage war, it is as if the weapons themselves are in charge. How is this logical?

\* \* \*

A text undergoing translation is always in danger of being scandalised—meaning, in danger of being used to prove or disprove allegiances to nation, identity, boundaries, or larger structures of power. (This use of the term “scandal” comes from Susan Stewart’s book, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For example, in the ballad tradition there are several players involved in the creation of scandals—one example is the English ballad collectors who came along in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the Scottish “folk” who, since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, had been singing ballads without writing them down. The ballad collectors, instead of transcribing the songs directly from the folk who sang them, re-wrote the songs as embellished English verse—an undertaking that ultimately served Nationalist, and certainly colonial endeavours. Not only did these collectors establish another class of readers for ballads (stealing their soul away from the largely illiterate people of the hills who sang them and publishing them in chapbooks for drawing room entertainment), but since many ballads originated in Scotland, this tearing at the root of tradition allowed England to achieve a certain cultural as well as political and economic dominance. What these scandals of poetic translation bring into question is the problem of authenticity—in the case of Scottish ballads, there is no definitive author, no “Homer of the hills” who composed the ballads and then set about spreading them orally among the people. What there is, over the course of over 500 years, is a constantly evolving genre as each singer of each generation in each town took licence to change the ballad at her or his will, passing down a song that held a trace of some original, authentic ur-ballad, but in reality was a hybrid composition—a constantly evolving translation. However, although the songs were constantly being reinvented, they ultimately served the purpose of renewing and rejuvenating an oral tradition in order to preserve cultural memory from generation to generation. And this is very different from the motives of the ballad collectors, who translated the oral tradition into English verse with the intention of wiping away the identity of the people who originally sang them.

In his essay “The Translators of *The Thousand and One Nights*,” Borges writes about the scandalous translations of *The Thousand and One Nights*, a text which was thoroughly abused by English translators who projected every sort of insecurity onto it, removing any iota of tone and logic from the original Arabic and embellishing it with their own moral dilemmas—one generation of translators taking out scenes that were deemed too offensive, and another generation embellishing erotic scenes beyond belief in order to titillate English social codes. This is a text that suffered extreme impositions of poetic licence—every translator defaced and maimed the text a little differently than the last, depending on the agenda (either his own, or England’s) to which he was complicit. Like the ballads, Orientalism itself is another scandal, aided by overly

poetic translators, who would take such liberties with Asian and Middle Eastern texts as to render the rhetoric and logic of the original language into nothing more than placid parlour reading. Again, there is always an imposition of a larger social and political context onto the original text as it is being translated. There is no translation without a motive—and although in these so called progressive modern times our gestures towards the original text are more self-conscious and sensitive, still we play out larger contexts in how we approach texts.

In her essay “The Politics of Translation,” Gayatri Spivak writes about the responsibilities that we have as Western readers and writers to question our position and privileged identity over, in particular, third-world translated texts. “Translation is the most intimate act of reading,” she writes. “I surrender to the text when I translate (398).” Surrendering to the text means careful attention and awareness of both the logic and the rhetoric of the original language—an attention that would be difficult to master without doing the hard work of actually immersing oneself in the culture and language of the text being translated. Ammiel Alcalay, in an interview with Benjamin Hollander, writes that learning another language is crucial in the agenda to “stretch the American context to engage with experiences that are not made to fit existing models” (184). To Alcalay it is crucial to resist mono-lingualism and to “give permission to other languages, literatures, and cultures to come into the space of the language you happen to be writing in (194).”

There are numerous ways that, in creative writing classrooms, teachers and students get around this issue of intimacy, and set about translating texts from languages they know nothing about. For example, homophonic translations, or exercises in which students are asked to mix and match four or five different translations of a text in order to come up with their own, English compromise. In a way, these kinds of translations (when they are done as a first, and last step) are another kind of scandal—they reduce the original text to a linguistic experiment and teach nothing new about language. What they ultimately teach is that anything can sound good in English. The dangers that poet-translators are capable of inflicting onto texts when our own poetics expand to overtake an original is a question, once again, of authenticity and ownership. Who has the right, the permission granted, to rewrite...and for what purpose? What kind of colonisation is being taught when texts are handled in this way, and what nation, empire, or ideology, does it mimic?

This issue of translation in the classroom brings Spivak to call for students to do the work of learning both the rhetoric and logic of a foreign language—most specifically a third-world foreign language—before translating it, or even before reading translations from it. To apply this to creative writing programs, I will simply question how many creative writing programs have any language requirement attached to them at all. This question is one that I ask myself in reference to the BFA writing students I used to teach at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. They all wanted to be writers—they all wanted the assurance from me that they had what it takes to be published. And yet, how to “have what it takes” is the last thing I wanted to be teaching them. My goal was that they began to question their motives in wanting to be writers, and from there, begin to critically examine how language works in the larger world around them. Translation offers multiple ways for young writers to be estranged from their language, to put their cockiness aside and actually feel what it is like to struggle with a text, to contextualize their own writing projects within an understanding of language as

a complex system of meaning-making.

And yet, I know that most of these students will never learn a foreign language. So what does that mean? That I avoid teaching translation all together, or do it in an “experimental” way that teaches them good lessons about textuality, but nothing about larger cultural, social, and political ways that culture and language work to create meaning? I am torn about how to handle translation in the classroom—Herodotus and Thucydides both taunt and challenge me to come up with a solution to this dilemma. When poets are trying to figure all this out, poetry is understood as a means of working through knowledge to arrive at a understanding of, as Benjamin Hollander formulates in a question to Ammiel Alcalay, “the boundaries we’ve drawn around what we left in or exclude from our understanding of poetic practice, and from how we think and act in relation to the world in a time of emergency.” Alcalay, in responding to Hollander, makes a very practical analysis that provides a conclusion for the larger point I’m attempting to make in this essay: “The turning away from a grounded poetics and the backlash against its concerns in much of what is now in vogue seem to me a great loss of breadth and scope, a willingness to not only settle for less but to become domesticated and so willingly participate in, and accept, structures of power...we have pretty much come to the point of removing poetry from knowledge, and sticking it in the creative writing department (201).” The creative writing department is not just a factory for producing poems and stories that are then published and consumed, but is a site where minds converge and think through writing about language, self, boundaries and the larger concerns of the world.

*This essay was originally presented as a conference paper at the AWP in 2003, & published in The Journal of Scholarly Publishing that same year.*

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Ryoko Sekiguchi  
Self Translation:  
or the Artifice of Constraint

Last winter I published my first book in French, *Calque* (P.O.L, 2001). It is comprised of texts from two Japanese works, *(Com)position* (Shoshi Yamada, 1996) and *Diapositives Luninescentes* (Shoshi Yamada, 2000). The book a sort of essay into the decomposition of structures attaching to the surface of language and of writing. The texts, as the pages turn, do not manifest any development. They are superimposed on each other with the lightest touch of narration, with hardly any determinable content. They are projected onto the same screen while remaining independent of each other. Then, besides the internal sense within each unit or fragment of text, the book reveals its reflection upon the work of translation.

First of all, the reason for having chosen “self-translation” or the “creation of another version” rather than a direct writing into French should be explained. There is a crucial difference between the “bilingual” author and the self-translator who was not forced by circumstances into being bilingual. Having been born in Japan and coming from a family that was not French-Japanese, French was not an obligatory language for me in the way that it is for some writers who come from colonized countries. As an independent individual with external, historical as much as personal reasons for being attached to the French language, this author’s relation to it is completely different. Rather, something like a “textual bilingualism,” an artificial bilingualism only possible within the field of writing, a bilingualism of the latecomer or the handicapped if you will, is a more apt description when one comes to it from the middle of the culture and history of the language. This is all the more so when the author enters contemporary French culture not through the language but through writing.

And it is in this sort of state of bilingualism that self-translation becomes necessary. When someone has already acquired a language as his or her language for writing, and has written some texts in that language, that writer can’t help but return to questions about writing in that language. To translate oneself and not to write in another language is thus, almost inevitably, to relate the text to two languages, to take responsibility for two languages of writing. It is not a matter of rewriting but really a matter of translating. There is also the question of responsibility. Since the author commits herself to the French language within her own text, the text must therefore take on the responsibility for what it produces as a piece of French poetic production. One must consider that a subordinate translation is not being made, but that two

versions with the same status are; the chronologically later text can exert an influence upon the already existent text.

The very idea of an “original text” subsisting through the displacement of one language into another is therefore put into question in the change of language being written. And the intention is to put the classic distinction between language of departure and language of arrival [source, target] into question, since the text itself is nothing but a particular and infinite instance. Usually, when faced with the strangeness of a translated text, one tends to think that the strangeness comes from the originating language, while one still cannot explain what the cause of that strangeness is. One contents oneself with saying that it comes from the work of translation. But one should not accept the opinion that the strangeness comes from the originating language. The point of departure text is not the source and departure itself is repeatable, origin and originals are multipliable. The original text then appears as persistent repetitions through the displacements of languages which react to and reveal the originals. The texts in this way do not merely depart and arrive, they write themselves and close in on each other during the course of the writing, within the constraint of translation.

This at the same time puts in doubt those metaphors which evoke the notion of “depth” when it is a really a matter of two languages in a text. People describe authors or translators as “digging into,” “intervening into,” “profoundly understanding” another language in order to translate. But if there is an effect within a text it appears to be less dependent on the intention of the author or the translator than the structure of the text.

One would also be wrong in considering this text multiplication as something quantitative or productive, since in creating two versions with the same status, nothing is “added” to something else, rather the myth of an original text is removed, is eliminated from one of the versions. The two texts are thus purposely threatened, in the sense that the author herself is from that point on placed in an unstable position, because the two languages, in the literary domain into which the two texts are thrust, each find different problematics and contexts which belong to them alone. In this impossible situation which consists in paying attention to both contexts at the same time, the text can no longer be taken for granted and is forced into a problematic position, into a contemporary localization, and more clearly than it had been when it existed in one language. The texts relate more intensely to literature itself, escaping from their anticipated, biographical, national, etc. positionality. As for the French text, the question of its status as translation or rewriting remains suspended as each version imposes specific writing problems. Translation and writing are combined, and the first teaches its constraints to the second concerning the reduction of one text to another and the pressures of limits and extensions. It is therefore no longer a question of depth but of stretching the surface of the text: such is the aim of this effort at self-translation/multiplication of versions.

Translated by Chet Wiener

*First published as “L’auto-translation ou l’artifice de la contrainte,” Poésie: 100, Paris: Belin, 2002.*

Jonathan Skinner  
A Note on Trobar

While it is a commonplace that the troubadours “invented” (or found) the art of love (whose key words we all know well—*vernal*, *auzel* [bird], *dona*, *pretz* [worth], *amors*, *cor*, *remirar* [glance], *dezir*, *joi*, *sofrirs*, *mezura*, *servir*, *merce*, *lauzengier* [slanderer], *senhal* [nickname]), the formal, lyric specificity of that invention has been lost to us. What was unique about the troubadour *canso* was its secular artifice, its engagement with social and linguistic particulars in an ideal vernacular, a *koine* relatively free of (Latin) ecclesiastical and juridical control while also not particularly tied to local dialects. The troubadours elaborated a frankly sexual (and, I might add, social) sensibility<sup>1</sup> in a “field of rhyme” with little compare in the history of Western literature—in fact, Occitan rhyme’s likely connections with Arabic and Hebrew poetry, in forms including the Mozarabic *zagal* and *muwashshah*, remain relatively unexplored to this day. (Indigenous influences such as refrain songs associated with the round dance have been considered more important.)

The classical background of written, quantitative measures must be kept in mind— stretching from the troubadours almost two millenia back to Sappho at least (who “reconciles us to the strangeness of her dialect by the sweetness of her songs” [Apuleius])—to get a sense of how *new* poetry, as elaborate artifice, must have sounded rhyming in the vernacular. Occitan poetics gave Dante the courage to write in Italian, and for this reason William Carlos Williams comes most to mind when I think forward from the troubadours: who wrote poetry “in the new dialect, to continue it by a new construction upon the syllables.” (If the troubadours had come at the end of five centuries of abuse of rhyme, they too would have rejected it; as it was in 1071, rhyme stood fresh, untapped, a handy constraint.) Without Williams, Paul Blackburn, the greatest American translator of the troubadours, would not have been able to bring us his ‘projective’ versions (see his *Proensa*, sadly out of print). And as with Williams, the troubadours’ *cansos* were their own answer to questions of love; the “allegory” of which was concocted elsewhere (whether via the doctrines of the *dolce stil nuovo*, Chretien de Troyes’s romances, or the courtly fables of Marie de France), as part of the

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<sup>1</sup> A secular unchristian ideal of love newly articulated . . . dominated by a strong expression of sensuality and eroticism, free from any principle of sin and guilt. . . .<sup>2</sup> (Lazar in Akehurst and Davis 71).

translation of Occitan culture that accompanied its violent suppression and dispersal during the thirteenth century, in the crusade against the Albigensians.

An important feature of troubadour rhyme is its non-sense. That is, whole words may refrain but never rhyme: “if the rhyme sound reaches a whole word (if the word is short, if the rhyme is rich), to respond with another word, or group of signifying syllables, is a game the troubadours rarely practiced” (Roubaud 306). *Cansos* rhyme sounds more than words (in this they couldn’t be further removed from the iconic wit of a Pope or Byron) and so, according to Jacques Roubaud (our most contemporary theorist of Occitan poetics), “it seems that the troubadours saw [sic] in the sounds proffered by the throats of birds—which after all had no meaning but for each bird and his lady in their common latin—an image particularly apt to represent, on the one hand, the privileged link of *canso* with hearer, the addressee, and on the other hand rhyme, this sound full of meaning that is not a word and seeks its mate.” That the smoothness of birdsong issues from such a sharp thing as a beak, finds its analogue in the “play of consonantal-vocalic collisions so crucial not only to the ‘joc’ [play] of rhymes but to the entire architecture of the *canso*” (274). Rhyme structures the poem’s total sound, not just the ends of lines (“makes,” in Ronald Johnson’s phrase, “bones for song rather than its catch ends”). Love must always be new, so that song, and each *canso*, must be new—as Roubaud has it, the *canso* is the *dona* of *trobar* (*amics* or *cavallier* for the *trobairitz*), and has to be as unique in each instance as s/he to whom it is dedicated .

Such axioms were realized to the degree that, “of the over 2,500 troubadour lyrics now extant, at least some 1,500 are unique in their precise combination of meters and rhyme-schemes. . . István Frank, in his *Répertoire*, lists 884 different rhyme-schemes, and of these, 541 are represented by only one poem apiece” (Chambers in Akehurst and Davis 107). Since many of the 343 other schemes are used in forms that require deliberate borrowing or sharing, we can safely say that a rhyme scheme was a kind of “signature” (the troubadours were the first composers in a modern language to sign their work). Much of the challenge of these schemes involved augmenting the worth (*pretz*) of a rhyme by pushing the rhyme words apart to test the limits of echo (thus *abba* was preferred to *abab*). The worthier the rhyme, the greater the memory involved. In like manner, the metrical scheme determined the melody, which also had to be new. What we have inherited from *trobar*—*sestina*, *sonnet*, *ballad*—are mere castings from a formal “laboratory” whose end never was form in itself but the renewal to which form was dedicated. As Williams saw clearly, the “sonnet”—as rigidly received form—was dead from the get-go.

Generally, a rhyme-scheme sets up the “melody” of rhyme timbres for one stanza (*cobla*), after which the music starts over again. (As Pound put it, stanzas came about when someone had to fit a long poem to a short tune.) This partition, or joining and separating of sounds, is thus itself part of the love dialectic, not as allegory but as musical structure that does not represent but engages—as in the *sirventes*, borrowing a known melody for satirical purposes, or the *tenso* or debate poem, which shares a melody (and presumably the object of affection): “all of the concepts, all of the theory of love’s key words only have meaning embodied in verses, said in axioms played out in verse forms, which, emphasized or broken or hidden in verses and rhymes, answer one another, in echoes or in dissonances, from verse to verse and from strophe to strophe”



(Roubaud 239). We come closer to the spirit of troubadour poetry if we resist Romantic notions of “embodiment”—as epiphanic presencing of the idea or emotion—when we remember that melody, meter, diction, rhyme sounds, and rhyme-scheme are not convergent but parallel, the garlands of an ultimately ambient practice. It is *in* (as in amidst), not *by* the play of sounds that love occurs: a supple, widely ranging poetry in touch with the contradictions, pleasures and perils of mediating love and melancholy, measure and excess, poem and non-poem (being and non-being)—with the memory and the life of a language. Rather than securing self, the *ieu* of the troubadour is a contingent locus in the shifting *joc* (play) and *joi* of *amors*, which love imperils as much as it affirms.

That troubadour poetry involves as much collaboration as competition (or that it could blur the line between the two) easily follows; as in the story about a bet between Arnaut Daniel and an anonymous *joglar*. They each bet their horse they could outdo the other in rhyme, and under the power of the king had themselves shut up in separate rooms. Daniel, who was bored, heard the *joglar* practicing his song all night and decided to memorize it. When they came before the king, Arnaut went ahead and recited the canso the *joglar* had composed. What had happened came out (Daniel confessed) and the king cancelled the bets, rewarded both the poets, but gave the song to Daniel. This tale reads nicely as an emblem of the “finding” (more than making—Creeley’s “given”) in *trobar* (though modern etymology connects both *trouver* and *trobar* with Latin *tropare*, ‘to compose a liturgical trope’). It is hard to be original without quoting extensively, where voice, like the single note, is meaningless outside of the polyvocal composition it enriches. Nevertheless, the art tended to divide into rival styles: *trobar leu*, and *trobar clus* (with an intermediate, or *ric*, style). The *leu* style—light, clear, direct—is mostly what I have translated here (though I have included a relatively light, and quite famous, piece from Arnaut Daniel, the master of *ric* in its dazzling sonorities). Transparency (especially in adultery) was the aristocratic privilege, and some of the most popular troubadours are masters of *leu*. While the method of *leu* is to proceed via the clarity of axioms—paired in opposition, headed toward synthesis—*clus* intertwines (*entrebescar*), weaving an illusory disorder that only comes clear when viewed as a total fabric: *cars bruns e tenhz/ motz entrebesc/ pensiuз pensanz* “rich dark and stained/ are the words I intertwine/ with thoughtful thinking” (Raimbaut d’Aurenga).

Marcabru, an (anti-)troubadour of low status (either an orphan or the son of a poor woman, depending on the *vida*), is credited with inventing *trobar clus*—although he himself never used the term: difficult, semantically closed work; couched in opacities of jargon and popular idiom; sometimes harsh and obscurely coded (whether to sublimate vulgar or to protect ultimately spiritual content); as the “realist” branch of *trobar*, more attendant on the broad linguistic and social materialities of poetry than on polished, courtly ideals. Marcabru was a sharp critic of what he perceived to be the loosening of morals in Occitan society, and part of the *clus* in his work involves figuring out the tone, which ranges from straightforward to outright sarcasm with plenty of pastiche in between— vividly contrasting with the sincerity of a *leu* poet like Bernart de Ventadorn. While Marcabru’s attempt to unmask or turn *trobar* against itself failed (though the class critique stands; see Blackburn’s excellent versions), his difficult forms were appropriated for a more



complex, dialectical *trobar*—in touch with its own melancholy—in the *cansos* of Raimbaut d’Aurenga and his disciple Arnaut Daniel.

Most of the rhyme has been left out of these translations. In translating verse by verse (not word by word or stanza by stanza), I have attempted to follow the rhymes of the original— by “rhyming” verses rhythmically and syntactically. (As I stated earlier, rhyme is worn out for us, and in any case forces bad syntax on a translation.) What remains can only be considered the faintest echo of the shape of the originals.<sup>2</sup> At the same time (after all the talk about *fin’amors*), I was interested in finding out what exactly it was the troubadours were saying. It turns out to be quite banal, at times naive—in the *leu* style these qualities can work together, and I chose poems where clarity of statement (not ‘expression’) is a main thread in the fabric. Thus in the simplicity of hearing love stated, you also hear the elegant shape of the poems. It is not subject-matter that counts here so much as ‘delivery’ in the oratorical sense. The troubadours wear their apparel differently, are like horsemen on the same terrain with the same equipment but different (sometimes bizarre) riding styles. I have been guided by the audible aspect of *trobar*, not as rhyme but as a measured turning of sense into sound, and a return of that measure making the *canso*. This is not out of any predilection for *trobar leu* over *clus*, but because the latter (with its idioms, jargon, tonal ambiguities and doublespeak—the “language” poetry of *trobar*) requires better knowledge of Occitan than I have, along with a good deal of philology. Daniel’s *ric* style is, I think, more accessible. In relying on cognates when possible to let the sounds through (as I have in all of these pieces: seize for *s’aisi*, chant for *chantar*, vault for *voutas*, contest for *conten*), I have attempted to get some of the total sound and density (“rhyme makes bones”) into my translations. (I haven’t been shy about exploiting homophonic coincidences, either.) In all of this, my method falls somewhere in between Pound’s melopoeic obsession with surface (in his “interpretative” translations of Arnaut Daniel) and Blackburn’s projective verse inhabitations. It is important to remember that these poems were not printed but sung (their authors were composers as well as poets); so read them aloud, sing them if you will, but read them with your ears.

The *vidas*, or short lives, and *razos*, or explanations, were prose biographies recited before the singing of the poems, something like poet’s patter for the *joglar*. (The *vida* is a brief account of the troubadour while the *razo* is a “little story in prose that attempts to explain how a particular troubadour came to compose a specific song” [Poe in Akehurst and Davis 186]). Their veracity is often hard to attest, and more often than not they are deliberately fanciful (Peire Vidal’s smells strongly of Ovid as well as wolf skin); nevertheless, they are responsible for our popular “troubadour,” strumming a lute beneath the lady’s balcony. Pound first came at the troubadours through these “personae” (it was Justin H. Smith’s *The Troubadours at Home*, and the bellicose Bertran de Born’s nineteen *razos*, that made him a quick expert). These may be our first “novels,”

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<sup>2</sup> For what it’s worth, Peitieu’s *Ab la dolchor del temps novel* is *aabcbc*: four octasyllabic *coblas doblas* (the rhyme sounds switch every two stanzas: so then *bbcaca*) with one *tornada* (envoi). Daniel’s *Doutz brais e critz* is *abcdefgh*: excepting the first two lines of each *cobla* which are broken up into four and six syllable verses, seven decasyllabic *coblas unissonans* (same end-sounds repeated throughout the poem) with feminine endings on *bfgh* and a two line *tornada*. Vidal’s *Ab l’alen tire vas me l’aire* is *abbaccd*: four seven-syllable *coblas unissonans* with masculine endings on *cc*.

and/or literary criticism, attempted in a Romance language. The *vidas* included here have been translated literally, to convey their casualness and simplicity.

A couple of notes: in *Ab la dolchor del temps novel*, *Bon Vezi* is the *senhal* or code name for Peiteus's lover. Daniel's St. William is, apparently, the famous William of Orange from the epic *Song of William*. The Longinus referred to is the apocryphal centurion who, when he stabbed Christ in the side with his lance, got blood in his eyes and was cured of blindness. As Roubaud cleverly notes, in this allusion to the blood which gives light, and by extension to Joseph's grail (which also caught that blood), Daniel implies a bold comparison between his lover's naked body and the holy grail. The obscure political content of this poem does not seem to affect its principal meaning, though it serves to remind us of the secular, even occasional nature of troubadour verse. In stanza two of *Ab l'alen tire vas me l'aire*, Vidal is describing the fragrant rectangle of Provence (just north of Marseille), where the birds really do sing in Latin.

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## VIDAS

The count of Poitiers [Guillem de Peiteus] was one of the greatest gallants the world has known and a great deceiver of ladies, and a good knight in arms and generous in love; and could write and sing well. And he went about the world a great while fooling ladies. And he had a son, who took to wife the duchess of Normandy, who had a daughter [Eleanor of Aquitaine] who was wife to King Henry of England, mother of the Young King and of lord Richard and of the Count Jaufre of Brittany.

Arnaut Daniel was from the same region as Arnaut de Mareuil, in the bishopric of Perigord, from a castle by the name of Riberac, and he was a nobleman. And he learned letters well and loved to compose. And he abandoned letters, and became a minstrel, and picked up a way of composing in difficult rhyme, for which his songs are neither easy to understand nor to learn. And he loved a high lady of Gascony, the wife of William of Buovilla, but he did not believe the lady gave him pleasure in matters of love; for he said:

I am Arnaut who amasses air  
and chases the hare with the ox  
and swims against the current.

Peire Vidal was from Toulouse. He was the son of a furrier. And he sang better than anyone in the world. And he was one of the craziest men ever; so much so that he thought anything that he wanted or that pleased him was true. And writing came more easily to him than to any man in the world, and he it was who made the richest songs and the greatest follies of arms and of love and insulting others. And it is true that a knight of Saint Giles cut his tongue out, because he had made it known that he was his wife's lover. En Uc de Baux cured and healed him. And when he was better, he went across the sea. From there he brought back a Greek woman, who had been given him to wed in Cyprus. And he made it known that she was niece to the emperor of Constantinople, and that for this reason he would have the empire. Which is why he put all he could earn into building a fleet, for he thought he would conquer the empire. He carried imperial arms and had himself called emperor and his wife empress. And he fell for all the good ladies he saw and begged for their love; and all said they would do and say whatever he wanted. For which reason he believed himself the lover of all and that all would die for him. And he always handled expensive steeds and arms and sat in an imperial throne. And he thought himself the best knight in the world and the most loved by women.

[RAZO:] And he loved The Loba of Puenautier. . . . The Loba was from Carcassone and Peire Vidal had himself called Lobo and wore a wolf's arms. And in the mountains of Cabaret he had himself hunted by the shepherds and mastiffs and greyhounds, the way a wolf is hunted. And he wore a wolfskin to make the shepherds and dogs think he was a wolf. And the shepherds with their dogs hunted and mauled him so that he was brought for dead to the house of The Loba of Penautier. When she saw that this was Peire Vidal, she rejoiced greatly in his folly and laughed a lot, and so did her husband. And they received him with great joy;

and the husband gave him to drink and hid him away as best he could. And he sent for the doctor and had him cared for until he was well.

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*Ab l'alen tir vas me l'aire*

Breathing in I draw deep the air  
That comes up from Provence  
I like all things from there  
So much when I hear it being praised  
I listen smiling  
And for every word ask a hundred more  
I'm so grateful to hear good of it

No man knows a sweeter realm  
From the Rhone to Vence  
Than the land sea and Durance enclose  
Nor one where such true joy flashes  
I left my joyful heart  
Amidst good people with a woman  
Who can make the saddest man laugh

No man will curse the day  
When he remembers her  
For in her joy is born and begins  
And whoever praises her  
Lies not if he speaks well  
Her excellence is without contest  
The noblest this world has known

All I know how to say or do  
Is hers the science  
She gave me and the knowledge  
By which I am light and singing  
And everything I do well  
Comes from her fine pleasing body  
Even when I ponder in my heart

—Peire Vidal

*A la fontana del vergier*

At the orchard fountain  
Where gravel makes the lawn green  
In the shadow of an almond tree  
Graced with white flowers  
And the new old song  
I found alone, and friendless  
She who offers no solace.

She was a damsel well shaped  
Daughter of a lord castellan  
And as soon as I thought the birds  
Brought her joy, the verdure  
And the sweet new season  
And that she might hear me  
Everything about her changed.

Her eyes wept into the fountain  
And her sighs were profound  
Jesus she said, king of the world,  
You make my suffering worse,  
For your shame confounds me  
And the best men in this world  
Go to serve you, as you please.

Gone with you is my friend  
Noble proud handsome rich  
And all I'm left is heartache  
My constant longing and tears  
Ai! cursed be king Louis  
Who called to arms and who preached  
Just so this heart could ache!

Seeing her so disconsolate  
I came up to the clear stream  
Beauty said I too much crying

Ruins your face and colors  
There's no need to despair  
He who made the woods in leaf  
Will bring you joy enough.

Sir she said I truly believe  
God will have mercy on me  
Forever in the other world  
As there are plenty enough sinners  
But in this one he took my king  
Source of all my joys; he considers little  
How estranged from me he is.

—Marcabru

*Reis glorios, verais lums e clartatz*

Glorious king true lamp and light  
God my right Lord and master please  
Lend my friend a true hand  
I haven't seen him since last night  
And here comes the dawn

True friend whether sleeping or awake  
Sleep no more but gently be stirring  
A star blazes in the east  
I know it well for the morning star  
And here comes the dawn

True friend I call you singing  
Sleep no more I hear birds  
Calling for daylight in the forest  
I shiver to think of the jealous one  
And here comes the dawn

True friend go to the window  
See how many stars are in the sky  
And know you can trust me  
If you don't the hurt will be yours  
And here comes the dawn

True friend since I left you  
I haven't slept or moved from my knees  
Asking God son of Saint Mary  
To bring you back my faithful friend  
And here comes the dawn

True friend out there on the porch  
You begged me not to sleep  
But wake through the night until day  
Now you grumble when I sing  
And here comes the dawn



True sweet friend I sojourn in such bliss  
That I would dawn or day never came  
For the gentlest woman ever born  
Holds me and holding her who cares less  
About madmen or dawn

—Guiraut de Bornelh

*Ab la dolchor del temps novel*

In the sweet new season  
Forests rustle and the birds  
Chant each in their own Latin  
In verses tuned to new song  
Then it's good a man seize  
That which he most desires

Neither message nor letter  
Brings what is most pleasant  
My heart doesn't laugh or sleep  
Nor dare I take one step  
'Till I'm sure about the end  
Whether it's as I require

This is the way our love goes  
Just like the whitethorn branch  
Trembling in the tree-top  
All night through rain and frost  
'Till daylight when the sun  
Spangles the leaves and branches

Remembering a morning  
When we'd had enough of war  
And she gave me the best gift  
Pledging me heart and ring  
God keep me alive long as  
My hand's beneath that cloak.

No worries that strange Latin  
Will put off my Bon Vezi  
I know how it goes with words  
The way small talk gets around  
Let them gabble of love  
We've got the bread, the knife

—Guillem de Peiteus

*Doutz brais e critz*

Sweet chucks and cries  
Lais and chant and vault-  
Throated birds I hear flirting in latin  
Each as a pair as we do  
Making clear love to our mates  
And I who love the richest  
Above all should make richly wrought song  
With no false word or rime unlocked

The flowering branch  
Vaulted round with flowers  
Birds set trembling with their beaks  
Is not fresher nor would I want Rouen  
Without her nor all Jerusalem  
But upright hands clasped I give myself over  
For loving her does honor to Dover  
Or he whose fealty Estella and Pamplona are

Nor was I lost  
Or the least off course  
When I first entered past castle dikes  
Where the lady I crave lives  
Like no nephew of St. William's  
I yawn and stretch all day  
For a beauty surpassing others  
The way pleasure outdoes cramps

I was welcome  
As well as my words  
Since I was no fool in choosing them  
Preferring fine gold to copper  
On the day I kissed my lady  
She made a shield of her rich blue cloak  
That the slanderers not see me  
Those viper tongues who talk such evil

May the merciful lord  
By whom were absolved  
Mistakes the blind Longinus made  
Be pleased if my mistress and I lie  
Together in the room where we trysted  
A meeting whose rich joy I await  
That I discover her body with kisses and smiles  
Gazing on her clear skin by lamplight

What did you say  
Mouth I think you just lost me  
Promises good enough for a Greek  
Emperor or the lord of Rouen  
Or the king of Tyre and Jerusalem  
Only a fool wants so much he ends up sorry  
Neither Love nor St. Genesius have the power  
To protect those who chase out joy.

Hateful caustic  
Whetted tongues  
Don't scare me even if Galicia's lord  
Was taken down it's right we blame him  
Who as we know captured his pilgrim cousin  
Raimon the count's son and I learned  
That Ferdinand will barely regain his honor  
If he unties and delivers him straightaway

I would have gone to see him but stayed  
For the crowning of the good king of Etampes

—Arnaut Daniel

*Bel m'es lai latz la fontana*

I find it pleasant by the fountain  
Where the grass is green the tree frog  
Repeats its song  
In the sand  
All night when it's quiet  
The nightingale trills  
Under leaves on his branch  
Amid flowers I enjoy  
Slow secret love

A lady is false to her friend  
In love if she boards three  
It's illegal  
If they are three  
But beside her husband I allow  
One prized courtly friend  
And if she goes looking for more  
She is dishonored  
And proven a whore

But if the first love betrays her  
Betrayal bears flowers no fruit  
Let her be false  
Show no mercy  
But not debase herself either  
Whoever cheats on his woman  
Cheated on goes gaping  
You cheated first  
So yawn idiot yawn

God gave me good luck in love  
If I could only have my fill  
There where I caress  
And court  
I'm the best

And my heart is not empty  
Lacks no love when I ride out  
Proud of Na Desirada  
But she's too far now

She's so slim round and smooth  
Beneath her Rheims cloth shirt  
When I see her  
I swear to god  
I don't envy the king at all  
Not to speak of the count  
I'm more true to my desires  
When I have her  
Nude under lace

In another close relation  
I invested love that was sweet  
Now I deny it  
To stay clean  
As long as the best doesn't change  
The good looking sparrow-hawk  
Flies from Puy straight to her  
Soon as its leash is cut  
It takes flight

Weak as a strand of wool to me  
Are the strong bit and harness  
However tough  
I grant you  
The whole strap and bridle  
That's how I work intertwining  
Words sharpening the song  
Tongue  
Entangling tongue

—Bernart Marti

*Quan lo rius de la fontana*

When the stream at the spring  
Clears up, as it does  
And eglantine flowers,  
And nightingale perched  
Warbles picks up and smoothes  
And refines its sweet song  
Then good it is I pick up mine

Love of a distant land  
For you my whole heart aches  
And there is no medicine  
If I can't hear your call  
Drawn by gentle loving  
Down in the bushes, under covers  
With she I most desire

Empty-handed every day  
No wonder I'm hot  
For no more gentle Christian  
Ever was, nor would God want one  
Neither Jewess nor Saracen  
He is well payed with manna  
Who wins something of her love

This heart knows no end desiring  
Her whom I most love  
I think wanting fools me  
If too much wanting takes her away  
Sharper than a thorn  
Is the pain joy kills  
I don't want to hear about it

Without any parchment  
I'll transmit the verse we sing  
In clear Roman tongue

To Uc le Brun by Filhol  
I think it good the Poitevins  
Those of Berry and Guyenne  
Take joy of him, the Bretons too.

—Jaufre Rudel



*Chansson do-ill mot son plan e prim*

Seeing the catkins bud I'll make  
A song of words plain and prim  
Since mountain tops  
Are the color  
Of many a flower  
And leaves turn green  
And the clamor  
Of birdsong sounds  
Through dark places in the wood

In the woods song encounters song  
And lest mine be faulted  
I sculpt and file  
Courtly words  
With Love's art  
One I don't have the heart to lose  
When it quits me  
I hold to the trace  
The more I feel its pride resist

A lover's pride is worth little  
When he trips his lord up  
From on high  
Into the dust  
With such worries  
That he strips him of his joy  
It's right he weep  
Burn and crack  
For having muttered at love

I'm not turning aside to mutter  
Good lady I'm on my knees before you  
But I'm afraid  
Of the rumors  
And joy shivers

So I'm claiming I don't want you  
We never rejoiced  
In such guests  
And it's hard to welcome them

Even if I welcome things pell-mell  
My thoughts assail you there  
My song, myself  
Worth the joy we had  
Where we parted  
For which my eyes are often moist  
With sorrow and tears  
And with softness  
For the joy I am suffering

I sigh but don't suffer for love  
I follow no measure or size  
Equal to myself  
Since Cain at least  
We haven't seen  
A lover less welcoming  
To hearts fickle  
Or deceitful  
For which my joy tops all

Beauty whoever turns your head  
Arnaut runs straight  
Where he'll honor you  
For your worth tops all

—Arnaut Daniel

*Non puec sofrir c'a la dolor*

I cannot hold my tongue  
Back from a toothache  
Nor my heart from the new blossoms  
When I see branches in flower  
And the song of lovebirds  
Echoes through the woodlands  
And though I go thoughtful  
And battling an ill wind  
When song brings orchards and fields in  
I am revived and comforted

I make an effort in nothing  
So much as song and rejoicing  
For I dreamed one night in the spring  
Something that delighted me  
I dreamed a woodland sparrowhawk  
Was perched on my hand  
And although it seemed trained  
I had never seen one wilder  
But soon it was tame and familiar  
And I held it on a good leash

I recounted the dream to my lord  
Trusting a friend as I should  
And he explained it in love's terms  
Telling me that I was certain  
To have the noblest of women  
Entrusted as my lover  
Provided I suffered for her  
That no man of my rank or above  
Ever dreamed of loving  
Or being loved by such a woman

Now I'm ashamed and afraid  
I wake up I sigh and moan

Taking the dream for a fool's tale  
Not believing a shred of it  
But I can't keep my thoughts  
Prideful vain outstepping measure  
From the folly of my heart  
For I know that after our crossing  
The dream will come true  
Exactly as I was told it would

And then you will hear a singer  
Coming and going with his songs  
Not that I know where  
And I must pluck up my courage  
To send her the message  
Bearing signs of love  
Even if it's only half done  
But I haven't any gage from her  
And no affair can be finished  
As long as it's not begun

For I've seen how a tower is built  
Starting with just one stone  
And gradully raised higher  
Until it can be garrisoned  
This is why I take heart  
If you think I should  
And send my verse traveling  
Once I've found a good tune  
And a quick-footed singer  
Who can bring solace and pleasure

And if I went to an emperor  
Or a king and he showed his grace  
To me just as to a traitor  
He neither wished to nor could protect  
Or support let him banish me  
Sent far away to a strange land

And let me be condemned  
And sure of much suffering  
If her rancor ever estrange me  
From her noble and true white body

And now you will hear and see  
Who know my language  
If it was ever veiled or obscure  
How clear I have made it

For I have truly made an effort  
That you understand this song

—Giraut de Bornelh

Originally published as

*Petit Chansonnier: Provençal Lyrics,*  
translated by Jonathan Skinner

by Periplum Editions, Paris, 1996

Rick Snyder  
The Politics of Time:  
New American Versions of Paul Celan

Translation is fundamentally an ethical undertaking. Of course, it's not an undertaking at all—but an overtaking, an afterlife—a taking over of words from one culture to another, one language to another. These transferences constitute the same act because language and culture are so intimately bound to one another that their distinction can be seen as a taxonomic convenience. To follow the basic thrust of linguistics, then, and attempt to isolate language from the larger social environment in which it lives is to put it in a laboratory in which its sole measure can be instrumentality. Language needs its larger social fabric to retain the valences that make it meaningful—and thus make poetry a possibility. This necessary entwining of language, culture, and history is unmistakably prevalent in the poetry of Paul Celan. Though the varying keys Celan used throughout his career make it difficult to speak of his work in the singular, these poems, in their very realizations, are always already linked to the contexts and circumstances, the real (lost) world in which Celan created them.

Initially at the temporal and spatial intersections of several empires, Celan's world was always composed of multiple languages. Born in 1920 in Romanian Czernowitz, formerly a part of the Austrian empire and then of the Ukraine, Celan grew up in a cross-section of German, Yiddish, and Romanian cultures. As John Felstiner notes in *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, the arrival of Soviet troops in Czernowitz provided Celan with the impetus to learn Russian and to begin trying his hand at translation. But the arrival of the Nazis in 1941 had only devastating effects. Celan's parents were deported, and he was imprisoned from 1942 to 1944 in Romanian forced labor camps, where he learned that his father had died of typhus, and shortly afterward, that his mother had been shot by the Nazis. After his release from the camps, Celan moved to Bucharest and then Vienna, before settling in Paris, where he lived, wrote, and taught until his suicide in 1970.

Aside from a few early lyrics in Romanian, Celan produced all of his mature work in German, the language of his mother and her murderers. The bitter paradoxes of Celan's relations to his *Muttersprache* have been the subject of much critical inquiry. Central to an understanding of this relationship is the *breathturn*, a term introduced by Celan in The Meridian speech of 1960, and one commonly used by critics to describe the radical changes Celan's work underwent throughout the next decade, and especially in the landmark

1967 volume *Breathturn*. Though the widespread application of this term may elide the extent to which Celan's poetics changed incrementally but continually throughout his career, it does serve to signify the tremendous differences in form, tone, and content between his earlier and later work.

In its use of elegant if ironically employed cadences and memorably disarming metaphors, the young poet's work strongly bears the marks of his two primary influences, French surrealism and German expressionism. His early work is relatively direct in its treatment of identifiable subject matter and can typically be "unpacked" by standard hermeneutical procedures. Poems of this period address almost obsessively themes of time, language, and loss, frequently evoking, both metaphorically and directly, the experiences of the poet, his family, and the millions of other victims of the Nazis. While Celan's best-known poem, "Deathfugue," from 1952's *Poppy and Memory*, seems demonstrably more aggressive in tone than the more somberly elegiac works that predominate in his first two books, it is not unusual in its direct treatment of its themes or its emotive power: "Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night / we drink you at noon death is a master from Germany / we drink you at sundown and in the morning we drink and we drink you" (translation Michael Hamburger).

The popularity of Celan's early work, and especially "Deathfugue," in postwar Germany undoubtedly helped to motivate the different approaches to language that Celan employed in his work throughout the rest of his life. Felstiner amply documents the poet's discomfort with the poem's assimilation throughout the 1950s and 60s into the German literary and educational establishment—where it was sometimes seen as a gesture of reconciliation. Of course, numerous other factors—personal, historical, and aesthetic—no doubt influenced the development of Celan's poetics. The degree to which such factors are intertwined is evident in a 1958 statement Celan made, in which he asserted that German poetry, "with the most sinister events in its memory," has become "greyer," distrustful of "beauty," having "nothing in common with the 'euphony' which more or less blithely continued to sound alongside the greatest horrors." Such poetry does not "transfigure or render 'poetical,'" but "tries to measure the area of the given and the possible," not in the abstract, but for "an 'I' who speaks from a particular angle of reflection which is his existence and who is concerned with outlines and orientation." The intent of these considerations, moreover, extends beyond the realm of any autonomous poetic, as Celan asserts, "Reality is not simply there, it must be searched and won" (translation Rosmarie Waldrop).

These statements prefigure and seem a blueprint for The Meridian speech, in which Celan's dizzying investigations of mimesis and alterity lead to such ideas as the "counterword" and the "breathturn," prime forces in the "radical individuation" of language that seeks a "wholly other." Without oversimplifying the dynamics of the poet's development, the application of such ideas leads the poet to systematically and at times violently dismantle the verse-edifice his early work erects. While Celan maintains much of the elemental vocabulary developed in his early poems—with central motifs of snow, stars, eyes, leaves, and flowers—his work increasingly interrogates, deconstructs, and recombines elements of the German language itself. His poems also increasingly turn to specialized vocabularies: those of geology, physiology, botany, and

ornithology, among others. In a similar manner, he more frequently employs archaic and regional German forms.

As George Steiner and others have pointed out, these developments point to a desire to create a German that Celan, the Holocaust survivor, can inhabit, one that's less stained than the common speech of the regime that brought him to what must be "left unspoken." Rather than implying that Celan is always looking back at what can't be said, Katharine Washburn has called attention to the ways in which Celan's poetics point to the future and attempt to guard against further assimilation: "Celan," writes Washburn, "employed the most rigorous of means to protect his history and his experience from trivialization, no doubt anticipating a future in which 'Auschwitz,' and 'genocide' would lose their potency and turn into threadbare metaphor." Importantly, with these shifts, Celan's verse constructions move further and further from the graceful cadences of his early work and become increasingly fragmented, plunging into highly vertical and violently wrenched syntactical constructions. As Steiner notes, the primary semantic unit of his work clearly shifts from that of the line to the word—and ultimately, to the word's constituent parts.

This shift is immensely important and may in fact constitute the heart of the breather. Though it's an extensive change in his poetics, this turn does not create any kind of a clean rift in Celan's oeuvre. The poet's later work doesn't forsake his early thematic emphases of time, language, loss, and alienation so much as it employs variable keys, differing registers, to perform these ideas—communicating as much in a formal as in a discursive manner. In traditional linguistic terms, the breather involves a movement from the horizontal, combinational, or diachronic axis of the poetic line to the vertical, associational, or synchronic axis. As a result, his poems begin to move toward an impossible absence of time—eternity—and, in the face of this impossibility, to inhabit a liminal zone between synchrony and diachrony. Or, instead of discursively stating "a fissure in time" to which he's "led by a mother's word" (translation Hamburger), as in the early poem "In Front of a Candle," his work increasingly complicates such statements to perform and inhabit that fissure.

With this shift, Celan's later work becomes densely polysemous. Individual words and their syntactic relations are complicated by the plurality of potential meanings they release almost simultaneously. As a result, the poems can seem cryptic, fractured, and crabbed, obviously crafted to convey something—many somethings—but often unyielding to conventional interpretation. Celan maintained, significantly, that a desire for realism drove his later work: "I try to reproduce cuttings from the spectral analysis of things, to show them in several aspects and permeations at once... I see my alleged abstractions and actual ambiguity as moments of realism" (translation Pierre Joris). In the context of traditional poetics, however, such "moments of realism" create tremendous difficulties in the later poems, and their idiosyncratic resistances to more-normative kinds of sense-making seem to perform what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "the becoming-minor of the major language." Indeed, the later Celan, whom critics from Steiner to Joris have asserted wrote German as a "foreign language," would be exemplary of Deleuze and Guattari's "minor authors" who "are foreigners in their own tongue."



Anyone hoping to render a version of Celan's work in English must grapple with the resistances of Celan's work, in general, and with how to render his highly compressed, involuted verbal constructions, in particular. The ways in which each translator approaches Celan's unique constructions has everything to do not only with the resulting poem in English, but with the basic assumptions that underlie his or her approach to poetics and aesthetics. Such decisions are not merely linguistic and contingent on the given differences between German and English, but as Voloshinov/Bakhtin would contend, are like anything linguistic in nature, at heart ideological, and reveal the translator's orientation in the sociocultural and even physical landscape as constituted by reciprocal interactions with language. Moreover, in the arc of Celan's oeuvre and the particular tragedy of his circumstances, the linguistic decisions of his translator take on an amplified importance, one that relates directly to Celan's relationship to time, history, Judaism, and German language and literature.

The translator is never merely a transparent or impartial mediator, of course, but one who assumes possession of a poet's work and offers a level of interpretation in presenting that work in a different language. The translator thus stands as an embodied interpretant, in the Peircean sense, triangulating the relationship between author and reader, and providing the signs by which the original work becomes legible in another language. Though translation necessarily domesticates its source text, as Lawrence Venuti contends in *The Scandals of Translation*, the degree to which a translator domesticates a literary work—especially a resistant poetic work—in order to make it legible within the dominant poetic code of the target language is of critical importance. Translation thus necessarily navigates not just linguistic but social and cultural issues and enters the realm of the ethical as much the aesthetic. Venuti rightly contends that as “translation constructs a domestic representation for a foreign text and culture, it simultaneously constructs a domestic subject, a position of intelligibility that is also an ideological position, informed by the codes and canons, interests and agendas of certain domestic social groups.” The ways in which this domestic subject—the representations of the poet's representations—is interpellated into a new culture depend not only on the actual translations but also on the ancillary materials supporting them.

Though translation of Celan's work obviously entails great difficulties, English readers have long been served by Michael Hamburger's versions, the first edition of which appeared in 1972, a mere two years after the poet's death. Hamburger's volume quickly attained and has maintained its status as the most prominent English-language version of Celan's work—thus becoming the source through which more than a generation of readers first encountered Celan. Certainly, Hamburger's reputation as a translator, scholar, and poet have helped keep the book in circulation, but such dynamics are no doubt reciprocal—and the stark eloquence Hamburger imparts to his English versions of Celan's undeniably difficult oeuvre have helped to bolster his reputation. Indeed, both of these factors—the difficulty of Celan's work and the long-standing success of Hamburger's translations of it—seemed to preclude other editions. Of the translations that appeared before 2000, only Joachim Neugroschel's collection seemed a potential alternative to Hamburger's. Others, such as Washburn and Margret Guillemin's *Last Poems* and Peter Jankowsky and Brian Lynch's *65 Poems*, seemed complements to Hamburger's volume. The most notable publication in this vein has

undoubtedly been Pierre Joris's *Breathturn*, a brilliant translation of the entirety of Celan's 1967 volume—and the first installment in Joris's project to translate all of Celan's later work, which Hamburger's volume, significantly, presents in relatively small selections.

The publication of John Felstiner's *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* in 2000 thus seemed to signal a generational changing of the guard. Along with ample selections of work from all of Celan's original and posthumously published collections, the book also presents several late poems never previously translated and selections from the poet's juvenalia. Most importantly, however, is the inclusion of Celan's major prose writings, including The Meridian speech. Though the entirety of Celan's small but important body of prose had previously appeared in Rosmarie Waldrop's *Collected Prose* (1986), Felstiner's volume, which he dubs an anthology, is the first of its size to contain both poetry and prose, making it, by virtue of quantity alone, a primary source of Celan's work. At nearly the same time that Felstiner's volume appeared, however, two other versions of Celan were hitting American bookstores, Nikolai Popov and Heather McHugh's *Glottal Stop* and Joris's *Threadsuns*. Though these publications are, in different ways, noteworthy, neither is a comprehensive culling. Joris's publication is the followup to *Breathturn* and represents a continuation of his project, while Popov and McHugh's inhabits some ambiguous middle region—presenting work from as early as 1959's *Speechgrille*, but offering selections that largely overlap Joris's project. Less than a year after these releases, Ian Fairley's version of *Threadsuns* and another book, entitled *Fathomsuns & Benighted*, appeared. That three of these four new publications focus primarily or exclusively on Celan's later work may indicate, significantly, that a new turn is taking place regarding Celan's representation within the field of American poetry.

On the whole, Felstiner's translations don't differ wildly from those of Hamburger. In many poems, their translations maintain both a high degree of fidelity to the original and to each other. Subtle differences do exist in their approaches, however, and these differences pertain strongly to ways in which each makes Celan's work, early and late, legible. Felstiner's versions are typically both more literal and colloquial than those of Hamburger, whose word choice and syntax tend to be more formal as he moves Celan onto a longer, graceful line:

With a changing key

you unlock the house where  
the snow of what's silenced drifts.  
Just like the blood that bursts from  
your eye or mouth or ear,  
so your key changes.

(Felstiner)

With a variable key

you unlock the house in which  
drifts the snow of that left unspoken.  
Always what key you choose  
depends on the blood that spurts  
from your eye or your mouth or your ear.

(Hamburger)

Felstiner's version follows the sentence structures of this early poem, while the second sentence in Hamburger's inverts the original. Such an inversion seems more common in Hamburger's versions, and the use of the formal prepositional phrases "in which" and "of that," along with the repetition of "your" in the final line, characterizes Hamburger's approach. Throughout his collection, Hamburger typically opts for a

more formal diction, saying, for example, “navigates” for Felstiner’s “sails around” and “effulgence” for Felstiner’s “brightness.” Hamburger is also more prone to interpretive extensions of metaphorical language, inserting a nautical motif into “Your mother’s soul whips on the sharks at the bow,” for example, while Felstiner maintains the poem’s literal reference: “Your mother’s soul lashes the sharks on before you.” Hamburger’s subtly formalizing tendencies clearly point to a desire to make Celan’s work legible within the traditional standards of English poetry, but as the examples given indicate, he typically works smoothly and is not prone to excessive departures. Focusing primarily on Celan’s work before the breathturn, his versions in many ways seem apt interpretations of the music of the originals.

Felstiner’s more vernacular versions also have their subtle poeticizing tendencies, such as sometimes rendering German present tense verbs in the English continuous aspect—“resting” and “swinging,” for example—to impart a type of hypostatizing quality. Felstiner’s versions also occasionally take liberties with Celan’s verbs to heighten affect—presenting “witnessed” for *wusste* (knew), or simplifying the complexities of the original German to try to obtain a plainspoken ease:

A strange lostness was	A strange lostness was
bodily present, you came	palpably present, almost
near to	you would
living.	have lived.
(Felstiner)	(Hamburger)

While Felstiner’s versions are, on the whole, slightly more literal renderings than Hamburger’s and less prone to extending Celan’s work syntactically and metaphorically, the play between heightened affect and simplified diction speaks to the interpellation of Celan within the dominant contemporary American poetic—which has long mandated that good poetry be both easy and emotive.

Felstiner’s work as a biographer is apparent in his engaging and well-detailed introduction, which seems tailored to interest those who may not know much about Celan’s life or work. Along the way, Felstiner tells stories about his engagement with Celan’s work that demonstrate the authenticity of his relation to the poet—by extension, necessarily, through his widow, Gisèle, and his books and papers. (As an associate of Celan’s during his lifetime, Hamburger can legitimate his efforts by describing his direct encounters with the poet, as he does in the introduction to his volume.)

What seems most notable about both books is how little work they present from Celan’s increasingly “becoming-minor” post-*Breathturn* period. Beyond the subtle ways in which each works to domesticate Celan’s poems, the omission of much later work seems to be the primary way in which each renders Celan legible. But as the later poems that are included in their volumes make clear, these omissions may be driven not by an intent to ignore the later Celan, but by the failure of each translator’s respective domesticating strategies to produce satisfactory results within their standards of legibility. Though Felstiner’s more literal approach generally produces somewhat better results with Celan’s more recalcitrant, “becoming-minor” work, both stumble more frequently in this terrain.

While only approximately half of the poems Felstiner presents are included in Hamburger's 1988 edition, neither selection is ultimately preferable. Both translators omit and include poems important to Celan's oeuvre. More than anything, the two books taken together point to the urgent need for a collected volume of Celan's work. For readers new to Celan, though, it is unfortunate that Felstiner begins his book with a collection of "youthful lyrics," or juvenilia not included in Celan's first major volume. Perhaps because both Felstiner and Hamburger present such small selections from Celan's final four books, their selections begin to overlap less and less. For Celan's final, posthumous collection, *Timehomestead*, these differences seem significant. Felstiner presents a number of poems with strong Jewish references and themes, while Hamburger presents only two of these poems.

Editing the selection in this way, Felstiner subtly imparts a teleological arc to the poet's career. In many ways, though, this presentation is consonant with another element of Felstiner's translation approach: the occasional formalization and sacralization of Celan's work by capitalizing nouns, taking the German *Du* as "Thou," and rendering words such as *Bund* (bond) as "covenant" or *Posaune* (trumpet) as "shofar." In combination with Felstiner's colloquial approach on the whole, however, such gestures lead not to a scriptural power—but to a tepid middle ground akin to "modern, accessible" versions of religious texts.

If Felstiner's book emphasizes the biographer's approach to present a suitably plainspoken but poetic and spiritual representation of Celan, Nikolai Popov and Heather McHugh's couldn't be more aggressive in its treatment of Celan. They make Felstiner seem modest as they discuss how the collaboration of "a European-born literary scholar-exegete and an American poet and translator brought...unusual range and resource to the enterprise." Moreover, this range and resource is used to seek "higher levels of fidelity than those of the word, the line, or the individual poem." Because they're searching for such high levels of "fidelity," it is perhaps not surprising that they also opted to not present the German *en face*, though their explanation is quite telling: "[b]ecause first and foremost [they] value the experience of poetry." Such a statement not only betrays how far Popov and McHugh will be willing to stray from the original text to reinscribe Celan within a version of the dominant American poetic, but also how strongly they endorse the current hegemony of the English language—which appears to be the only language in which poetry can be written. Throughout the introduction, the translators are too fascinated with the poet's psychological suffering and eventual suicide to present any real background for him, and what is presented is typically impressionistic and often offensive. They make reference to "whiffs of the famously biographical topoi of the camps" and present the murder of the poet's mother as "a wound to the throat," which serves as the springboard for poetic reflections: "If utterances issue from a gaping hole, so too does blood: the place of vulnerability is also the place of poetry." Perhaps most disturbing is the introduction's conclusion, a bizarre, world-become-text romanticization of Celan's suicide:

Paul Celan died by drowning. He did it not just reflexively, but transitively: He died by drowning himself...He made himself a glancing stroke, a winking wave, withdrawal's sign. As waters rise toward iris-level, as the eye-globe is covered, a greatening force of mind informs the sensual field. In

the face of grief, in the light of death, in the vale of tears, what does intellect do? Of sinking things, thinking sings.

Unlike Felstiner, whose annotations are quite limited, Popov and McHugh present copious notes for the majority of their poems. While they do convey some interesting information, many of the notes are marred by connections and assertions that seem speculative at best. In at least one instance, their insights overlap heavily with those presented by Joris in his *Threadsun*s, though only he attributes these insights to the scholar Otto Pöggeler.

In many ways, Popov and McHugh's translations are as reckless and irresponsible as their supporting materials. If Celan's history is effectively elided in the indulgences of their introduction, his poetry is no more present in their translations. Popov and McHugh go to great lengths to make his poetry both quite charged and superficially emotive and quite legible. Ultimately, such an approach seems to be the metastasis of Felstiner's and Hamburger's subtler gestures. For example, Popov and McHugh make a clumsy *ex nihilo* insertion in "Frankfurt, September" to call out a deeply embedded, bilingual pun involving Kafka (the Czech for jackdaw is *kavka*): "the pseudo-jackdaw/(cough-caw's double)/is breakfasting." Such a dredging to the surface of a pun that would likely remain invisible to the vast majority of German readers seems representative of their process, which also includes highly impressionistic word choices and the insertion of possessive pronouns to heighten affect. In a poem from *Breathturn*, for example, the last line of which Joris has rendered, quite literally, as: "You—all, all real. I—all delusion," their version stands: "You're my reality. I'm your mirage." For someone whose work is as heavily invested in the dialogic and intersubjective as Celan's, such manipulation to render that work more legible in a superficially emotive manner is deeply problematic. Even when Popov and McHugh don't attain this level of "fidelity," their versions chronically heighten the poem's surface—rendering the German *singt* (sings), for example, as "is breaking/into song" and "raises its voice"—to make Celan's work seem more conventionally feelingful. Along the way, they forsake much of his vertiginous difficulty. To this end, the lineation and development of their poems often depart drastically from that of Celan's, causing the entire emphasis of numerous poems to shift. Moreover, they also regularly unpack his involuted structures into impressionistic, heavily domesticated, and even hackneyed statements.

What's perhaps most distressing about these methods is that they're exercised predominately on Celan's most difficult, "becoming-minor" work. This reinscription of the poet's most resistant work into a strain of the American poetic landscape that could best be described as postconfessional—or, very easy and very emotive—is troubling. The logic of the book's selection is probably best conveyed by its subtitle, *101 Poems*, akin to one of the anthologies of "best-loved poems" that litter the shelves of the megastores. Though Celan's later work is highly serial in nature and accrues power by circling, retouching, and modulating its ideas and themes, Popov and McHugh plunder this work to take what they want from his later volumes. Significantly, their selection doesn't include any of the later poems that show the poet operating more politically, such as "Todtnauberg," which describes the poet's encounter with Heidegger, or "Denk Dir," his

poem commemorating Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War. Real-world politics, or any kind of politics, is not very popular in the dominant American poetic.

In many ways, Pierre Joris's translations can be seen as counterwords to the those of Popov and McHugh, certainly, and to lesser extent, to those of Felstiner. Such a statement, however, may carry an inaccurate temporal implication, because Joris's *Breathturn* appeared in 1995, well before the others', and at the same time as Felstiner's biography. As Joris notes in his introduction to *Breathturn*, his engagement with Celan's work has been ongoing for decades, dating back to the original appearance of that book, which he immediately began to translate. While Joris's statements in this vein demonstrate a type of authenticity—and he too knew Celan's wife, Gisèle—they are directed to a more engaging end, in this case, Joris's desire “to relativize the very notion of a definitive, final translation.” Not only does this statement, in and of itself, indicate the relative sophistication of Joris's approach, it is also consonant with Celan's declaration in The Meridian speech that “the absolute poem...cannot exist.” The extent to which Joris understands Celan's poetics is evident, in a multitude of ways, throughout *Breathturn* and *Threadsuns*. The introduction to the former remains the single best overview of Celan available in English, providing nuanced and insightful information about Celan's life and the development of his work, while the latter is an admirable analysis more limited to the development of Celan's later work.

Joris's translations exhibit a high level of fidelity to the originals; they typically do so with a fine precision of word choice and an attentiveness to the movement of both the original poem and the translation. As Joris states in the introduction to *Breathturn*, “the translator cannot rely on a generally applicable rule but has to try to reproduce, wherever possible, the movement of Celan's language, while measuring how much strain it is reasonable to impose upon the target language.” Contrary to the dominant American poetic, some strain will be inevitable—and is imperative to convey the ways in which Celan's “becoming-minor” work defiantly strains normative German in the attempt to chart a “language actualized, set free under the sign of a radical individuation” (translation Rosmarie Waldrop).

Language actualized in *Breathturn* and *Threadsuns* frequently entails a type of solidity and compression. These qualities are what allow Joris to reproduce the plunging, vertical effects so critical in Celan's later work, often without forsaking the emphases of the original, something that is not easy to do given the syntactical differences between English and German. Where Popov and McHugh, for example, shave a line to smooth the lineation of a work, Joris maintains both the winnowing effect of the material poem and the important emphasis of the final two words:

In their control towers	In the controltowers the hundred
one hundred silver hooves	silver hoofs hammer
hammer free the outlawed light.	the forbidden
(Popov and McHugh)	light free.
	(Joris)

Such an attention to the poem's movement is not just a by-product of a close rendering of the original, however—as “literalism” can lead in many different directions:



But in you, from birth, the other wellspring foamed, on the black jet remembrance dayward you climbed. (Hamburger)	Yet in you, from birth, the other wellspring foamed, on the black beam of memory you climbed to daylight. (Felstiner)	But in you, from birth, foamed the other spring, up the black ray memory you climbed to the day. (Joris)
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All three of these versions are quite faithful to the original, but the movement of Joris's final lines are more finely honed than both Hamburger's contrived rendering and Felstiner's subtly poeticizing "black/beam of memory" and "daylight." The differences are minor, but in many ways, translation is an art of the smallest parts of language—the articles and prepositions that George Oppen so admired. In this sense, one can occasionally quibble with some of Joris's decisions, especially in *Threadsuns*, in which Celan's style is ever more "becoming-minor." Such instances, however, only highlight the difficulties of Joris's approach, which, at its best, seeks to demonstrate Steiner's assertion that "literalism is not, as in traditional models of translation, the naïve, facile mode, but on the contrary, the ultimate." On the whole, Joris's capacity to understand the thrust of Celan's later work, as indicated by both his translations and their supporting materials, makes him an important bridge between a Continental philosophical avant-garde that reveres Celan and an American poetic avant-garde that needs him.

Like Joris's translations, Ian Fairley's *Fathomsuns & Benighted* allows Celan's work to be innovative—if not quite so "becoming-minor." On the whole, Fairley seems to accomplish the difficult task of both domesticating and exoticizing Celan's work. In Fairley's version, Celan's work becomes more legible, but within poetic standards derived as much from the English canon from Shakespeare to Milton as from the contemporary American easy-and- emotive approach. Though Fairley presents Celan's work in its entirety and typically hews closely to the structure of Celan's originals, his versions are at times as eccentric as his book's title. *Benighted* is a short series of poems composed at roughly the same time as *Threadsuns*, but Fairley provides no explanation or derivation for *Fathomsuns*—though, interestingly, Joris does explain it in his introduction to the same volume:

These "Fadensonnen," these threadsuns fold into the word that gives their elongation—the "Faden," the thread—something more, something which in English is still there in the word "fathom," which comes to us via the Indo-European root \**pet* and Germanic \**fathmaz*. "the length of two arms stretched out."

Such a lack of explanation is a problem in Fairley's book. Though it does contain an introduction that presents interesting close readings of Celan's later work in the context of such important influences as Rilke and Meister Eckhart, it includes no annotations for the poems. Though Fairley's translations are rife with word choices and phrases that seem idiosyncratic or historicizing, his intent can sometimes be divined:

Eternities, died	Eternities, long dead
over and above you,	without you,
a letter touches	a missive meets
your still un-	your yet un-
wounded fingers,	wounded fingers,
the shining forehead	the shining brow
vaults hither	tilts hither
and beds itself in	and makes its bed amid
odors, noises.	stench and stir.
(Joris)	(Fairley)

Here, Fairley's "a missive meets" seems an attempt to match the alliteration, if not the straightforward nature, of the German's *ein Brief berührt*. Similarly, the Shakespearean "stench and stir," set up by the expansive "makes its bed amid" for *bettet sich in*, seems driven to somehow reproduce the wordplay in the German *Gerüche, Geräusche*. While Fairley's efforts are inventive—and sound is certainly a component of sense in all poetry, and especially in Celan's—their price is a modulation of the poem's tone that seems more significant than the sonic play itself. (Fortunately, Fairley makes no attempt to compensate for the poem's most prominent pun, *die erglänzende Stirn*, or "the shining forehead," which plays on *der erglänzende Stern*, or "the shining star.") More problematic than Fairley's attempts to reproduce these effects is his poeticization of the characteristically Celanian compound *hinweggestorben* in the original's second line, which Joris conveys with its literally dislocating spatial sense, but Fairley converts into a more trite evocation of time and absence.

Though Fairley is by no means as reductive as Popov and McHugh, other instances of significant semantic alteration and diminution occur in his versions, such as in his too elegant "Ashenfathomed, / hour after hour, / by shadowed eyes / under sealed lids," which Joris presents with its original emphases and jarring, complex meanings: "Threatened through by ashes, / hour-hither hour-yonder, / by the lidshadows of shut / down eyes." More noticeable is Fairley's tendency to torque the language for a poeticizing effect that can seem almost rococo, instances of which range from "diluvial," "blanchard manes" and "prospects mount parabolic" for Joris's more-literal "worldwet," "whitehorsemanes," and "Hairpincurve-glances are climbing up," to quasi-homophonic renderings such as "SIGNAL, by harnstem and hertstem" and "OVER GLOW-AND MOW-WINE."

Such comparisons bring up important issues, the first of which is Joris's reliance on compound words borne literally into English and Fairley's tendency to create more interpretive or metaphoric "equivalents." While Joris's compounds may indeed seem more non-normative than the German originals, they also typically convey more of both the poem's complex meanings and its compression into its vertical axis, and are thus often preferable to Fairley's impressionistic attempts at compensation, or to a more straightforward unpacking of the compound onto the horizontal axis (as in Popov and McHugh's "Wet from the world"). If Joris errs in these instances, it is on the side of a semantic density and synchrony that are consistently more faithful to the "becoming-minor" thrust of Celan's later work.



The other issue is the experimental nature of some of Fairley's more far-reaching or homophonic renderings. In the simplest sense, these efforts seem to constitute a fundamental misunderstanding of Celan's work—and to meet his plurality of meanings with the near-absence of any meaning. Moreover, the inescapable referent of so much of Celan's work—historical catastrophe—makes the playful nature of such experimentation questionable. In other situations, of course, such innovation might be commendable, and in many cases—such as Zukofsky's *Catullus* or Christopher Logue's versions of the *Iliad*—might be seen as a justifiable way of minoritizing or destabilizing a dominant poetic. But at the present time, Celan's place in the historical canon—and what that place signifies—does not seem to be so firmly fixed that his work needs to be subjected to an approach that verges on postmodern pastiche.

At it stands, Celan's proximity in time only makes assessment and translation of his work more difficult. Celan's work currently seems to inhabit a literary historical liminal zone—no longer contemporary, regardless of whether the work seems dated or not—but not yet historical in the sense that Rilke, Mandelstam, or Auden, who died after Celan, seem products of the bygone, high-modernist era. Celan's culture, as well—that of a Holocaust survivor and self-exiled European Jew—is foreign to that of contemporary American society, but not so foreign that, like that the worlds of Virgil, Dante, or even Cavafy, it seems indelibly other or exotic. Ultimately, it is the very temporal and cultural liminality of Celan's work combined with the tragic extremity of his circumstances that make the translation of it a vital issue.

It is probably not surprising, then, that along with the recent proliferation of translations has come a new diversity of visions of Paul Celan. Indeed, from a sociohistorical perspective, in Bourdieu's terms, "Paul Celan" currently occupies distinct, contrary positions within the field of American poetry—with Popov and McHugh's versions appearing on the venerable academic press Wesleyan, Felstiner's on the mainstream behemoth Norton, well known for its conservative, canon-making anthologies, Fairley's on the small and somewhat obscure Sheep Meadow, and Joris's on the small, not-for-profit Sun & Moon, whose reputation is largely linked to Language Poetry (an ideologically motivated importation of post-structuralist concepts into American poetry). The situation is all the more confusing, however, because it results from the near simultaneous appearance of work from different points on the diachronic arc of Celan's career.

As we move further into the second generation of English-language study and translation of Celan, the ways in which his work is conceived are by no means established. The new translations of Celan are implicitly presenting different, though perhaps not mutually exclusive, ways of conceiving of both his work and the historical catastrophe to which it is indelibly linked. This process of re-envisioning and re-presenting Celan, of course, goes hand in hand with his movement into the historical canon—another process that is by no means finished. One hopes that this process will never be finished and that future generations will continue to re-approach and re-present this most demanding and important of poets. How this process of representation unfolds in the next few generations, however, remains to be seen. To amend Celan's oft-quoted comment from his 1957 Bremen speech, such realities are at stake in a translation.

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Jalal Toufic  
An Interview By Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

— Is it possible to pinpoint your exact motivation for writing *(Vampires)*? Did it stem from any one particular idea, incident, film, etc.?

— Now, so many years later, I remember only vaguely some of the reasons for starting to write *(Vampires)*. I think that what attracted me to the figure of the vampire at a time when I was finishing *Distracted* was that when he is in a place he is simultaneously not in it, that is, that he is as it were ontologically distracted, as is shown by his failure to appear in the mirror at the same location; that he is an aristocrat; and, given my dislike of sitting, that when he exceptionally sits he still seems to be standing since the height of the dining room chairs in the vampire's castle is that of a standing man (Murnau's *Nosferatu*). But as usually happens, one embarks on ventures for the wrong reasons or for secondary ones—especially during one's youth. Thus Christopher Columbus sailed west across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a route to Asia, but landed instead on and thus discovered America, whose existence he did not suspect. And thus *Casablanca's* Rick says that he moved to Casablanca for health reasons: "I came to Casablanca for the waters." "The waters? What waters? We're in the desert." "I was misinformed."

— How long did the book take to write?

— From the perspective of my various landlords, *(Vampires)* took about two years to write. But certainly the issue is more complicated, since to write this kind of book one has to have at least once underwent non-linear time, whether labyrinthine or cyclical, feeling while in a certain location that one has always been in it; one has at least once to have seen people frozen by a diegetic silence-over; one has at least once to have experienced "a day the measure of which is a thousand years of what you count" (Qur'ân 32:5) or "a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years" (Qur'ân 70:4).

— Critical responses to your work vary widely, so I was wondering: do you read reviews of your own work, do they affect you, are you as suspicious of someone praising your work ("There is, in my opinion, no more subtle or powerful thinker today than Jalal Toufic") as you would be of someone slamming it ("This is the most incomprehensible book I've read in years")?

— I am not at all suspicious but honored that the poet Lyn Hejinian wrote the first line, which appears on the jacket of my book *Undying Love, or Love Dies*. Without your characterization of the second commentator's words as "slamming" my book, which I assume you concluded from the context of the quote, I would have been unable to discern whether his or her comment is a compliment or not. Moreover, I am unable to gauge what the one who wrote these words means by the term "incomprehensible"; for example, does he or she understand it in the manner I do in the second edition of *Distracted*: "Lebanese filmmakers and more so videomakers should not make films or videos to try to understand and make understandable what happened during the war years. While social scientists, whether sociologists, economists, etc., can provide us with more or less convincing reasons, and mystifiers can grossly nonplus us, valid literature and art provide us with intelligent and subtle incomprehension. One of the main troubles with the world is that, unlike art and literature, it allows only for the gross alternative: understanding/incomprehension. Contrariwise, art and literature do not provide us with the illusion of comprehending, of grasping, but allow us to keenly not understand, intimating to us that the alternative is not between comprehension and incomprehension but between incomprehension in a gross manner and while expecting comprehension; and incomprehension in an intelligent and subtle manner..."? I find what most others deem most comprehensible, newspapers, incomprehensible in an ineluctably dull manner; it is easier for me to read thinkers, writers or poets such as Jacques Lacan, Gertrude Stein, the James Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*, and Paul Celan than newspapers.

— Aside from obviously Nietzsche and Deleuze, what other writers do you enjoy, are you influenced by, stylistically? Are there any novelists whom you particularly admire, in terms of narrative structure, style, etc.?

— While I rarely read novels, I admire the novelists William Burroughs and Alain Robbe-Grillet generally, as well as specific novels and shorter fictional texts by other writers, for example: Kathy Acker's *My Mother: Demonology*, J.G. Ballard's *Crash*, Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho*, Thomas Bernhard's *The Loser*, Maurice Blanchot's *Death Sentence* and *The Madness of the Day*, Marguerite Duras' *The Malady of Death*, Richard Foreman's *No-Body: A Novel in Parts*, Pierre Klossowski's *The Baphomet*, Doug Rice's *Blood of Mugwump*, Sartre's *Nausea*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. I do not believe that any writer is influenced by any other at the level of style—at least I am not. On the other hand, I believe writers collaborate with each other and with artists and filmmakers and video makers in an untimely manner—at least I do.

— Who do you write for—yourself, a particular audience?

— I write for myself as one of the readers of my work; were it otherwise my writing, including my responses in this interview, would not be a dialogue (as *Distracted's* epigraph puts it: "Are you saying this to me?" "Also to myself. One should speak solely when also speaking to oneself. Only then is there a dialogue"). I also write for and to my amnesiac version in an altered realm of consciousness that he found himself in after a lapse of consciousness and that I found myself out of after a lapse of consciousness: he needs my help to achieve a modicum of detachment from the stream of thoughts linking in his head on their own; from compulsions; from the insinuating voices-over that assail him; and from hallucinations. I also write to my untimely collaborators, and to the forgetful grateful reader, i.e. the generous reader.

— What are your feelings on the academic/intellectual community in Beirut now? Do you feel that your work is supported here or is it better appreciated abroad, and if so, does this bother you?

— For the first couple of months following my return to Lebanon in 1999, after spending fifteen years in the USA, I met a number of people who instead of asking me, who had taught at California Institute of the Arts, one of the main American art institutes, about the contemporary art practices and critical theories in the USA in general and California in specific, began themselves to talk to me profusely about the American art scene! I believe that were someone to return, like Lazarus, from death, they would not care to ask him about that condition and/or realm, but would start telling him about it! Would they be thus “giving voice to the voiceless”? In his opening remarks for the exhibition *DisORIENTATION* at the House of World Cultures in Berlin, on 20 May 2003, Lebanese novelist and journalist (!)<sup>1</sup> Elias Khoury talked about “the role of culture as a critical approach and as the voice of the voiceless.” If we include in culture neither art nor writing, then yes, culture—and democracy<sup>2</sup>—gives voice to the voiceless (the Lebanese newspaper *as-Safir*’s motto is: “the voice of the voiceless”). But art and writing (and real emancipatory politics) do not give voice to the voiceless;<sup>3</sup> rather, they interrupt even the inner voice of the “voiceless,” whether by suspending the interior monologue of the reader or spectator (or advocate of a political movement), or by trying, often unsuccessfully, to silence the voices-over that forcibly impose themselves in the mind of the one who, whether schizophrenic or dead, has become voiceless, anxiously wanting to scream but unable to do so. It is the exceptional merit of Beckett’s writing to suspend the interior monologue of the reader even as he or she reads that the voice—even more than life!—goes on: *Worstward Ho* begins with, “On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said Nohow on....”; continues with, “Least. Least best worse. Least never to be naught. Never to naught be brought. Never by

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<sup>1</sup> In the Arab world, one repeatedly encounters the even more incongruous combination in the same person: poet and journalist.

The difference between Khoury the writer and Khoury the journalist (he is the editor of the cultural supplement of the newspaper *an-Nahâr*, where he contributes a weekly page) does not correspond exactly to the difference between his novels and his journalism, since he is often a journalist in his novels, while he is sometimes a writer in his journalism.

<sup>2</sup> Fittingly, in Arabic *sawt*, whose primary sense is “a voice,” means also “a vote.”

<sup>3</sup> At one point toward the end of my video *The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, 2002, I was not vigilant enough against being the voice of the “voiceless”: if the quote of the first few lines from Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* (“Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels’ / hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me / suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed / in that overwhelming existence”) belongs to culture, it is not because it would instance erudition, but because it appears to be an attempt to give voice to a cow that is on the point of being slaughtered (is the cow really voiceless? “The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not a thing but hymneth His praise; but ye understand not their praise.” [Qur’ân 17:44]). Nonetheless, I hope that in front of the previous cow being slaughtered, my video induced a suspension of the interior monologue and thus a kind of prayer. Prayer is not some discourse of supplication, but the suspension of the interior monologue, so that it is God Who talks and does things: “I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks.” One of the most beautiful prayers in Islam is Hallaj’s *Anâ al-Haqq* (I am the Real [i.e. God]). Prayer is addressed to God, but by God.

naught be nulled. Unnullable least. Say that best worse. With leastening words say least best worse. For want of worser worst. Unlessenable least best worse”; and ends with, “Said Nohow on.” If culture attempts to give voice to the voiceless, it is, unfortunately, partly to try to hide the infinity of what can have less voice but never no voice: “Least never to be naught.” As in the case of *weightless*—“having little or no weight” (*American Heritage Talking Dictionary*); “having little weight: lacking apparent gravitational pull” (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*); “having or appearing to have no weight” (*Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*)—and notwithstanding the dictionaries, we should not understand the suffix *-less* in *voiceless* and *motionless* to basically mean “without; lacking” (*American Heritage Dictionary*); we should rather take *voiceless* to refer basically to someone who has less voice but never no voice, and *motionless* to basically refer to a worldly living human, animal or object that can have less motion but never a *dead stop*, the kind of unworldly freezing that the dead, the schizophrenic and the dancer’s subtle body may undergo in the altered states and realms of dance and death. For an example of the resentful nightmare that is Khoury’s idea of giving “voice to the voiceless,” one can read his novel *The Sun’s Gate*, 1998, in which a male nurse keeps trying to remind an older friend of his who is in a coma of sundry incidents that happened to him. How fitting that Khoury came up with this monologist situation given how bad a listener he is—isn’t it the case that virtually all those who want to give voice to the “voiceless” are bad listeners? Symptomatically, his vacuous male nurse does not give voice to the voiceless once the latter dies. Where Khoury leaves, the Tibetan Buddhist lama starts; indeed, the situation envisioned by Khoury is a travesty of the following situation in Tibetan Buddhism: the lama reciting the *Bardo Thödol* (literally *Liberation through Hearing in the In-Between State*) by the side of the corpse.

In my book *Over-Sensitivity*, 1996, which I wrote in San Francisco, I constructed the concept of withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster. In my next book, *Forthcoming*, 2000, which I wrote in Los Angeles and whose manuscript I sent to the publisher just before leaving to Lebanon in October 1999, I elaborated this concept, imagining at one point a Lebanese photographer “who had become used to viewing things at the speed of war. So for a while after the ‘civil’-war’s end, he did not take any photographs nor shoot any videos, waiting until he learned to look again at a leisurely pace. This period of adjustment lasted a full two years. Yet even after he became used to looking at buildings and experiencing events at the rhythm of peace, the photographs of the ruins in Lebanon taken by this Lebanese photographer, who classically composed those of his photographs shot in other countries, still looked like they were taken by a photographer lacking time to aim since in imminent danger, the compositions haphazard and the focus almost always off. . . . in his work the out-of-focus and/or the haphazard framings were not a formal strategy but due to the withdrawal and thus unavailability to vision of the material.” Unbeknownst to me, at the same period, the Lebanese artists Joana Hajji Thomas and Khalil Joreige, who were living then between Paris and Beirut, did an installation titled *Wonder Beirut*, at Janine Rbayz Gallery in Beirut in 1999, that revolves around the work of a photographer who “no longer develops his photographs. It is enough for him to take them. At the end of the exhibition, 6452 rolls of film were laid on the floor: rolls containing photos taken by the photographer but left undeveloped” (from Hajji Thomas and Joreige’s text “*Tayyib rah farjik shighli*” [“OK, I’ll Show You My Work”], *Al-Âdâb*, January-February 2001). This concordance between two anomalous fictional photographers conceived by a writer and two artists who did not know each



other reveals a community between strangers, as well as confirms these two fictional photographers and their kind of problematic photography as symptoms of the society in question. From this perspective, and unlike Egypt, in which the vast majority of artists and writers reside in their country and never emigrated for extended periods, Lebanon, which due to the long civil war and the invasions it suffered as well as for other reasons has a significant number of artists and writers abroad, is a privileged site for thinking the community in general and the artistic and literary community in specific, for the latter is formed basically not through its members' exposure to and consequent discussion of each other's works (which produces fashions) but through this concordance around anomalous subjects, figures, spaces and architectures, etc., by artists, thinkers, writers, and film and video makers who do not know each other, revealing these anomalies as symptoms of the culture with which they are dealing. Now that Joana Hajji Thomas, Khalil Joreige, myself and a few others are together in Beirut and we know each other, I am much more interested in what singular universe each one of these video makers and artists are developing, rather than in the affinities and resonance between our works, so that our community now that we know each other and each other's works is one of support for the construction by each of his or her (or their—in the case of Hajji Thomas and Joreige—) own universe.

"A people is a detour of nature to get to six or seven great men. —Yes, and then to get around them." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Aphorisms and Interludes" no. 126). If the qualification is to be viewed positively, one can interpret it as implying: "... in order to get to six or seven additional great men, again and again." Unfortunately Arabs are in such a dire condition that I am apprehensive that the affirmative reading of the qualification in Nietzsche's aphorism may no longer hold in their case. Should a great Arab man or woman be satisfied with this? No, since another implication of Nietzsche's aphorism is that nature cannot get to six or seven new great men or women through the "six or seven" great men already present. Within the context of Arabic culture, this is an additional source of solitude for any great Arab man or woman: for as long as the state of Arabs is this dire, the future great man or woman who may pick up the arrow any great Arab man or woman has sent<sup>4</sup> will of necessity not be an Arab but someone from another people.

Given the retarded state of the "contemporary" Arab world, I am far better appreciated abroad since the vast majority of those who are contemporaneous with the present live there. The vast majority of those who are not contemporaneous with the time in which they historically live, but lag behind it, believe that were they to travel to the past, they can take advantage there of their knowledge of the future from which they come. Had I still any illusion that such people would read me, I would advise them to consider the case of the philosopher of the untimely, the untimely philosopher Nietzsche, the author of among other books *Untimely Meditations*, who,

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<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze: "In Nietzsche, there is the great opposition between Christ and Saint Paul... [D.H.] Lawrence takes up the opposition once again, but this time he opposes Christ to the red John of Patmos, the author of the Apocalypse.... It is not that Lawrence simply imitates Nietzsche. Rather, he picks up an arrow, Nietzsche's arrow, and shoots it elsewhere, aims it in a different direction... to another audience: 'Nature propels the philosopher into mankind like an arrow; it takes no aim, but hopes the arrow will stick somewhere' [Friedrich Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator," in *Untimely Meditations*], *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 37.

viewing things from the perspective of the future (“What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism”),<sup>5</sup> was ill-adapted to and alienated from the time in which he ostensibly lived: “—Ultimately, no one can extract from things, books included, more than he already knows.... Now let us imagine an extreme case: that a book speaks of nothing but events which lie outside the possibility of general or even of rare experience... In this case simply nothing will be heard, with the acoustical illusion that where nothing is heard there *is* nothing” (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*).

Postscript: while I am reluctant to give and conduct interviews (this is the second one I give; in addition I have myself once interviewed a filmmaker), the people I am essentially interested in interviewing are Sûfî masters who have already died physically, as well as al-Khadir, whose encounter with Moses in Qur’ân 18:65-82 is one of the most beautiful interviews.<sup>6</sup> While in life I can reach the interviewee even if I am not of the philosophical and/or artistic level to really benefit from the interview, and even without needing the interview to clarify for myself some specific characteristics of the universe he or she has constructed and with which I feel an affinity, this cannot be the case when the interviewee is “dead,” paradigmatically a Sûfî (or Zen...) master: one will have the privilege of meeting him or her in the Imaginal World (*‘alam al-khayâl* aka *‘alam al-mithâl*) only if one is of a spiritual level to benefit from the interview.

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<sup>5</sup> From an entry in the projected preface, dated November 1887-March 1888, to *The Will to Power*. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn ‘Arabî: “... The shadow of a person appeared to me.... I rose from my bed and headed towards him... I stared at him and recognized Abû ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Sulamî, whose spirit had incarnated and whom God had sent to me out of mercy for me. ‘... If he [Moses] had been patient, he would have seen. As it happened, he was preparing to ask al-Khadir a million questions. All concerned facts that had happened to him and that he reproved when coming from al-Khadir.” (Ibn ‘Arabî, *Les Illuminations de la Mecque*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz [Paris: Albin Michel, 1997], pp. 157-158). Cf. Michel Chodkiewicz: “The three acts that Moses reproaches al-Khadir: the boring of a hole in the ship, the slaying of the lad, and the failure to demand payment in exchange of a service correspond to three episodes of the life of Moses that do not conform externally to the norm: the crossing of the Red Sea, the slaying of an Egyptian and the watering of the herd of the girls of Shu’ayb (Jéthro). Therefore al-Khadir does nothing but return to Moses his own image, but Moses judges al-Khadir and therefore himself according to his own state, which is the introduction of the law,” *Ibid.*, p. 311 (my translation). Hence the encounter of Moses and al-Khadir provides a felicitous example of what Lacan tells “us” in his “Seminar on [Poe’s] ‘The Purloined Letter’”: “The sender, we tell you, receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form.”



Keith Waldrop  
Translation as Collaboration

A translation happens at a particular time, in a particular place, and through a particular agency—a scholar, a writer, a committee... The work that then appears is, or hopes or pretends to be, the double of a previous work in a different language. In this respect it may be more or less successful. But it is also, and importantly, a work of its own time.

An obvious example: the *Iliad* is a poem in Greek unrhymed hexameters. When Keats traveled in that particular realm of gold, he was reading English fourteeners, rhymed in couplets with frequent enjambment.

Then Pallas breathed in Tydeus' son; to render whom supreme  
To all the Greeks, at all his parts, she cast a hotter beam  
On his high mind; his body fill'd with much superior might;  
And made his complete armour cast a far more complete light.

The fourteener, a line of seven iambic feet, seems to have been losing its popularity by the time Chapman went work. When he came to translate the *Odyssey*, he must himself have lost confidence in it; at any rate, he did that poem in iambic pentameter. (Iambic pentameter was, already, and for the following centuries, considered so suitable for English epic poetry that it was, and still is, labeled “heroic” verse.)

Keats was looking into a poem of the English Renaissance. Had he read Pope's translation, in English heroic couplets, quite different from Chapman's verse, he would have been in high Augustan mode, where he would probably have been a bit uncomfortable.

Had Keats translated Homer, he would have written a romantic *Iliad*, as—later—there would appear Victorian and—later still—modernist *Iliads*.

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<sup>1</sup> A talk to students in Rosanna Warren's class in literary translation at Boston University, February 2002. Part of this appeared in *Conjunctions* with samples of a translation of Baudelaire.

My thesis is so obvious, I hate to come out with it directly. But here it is: the translator is a collaborator, not exactly with an author, living or dead, but with a text. Thus there are two phases any translator must go through: first to read something, then to write something.

This is why the naïve scribbler is so very very wrong to suppose that translating is the easy way to write a poem, a story, a play, that all you have to do is know the language of the original and, as it were, transcribe it in your own.

Try it.

The fact is that to translate is harder than writing something “of your own,” since you face all the problems, all the difficulties, of composing any text, but, in addition, the obligation to relate it in some way to another given text.

Remember that I am discussing *literary* translation, the translation of works of art. There are other texts that call for limiting oneself to getting meaning across, if necessary by disregarding other facets of *sense*. Sense includes meaning, but meaning is only one aspect of sense.

Most literary texts—perhaps not all—do mean something and, as Jacobsen and others have noted, meaning can always be taken across into another language. But what must be kept in mind is that (1) getting the meaning across is at best a partial (or preliminary) translation of a literary text; and (2) the same meaning, in its new tongue, may not bring with it the full, or even the same, sense.

Here allow me to insert the most banal of propositions: anything that can be said can be said some other way. Less banal, though still, I think, obvious: what is said differently *is* different—even if it still says the same thing.

An example (from a text that, I must admit, the translators were not thinking of as literature):

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet recounts his call, chapter six, verses one and two. In the King James Version of 1611, we find the following magnificent visionary setting:

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

The Revised Version, 1885, and its cousin the American Standard Version, 1901, took out the word “also” and changed “Above it” to “Above him,” leaving the rest intact. But in 1952, the Revised Standard Version attempted, as they put it, to preserve “those qualities which have given to the King James Version a supreme place in English literature,” but wanted “those qualities” in up-to-date language. Their text reads:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.<sup>2</sup>

Other versions:

“In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; his trailing robes spread over the temple-floor, and seraphs hovered round him, each with six wings—two covering the face, two covering the body, and two to fly with.” (James Moffatt, 1935)

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and uplifted, with the skirts of his robe filling the temple. Over him stood seraphim, each having six wings, with two of which he covered his face, with two he covered his loins, and with two he hovered in flight  
.”

(An American Translation [Alex R. Gordon], 1939)

It would be hard to argue that this does not say the same thing. But with those final words, the magnificence, the sense of grandeur, is lost—lost because of the reviser’s tin ear.

Another example. Many years ago, I picked up a book I had been told was weird, the intimation being that I might like it. The first sentence caught me.

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<sup>2</sup> Other versions:

“In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; his trailing robes spread over the temple-floor, and seraphs hovered round him, each with six wings—two covering the face, two covering the body, and two to fly with.” (James Moffatt, 1935)

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and uplifted, with the skirts of his robe filling the temple. Over him stood seraphim, each having six wings, with two of which he covered his face, with two he covered his loins, and with two he hovered in flight.” (An American Translation [Alex R. Gordon], 1939)

Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning.

Willa and Edwin Muir had translated Kafka's *The Trial* in 1937. Almost twenty years later, the publisher announced the "Definitive Edition," for which some suppressed passages were now included and a noted German scholar went over the translation for mistakes. The first sentence now read

Someone must have traduced Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning.

*Traduced* translates more accurately than *been telling lies about* the German word *verleumd*. That is to say, it translates more accurately the single word. The sentence as a whole means just what it did, but the tone is ruined. As Dryden pointed out three centuries ago, one does not translate words. The smallest unit of prose that can be thought of as translatable is the sentence and it is not incorrect, at most an exaggeration, to say that the real unit is the entire text.

A different kind of example: towards the end of Beckett's *Molloy*, Moran tells what Gaber told him of a conversation with a third party.<sup>3</sup>

Il m'a dit, dit Gaber, Gaber, qu'il m'a dit, la vie est une bien belle chose, Gaber, une chose inouïe.

A literal translation might be something like "He told me, said Gaber, Gaber, he said, life is a very beautiful thing, Gaber, an unheard of thing." In Beckett's own English version of the novel, this becomes

He said to me, said Gaber, Gaber, he said, life is a thing of beauty, Gaber, and a joy for ever.

My point is not that Beckett can do what he wants with his own text. I think this a beautiful job, of the sort that—if one is translation-conscious—there is a moment of surprise, of *can he really get away with this?*, followed by the joy of language used well.

If *Molloy* were a realistic novel set, for instance, somewhere in France, it would not have worked to bring in Keats. Perhaps in no other novel would it have worked. But it works here.

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<sup>3</sup> French, p. 255, English, p. 226

This is the place to note those translation problems without number: what do you do with passages in dialect? how do you deal with flora or fauna for which there is no English name? with—to put it broadly—cultural references that readers of English are not likely to get? The sad fact is that these problems, and others, one can bring up in general terms, but solutions, if they exist, are available only at point of contact, only precisely where they come to light. That Beckett could use an echo of Keats is not something that is going to help you. The questions are common and lie in the relations of a text and two languages, the answers are individual and are up to you.

What does a translator need to know?

This is a terrible question.

Let us skip over the ideal situation, where we are complete masters of two languages and of their entire cultural fields, perfect readers of literary works, enormously talented writers...

Actually our relation to the language we are translating from, the source language, is not the same as our relation to the target language. Most of us who translate one direction could not work the other way around. Even a completely bi-lingual writer may feel it uncomfortable or impossible.

Translators vary in their knowledge of, and competence in, the source language. One to whom it is native is, of course, from that angle, the best prepared (I envy greatly any bi- let alone tri-lingual person), but there are other degrees of knowledge, all the way down to zero.

From Pound's *Cathay* to the Merwin-Brown Mandelstam, there is a tradition of literal collaboration, where one person reads and the other writes. I can report personally on the difficulties and rewards of such an arrangement. The Chinese poet Xue Di left China and came to the United States shortly after the events at Tian'anmen Square in 1989. For some years now, I have been working to get his poems into English.

Someone who knows Chinese (I do not) prepares a trot, a translation as literal as possible, often with alternate possibilities for words or phrases. Xue Di, whose English has gotten better and better, goes over this interim version. Then, from this material, I attempt to fashion an English poem, aspects of which I may discuss with Xue Di.

When I started this project, the question was not, Is this the best way to proceed? There was simply no one doing anything for this body of work.

I am reminded here of my first attempts at translating poetry. Though people insist I must be joking, it is the case, that I began translating French poems into English, because in French I could not read them. I mean, I could understand the words, the sentences—more or less—but the sense remained foreign. They were not yet, in the way I was reading them, poems. They were like the trots that my interim interpreters make of Xue Di's poems, poems stripped to their meanings.

On occasion I have been given a wrong lead. What I was first given, in a poem by Xue Di, as a silk scarf turned out to be a cypress tree. That's correctable. (Nicer, it's true, had it been corrected before publication.) The thing I regret in the way all this is done is that I can never actually know how closely my version relates to the original, how adequate it is in character and tone.

On the other hand I have often wondered, were I bi-lingual, would I ever have felt the necessity of translation. And is it possible for someone bi-lingual to appreciate a translation from a language so perfectly known—almost certainly an inferior work. It must be possible, since it does happen, but I find it hard to fathom.

The translator's relation to the target language is something else again. It is the language being written and its use is crucial. The answer to the question, how to prepare oneself or how to improve one's basic skills in translating, is simply to learn more and more the use of one's own language. Which can be done in two ways. Obviously it helps to write, to practice writing: if you translate a poem, you are writing a poem; if you translate fiction, you are writing fiction. Anything you write can sharpen your ability to write.

But more important: to translate—or indeed, to write at all—it is necessary to read, to read, that is, in your own language. And, reading, to listen to what you read. There is no other way to gain access to the vast repertoire of possibilities in the specific language you are working with and in.

Your relation to the work you are translating is, finally, the full collaboration. I have translated mainly contemporary French poets, in some—not all—cases, poets with whom I am acquainted personally.

Recently, however, I have taken on Baudelaire. And I am translating him into English versets.

Why am I spending my time on a version of *Les Fleurs du mal*? Easy: I have not been satisfied with any translation<sup>4</sup> I have read. There are a great many—no doubt many more than I have dug up—going back to the Victorians. (How unfortunate neither Rossetti nor Swinburne took on Baudelaire.)

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<sup>4</sup> I don't mean there is no single poem well translated. I mean of the whole collection or a substantial selection.

The harder question: why in versets?

What are the alternatives?

The old phrase “in the original meters” is not helpful. A French meter, alexandrine or other (Baudelaire uses various meters), cannot be followed in English. An English alexandrine, for instance, has the same number of syllables as its French namesake, but no other relation.

Another tack is to claim, for instance, that the alexandrine is to French poetry what heroic verse is to English. This makes sense to me. At any rate, it seems reasonable to translate metrical poems in meter.

Reasonable. But not for me.

And I do not find anyone who has really done it well. Arthur Symons tried.

Stinginess, Sin, Stupidity, shall determine  
Our spirits' fashion and travail our body's forces,  
And we shall feed on the corpses of our remorse  
Like the beggars who nourish their own vermin.

It is hard to believe, with this first stanza of *Flowers of Evil*, that Symons—on his own—was a competent poet. I think he was trapped by an idea of duty, that he must somehow match (match *exactly*) the formal qualities of the original—which, however, he was quite incapable of doing. It is the analog of another (and opposite) mistaken idea: that one must be as literal as possible, even to the extent of word for word. (There are two traps that unwary translators walk into: (1) wandering too far from the original and (2) sticking too close to it. The latter is more common and more dangerous.)

There is another possibility: free verse. This would mean, not meter into meter, but at least verse into verse...

But at this point (having tried, by the way, several kinds of verse) I was struck by other considerations. In translating any particular text, there are particular values to be considered, particular, that is, not to a theory, but to the piece at hand. Something is bound to get lost in transit and some things are more precious than others, and one must decide, in a text to be translated, what is more, and what is less, precious.

Some poems can be translated into prose, not without loss, but still retaining a great deal of their value. Long narrative poems are often cases in point. I like the prose version of the *Odyssey* by T.E. Shaw and that of *Orlando Furioso* by Guido Waldman.

Even with lyric poetry... I must admit that, after looking through many versions of the Greek Anthology, I have generally gotten more from the Loeb “literal” translations.

J.M. Synge translated a dozen poems of Petrarch into prose, the most beautiful Petrarch in English<sup>5</sup>.

All things that I am bearing in mind, and all things I am in dread of, are keeping me in troubles, in this way one time, in that way another time, so that if I wasn't taking pity on my own self it's long ago I'd have given up my life.

There are poets whose work, handled this way, could survive hardly or not at all: Verlaine, Heine... Or try to imagine prosing Auden's

As I walked out one evening,  
Walking down Bristol Street...

Is *Les Fleurs du mal* in this category?

But meanwhile, I had been working in another direction. The Bible was so early and so pervasive an influence, that my first impulses to write came often in the shape of versets. This strange hybrid, hovering between verse and prose, has always haunted me. Many of my first effusions were versets, Biblical to the point of blasphemy.

French poetry is full of versets, from Judith Gautier's versions of Chinese poetry, through Claudel, Segalen, Perse, to Jean Grosjean and Paul Keineg, both of whom I have translated.<sup>6</sup>

Not everyone admires the Carlyle-Wicksteed Dante, but I have always liked and still continually go back to it. Each tercet of Dante's terza rima is made into a separate but continuous prose, a sort of prose stanza. Some of these stanzas contain more than one sentence; some sentences take more than one stanza. They are, in other words, not quite prose, not quite verse—precisely, versets. I have seen Carlyle's *Inferno* (he was, by the way, John Carlyle, Thomas's younger brother) referred to as a “scholarly” translation, but—not allergic, as some are, to Victorian English—I find it beautiful.

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<sup>5</sup> Putting aside, of course, the great Wyatt imitations

<sup>6</sup> Jean Grosjean, *Elegies*; Paul Keineg, *Boudica*..



My interest in translating Baudelaire goes far back and I have, over the years—decades—tried meter and rhyme, free verse, prose... In an attempt to make a prose version of one of the poems, I somehow tricked myself into making versets. It seemed, when I realized what I was doing, a ridiculous thing, but what is a little flirt with the ridiculous, compared with the immense impossibility of translating any literary text? For some time now, I have continued. I have, in various states, the first eighty or so poems. Off and on, I flip open my *Pléiade* and go to work on another...

Rosmarie Waldrop  
Irreducible Strangeness

Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him.<sup>1</sup>

This is Schleiermacher, the German Romantic Theologian and Philosopher, on the various methods of translation. He is in favor of leaving the author in peace, rather than adapting the foreign work to what the reader is used to. This debate is lively right now in the US. Lawrence Venuti has written three books in defence of “foreignizing,” as he calls it.

But the debate has been going on for a long time. Goethe saw these two possibilities as part of a historical process. Actually he posited three stages of translation following one another:<sup>2</sup>

The first is simple and prosaic (*schlicht-prosaisch*) and wants to know what a work “says.” This kind of translation has been reigning through the seventeenth century.

The second stage, which he calls “parodistic,” adapts the foreign work’s spirit to our own culture. This stage Goethe assigns to the early eighteenth century and especially to the French — with a definite dig at their arrogance of wanting to make everything according to French taste. It is still the dominant mode in English-speaking countries, as Lawrence Venuti has shown.

Translation of this kind is praised as “transparent” or “seamless.” It reflects the values of our science-dominated culture, Venuti says, by “valorizing a purely instrumental use of language and...immediate intelligibility.”<sup>3</sup> Looked at from a political angle, this appears less harmless than “parodistic” would indicate: at the very least it domesticates, at worst it is imperialist and colonizing.

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1. Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens” (1813), quoted in Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 19.

2. J. W. v. Goethe, “West-Östlicher Divan: Noten und Abhandlungen,” *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*, vol. 2, ed. Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1949).

3. Venuti, p. 5.

I once heard Jerome Rothenberg argue in this mode that Japanese haiku should be translated into a Wordsworthian idiom because the position haiku has in Japanese culture is analogous to Wordsworth's position in English-speaking culture.

In Goethe's third and highest stage, finally, the translator tries to make his work identical with the original. These versions at first encounter resistance among readers because a translator who "attaches himself so closely to his original more or less abandons the originality of his own nation. The result is a third [term] toward which the taste of the public must first be educated."<sup>4</sup> This he sees going on in Germany in his time, with the nationalistic aim of making the German language suppler by listening to foreign cadences.

This "third" is of the greatest interest. It is important that, in contrast to the domesticating, colonizing model, this kind of translation follows the foreign work so closely it almost abandons its own language and culture. It is, in Schleiermacher's phrase, "towards a foreign likeness bent."

Its locus is definitely new ground somewhere between the two languages, stretching the border of the target language beyond where it was before. Emmanuel Hocquard calls the new ground a "blank spot" on the map of one's language: "a particular language within French, which resembles French without being altogether French." So that translation actually means "gaining ground," gaining new territory between languages.<sup>5</sup>

(I part company with Goethe when he goes on to say that the last, the translation that tries to identify with the original, in the end, tends to approach the interlinear and thus close the circle. This owes more to Goethe's love of circular patterns than to an understanding of translation. But it is no doubt one source of the value Benjamin places (at least in theory) on literal word-by-word rendering of syntax.)

Both "domesticating" and "foreignizing" translations aim to enrich the target language and culture. Though the latter has a more respectful attitude to the foreign culture. To continue the colonial metaphor: One as it were imports raw material to manufacture something good and English out of it, the other tries to import the foreign artefact and points at the foreign culture as something interesting.

Of course there are many ways to be "foreignizing." Which particular features of the foreign language a translator tries to keep depends on the nature of the particular foreign text.

The most radical example I know is Celia and Louis Zukofsky's monumental *Catullus* which tries to keep the sound of the words, almost phoneme by phoneme, while also conveying the meaning. Their translation, says the preface, "follows the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his Latin — tries, as is said, to breathe the 'literal' meaning with him." The grandeur of this impossible ambition to transfer *everything intact* is overwhelming. So is the Zukofskys' sheer persistence: they do not just tackle one poem or two in this manner, but *all* of Catullus.

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4. Goethe, p. 256.

5. Emmanuel Hocquard, "Blank Spots," trans. Stacy Doris, *Boundary2* 26, No. 1 (Spring 1999).

I am fascinated by this focus on sound (which is also a bit quixotic because we don't even know very well what Latin sounded like), and by this project of "breathing the 'literal' meaning." There are brilliant successes. For instance, the famous opening, "Miser Catulle" (something like "poor old Catullus") becomes "Miss her, Catullus?" Here, both the single sound and the whole poem enter into the translation because "missing her" is indeed the root of Catullus's misery.

When I look at Catullus 85 :

Odi et amo, quare id faciam, fortasse, requiris.  
nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

(literally:

I hate and love, why I do so you may well ask.  
I don't know, but I feel it happen and suffer.)

and find:

O th'hate I move love. Quarry it fact I am, for that's so re queries.  
Nescience, say th'fiery scent I owe whets crookeder.

I am amazed that the English does indeed sound like the Latin, amazed by the sheer strangeness of diction which nevertheless manages to suggest some of the Latin's meaning. I am intrigued by the particular English words Zukofsky *heard* in the Latin, by the meanings and associations the unexpected ones set in motion: quarry, fiery, owe, crookeder. I am in awe of this work, delighted that it exists. But I am also glad it is not the *only* Catullus in English.

In fact, I tend to think of it as Zukofsky rather than as Catullus. I do not think of the method ("his monstrous method," says Guy Davenport) as a window onto a foreign text. Whereas it definitely is a way of extending the possibilities of poetic speech in English and especially of drawing attention to the materiality, to the physical nature of words. In other words, when a "foreignizing" translation gets this extreme, it flips over into an emphasis on the target language, in terms of a subversive poetics. Though it is through the presentation *as* translation that the point is made.

In short, I think of Zukofsky's Catullus as an extreme possibility, as a monument rather than a model.

In my own translation process I very much go through all three stages that Goethe saw as a historical sequence:

A preliminary stage of intense reading together with my first round of writing (which is interlinear, almost word for word) attempts to understand the work—though not just "what it says." The understanding

I am after is also different from a critic's analysis. It aims more at retracing the author's steps, his creative process. As Valéry puts it:

Translating...makes us try to step into the vestiges of the author's footprints; not to fashion one text out of another, but to go back from this one to the virtual epoch of its formation, to the phase where the state of mind is that of an orchestra whose instruments awaken, call out to one another, try to be in tune before the concert.<sup>6</sup>

Haroldo de Campos speaks of "dissolving the Apollonian crystallization of the original text back into a state of molten lava."<sup>7</sup> Curiously, the philosopher and critic Wilhelm Dilthey saw the hermeneutic process exactly in these terms, as

uncovering the meaning of a text by re-creating the whole process of the genesis of that text. The conceptual premiss behind it is Aristotle's distinction between *ergon* and *energeia*: Interpretation of a work, as Dilthey understands it, consists in "translating the *ergon* — the completed object — back into the *energeia* that brought it forth."<sup>8</sup>

In the second round, I do not look at the original. I must separate myself from its authority. I treat the mess of the first draft (which is not quite English, often makes no sense at all) as if it were a draft of my own, though with a sense of the text's intentionality in mind. I try to re-produce, re-create it in English, make a poem of it. The importance of this stage of separation cannot be exaggerated, and I am still grateful that I was very early pointed in this direction by Justin O'Brien.<sup>9</sup>

In the third round, I go back to dialogue with the French and try to wrestle the English as close to the original language as possible.

It is hard to say if one stage is more important than another. Each only seems possible once I have gone through the preceding one. I can only write an English text once I have "understood" the French. I can only get close to the French once I have a text that can stand by itself as a text in English. In my Jabès translations, much of the work at the third stage has been on syntax, on letting the sentences approach again the length of the French ones, on trying to catch the rhythm of the paragraphs.

I would say it is a matter of finding, for each individual case, that fine line between being as foreign as possible and sounding as good as possible in English. It seems to me analogous to the problem of

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6. Paul Valéry, "Variations sur les Bucoliques," *Oeuvres*, vol. 1, p. 215.

7. Haroldo de Campos, "Transluciferation," *Ex 4* (1985), pp. 10-14.

8. Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, trans. Mary Whittall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 4.

9. Justin O'Brien, "From French to English," in *On Translation*, ed. Reuben A. Brower (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

aesthetic distance: you want to be as cool, as far from sentimentality as possible—while still being able to engage the emotions. Or to open form, which wants to be as open as possible, but still with as much closure as necessary for it to be recognizable as form.

Translation's ultimate task may be to bear witness to the *essentially* irreducible strangeness and distance between languages — but its immediate task is exactly to explore this space.

*This talk was presented at “In the Making,” a Danish-American Poetry Conference in Copenhagen, August 2001. It is included in my book of essays, DISSONANCE (IF YOU ARE INTERESTED), forthcoming from University of Alabama Press.*

Chet Wiener

The Legacy and Future of “Horizontal” and “Vertical”  
Translation in Contemporary Poetry

1

When Paul de Man addresses Walter Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator” he frames his reading in terms of what he calls the recurrent problem of modernity, “whether what we are doing now is different from what was done before.”<sup>2</sup> He derives the question from Gadamer who finds answers in the historical critical turn in philosophy towards language and in relations of subjectivity to linguistic productions. De Man submits a basic comparison between translation and philosophy in this light, an inherent connection to critical referentiality and the paradoxes of repetition which can eventually be discerned in a split in the respective “modes” of poetry and translation: translation points to the relation between and among languages, and poetry, in a differentiation from that relation between languages, expresses historicity marked in its literary productions.

2

Since translation is essentially bound to problems of repetition and continuity, and discussions of translation often lead to considerations of how translation is similar and different from other forms of representation, it is my hope that drawing up parameters for describing the relation between attitudes and practices of translation in poetry can provide gauges for measuring kinds of differences from what was done before and what may be particular about what is done now. To do so, I will be pointing to what I’m calling a *vertical* relation to predecessors (often framed in terms of the more or less immediate future of a language or

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this essay was originally presented at the Poetry Session of the MLA (Poetry and the Politics and Theories of Translation), December 27, 2003, as “Translating Downward, Translating Horizontally: National Languages and Poetic Activity.”

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, Schocken Book, 1969. Paul de Man, “‘Conclusions’: Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator,” *Resistance to Theory*, Minnesota, 1986. De Man refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s “The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century,” *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, tr. and ed. David E. Linge, U of Claifornia Press, 1976.

literature) and a *horizontal* relation to contemporaries or culturally determined models (often framed in terms of identity).<sup>3</sup> In the vertical relation, identification with something like a “canon” is made in order to assert difference with and in terms of it. In the horizontal relation, difference from a canon, or from dominant conditions, is used to assert identity, or an urge toward compiling prevails.

But rather than concentrating on Romantic or modern texts or perspectives, I will look to classical, medieval, early modern and contemporary ones which emphasize different horizontal and vertical relations. These include (1) Roman theories of translation in the time from Cicero to Quintilian, where the site of difference was a seeking and claiming of superiority; (2) an example from fourteenth-century France, the *Ovide moralisé*, in which writing develops largely horizontally as an expression of commentary and compilation; (3) some contemporary projects gleaned from issues 5 and 10 of *Chain* (eds. Jena Osman and Juliana Spahr), and the collections *Going Home to Landscape; Writing by Filipinas* (ed. Marianne Villanueva and Virginia Cerenio, Calyx Books, 2003) and *Sin Puertas Visibles, an Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women* (ed. and trans. Jen Hofer, Pittsburgh/Ediciones Sin Nombre, 2003), where compilation, performance and/or cultural exchange prevail and; (4) French Renaissance writing’s modeling of itself on Roman verticality while finding a horizontal resolution to the question of whether translation and poetics can be separated by positing an ultimately shared horizon for all peoples, languages and literatures.

### 3

The Roman vertical translation model begins with a stage of emulation; then the emulated tradition is carried on as the preliminary model gains renewed life through what the new text takes from it. Meanwhile, the resulting text also necessarily proceeds by virtue of its differences in language, cultural and formal substitution, even as various sorts of continuity with tradition are maintained. In this context, it is as if an elevator is used to rise to the lofty heights of Greek ancestors, to bring their riches down to the level of the ascending Romans, to rise in a new form. As Cicero explains concerning his translations of Demosthenes and Aeschines:

And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, one might say, the “figures” of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were. The result of my labor will be that our Romans will know what to

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<sup>3</sup> A specific notion of “vertical translation” seems first to have been employed by Gianfranco Folena (“Volgarizzare’ e ‘tradurre’: idea e terminologia della traduzione dal medio evo italiano e romanzo all’umanesimo europeo,” *La traduzione: saggi et studi*, Trieste, Lint 1973) cited by Rita Copeland (*Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1991, p. 11), to describe a hierarchy of prestige among languages. Although in the Western tradition, at least from Saint Paul to the German Romantics, hierarchical relations among languages and their capacities for expression have been considered in relation to what translation can and cannot achieve.



demand from those who claim to be Atticists and to what rule of speech, as it were, they are to be held. *De optimo genere oratorum (The Best Kind of Orator)*, 5.14-15.<sup>4</sup>

Cicero also puts forth related positions on translation and the idea of cooptation in *De finibus (On Ends)*, and specifically on poetry in the *Tusculan Disputations* (2.11.26). An image of the Roman conception of this process is crystallized in Horace's "Graecia capta ferum victorem/ cepit et artis intulit agresti Latio," ("Greece having been captured, conquered its savage victor and introduced arts into rustic Latium," *Epistle 2*, 15.6). With Quintilian's positing of the pedagogical use of reading (1.8.5), paraphrasing and re-writing (1.9.2 ff), and translation (10.5.2 ff), the Roman perspective on translation as vertical appropriation of the superior model in order to rival and exceed it is firmly established.

4

Thomas Greene and others have described the generalized intertextual mode of the Middle Ages as "metonymic": an original is added to or commented on and thus, essentially, continued.<sup>5</sup> For instance, in the Christian tradition the meaning of a text or the Text may be known, yet it is available for commentary, elucidation, extension. Rita Copeland describes how, as opposed to the orator, the *fides interpres* (and *interpres* could mean interpreter or translator in Latin) mocked by Cicero (as in the quote above from *The Best Kind of Orator*) and Horace gains a positive valence in an atmosphere imbued with Christian exegesis.<sup>6</sup>

Copeland also describes the separation between rhetoric and grammar which Cicero and Quintilian pass on to later ages: rhetoric assumes the important functions of moral exemplarity and invention, and grammar, to which translation is initially seen to belong, develops the hermeneutical, commentary function. For the Romans, grammar precedes rhetoric in the pedagogical program toward becoming an orator, and *ennaratio* (as glossing or interpretation) and *interpretatio* (as translation or interpretation) belonged to grammar. Meanwhile, rhetoric is the Roman master discourse: it is superior to and can subsume even philosophy because it persuades to right moral action. But through the Middle Ages these Roman valuations are shifted or reversed, as the eminently metonymic and horizontal practices of exegesis, glossing and commentary rule the day.

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<sup>4</sup> Cicero, *De inventione, De optimo genere oratorum, Topica*, trans. Harry Mortimer Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library, London: 1949, p. 365.

<sup>5</sup> The metonymical model is opposed to the metaphorical model; in the latter displacements of the exemplar prevail over its extension. Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, *infra*.

<sup>6</sup> Copland, p. 45-55 on Jerome, and *infra*.

In the fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé* the exegetical commentary tradition and its association with translation (as more or less a synonym of interpretation and as the hermeneutic inheritor of the grammatical, as opposed to rhetorical, function) evidently fuels poetic composition: here the medieval metonymic thrust spreads out horizontally in the “moralized” translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* into the contemporary Christian context. In drawing out this context, the *Ovide moralisé* includes rewriting and compiling functions by reworking vernacular exegetic and literary sources (such as glosses on Genesis, previous glosses of Ovid, the *Roman de la rose*, and French translations of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*...). Poetry and translation are united through the horizontalizing exegetical impulse founded on asserting the cultural identification of Ovid’s intentions and work to the fourteenth-century poet-translator’s program.

5.

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, poets in France began writing treatises on poetry; each called a *Seconde rhétorique*, as compared to the “first rhetoric,” oratory. Such treatises continued to be referred to as *Seconde rhétorique* into the sixteenth century, when a terminological shift increasingly led to their each being referred to as an “Art of Poetry” which perpetuated a close dependence on classical rhetoric, its terminology and canonical texts. This trend was due in part to applications of educational practices derived from Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*, ideas and principles from which were transposed into these “Arts.” At the same time there was an echo of the conception of rhetoric as master discourse because it could move people, now applied to poetry. This can be seen for instance in Sidney’s *Defence of Poesie* (1595).<sup>7</sup>

In this age of *Arts poétiques*, Thomas Sebillet’s (1548) is interesting for calling translation “*version*” and typical for allying translation to imitation. Imitation, as the sixteenth-century French writer’s rendition of mimesis, meant imitating literary models, and perhaps secondarily imitating nature through writing variously empowered with consciousness and formal forays into classical aesthetics. As Sebillet put it, “*version* is nothing other than an imitation.” His treatise, the full title of which translates as, “French Poetic Art for the instruction of young students and also those a little advanced in French poetry” forthrightly recommends exploitation of tradition and sees all poetic composition as part of a continuum. Within this continuum, he writes, “it is easy to add things, easy to innovate on your own or to imitate the innovations of others using their knowledge.” Because he considers imitation and translation the same sort of activity, he even recommends imitating translators. “So imitate these divine minds who, following other’s footsteps, made the most sweet path to follow and are themselves followed.” He mentions such contemporary *versions* as Marot’s versions of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* and the *Psalms*, Sale’s *Iliad*, Héroet’s *Androgyne* (from Plato’s *Symposium*,

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<sup>7</sup> “For indeed Poetrie ever sets vertue so out in her best cullours, making fortune her well-wayting handmayd, that one must needs be enamoured of her...Hee doth not onely farre pass the Historian, but for instructing is well nigh comparable to the Philosopher, for moving, leaveth him behind him,” *The Defence of Poesie: An Apologie for Poetrie*, Bibliotheca Augustana, University of Toronto, [http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/anglica/Chronology/16thC/Sidney/sid\\_poes.html](http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/anglica/Chronology/16thC/Sidney/sid_poes.html).

and itself probably translated from Ficino?), Des Masures' *Aeneid*, Peletier's *Odyssey*... Unlike Roman verticality, the superiority of the model is not necessarily problematized; Sebillet explains, "Someone and his work deserve great praise to have to some extent well and smoothly expressed in his language what another had better written in his, after having conceived it in mind with care." Clouding the distinction between imitation and translation, Sebillet also diminishes the hierarchy among different sources for imitation, as developing the art of poetry writing remains his central concern.

6

Joachim Du Bellay's *Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoys* (1549) is not properly an "Art of Poetry," since it ambitiously covers a wider area, including poetry, the French language itself, and the status of French literature. Du Bellay is adamant about resolving the translation-imitation confusion: Real and useful translation from one language to another can only be of the "encyclopedia" of ancient knowledge—it is a matter of transmission. One translates exemplary texts to prepare minds and it is especially useful for the dissemination of science and philosophy.

As regards poetry, he follows a classical conception of imitation as articulated by Quintilian and others: models are to be "ingested" and "digested" whole before the poet moves to make his own inventions. On the one hand, this preparation by the poet (concerning classical and other literatures) is distinguished from the translation proper of "scientific" texts. On the other, this sort of imitation is sometimes hard to distinguish from translation.<sup>8</sup> Du Bellay, in contrast to Sebillet, finds it "odious to imitate within [meaning "from and to"] one's own language" (VII), since he considers that previous and contemporary productions in French have not yet attained a level worthy of serving as examples.<sup>9</sup>

Vertical modeling as "imitation," but not translation on a literary level, is advocated, as is vertical transmission of (scientific, moral or philosophical) knowledge. Both are necessary for the present and future benefit of the language and literature. To Du Bellay, vertical appropriation in the manner of the Romans of the Greeks is absolutely needed to raise French poetry up but it is the poet's language itself which can succeed in rising. In his view, this rising is a truth related to a capacity shared by all in every language, equal under God and after Babel. Du Bellay explains that every language is subject to a natural process of growth and change, with stages of ascension and demise. But at the point where French language and literature are as he writes, and despite some confusion of vocabulary, he consistently argues (a) that translation and imitation must be separate: the unequal historical moment of the two languages work at cross-purposes, and (b) there is a difference of purpose and mode of transmission and result in scientific versus literary writing.

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<sup>8</sup> The confusion of imitation and translation can even be seen on the level of the treatise since Du Bellay himself bases a good portion of his *Deffence* on an Italian text, Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542). As Du Bellay allows for gainful imitation from other vulgar languages, he notes that Homer and Virgil would not be able to translate Petrarch with the same grace and naturalness as lies in Petrarch's use of his native Tuscan.

<sup>9</sup> Like Quintilian, Du Bellay does advocate looking back to old sources in one's national language or literature for vocabulary.

Thus a comparison can be made to Walter Benjamin's now canonical and perplexing image of the relation of translation to original as broken pieces of a clay vessel *articulating* continual displacement.<sup>10</sup> Du Bellay offers a particular temporal explanation of this process, suggesting that the overlap of poetic and translative functions is doomed to failure because different languages and literatures evolve at different rates, even as language, literature and culture can gain from translation and the cooptation of literary models.

8

Contemporary writing projects, like Early Modern ones, also implicitly and explicitly address the gaps and intersections between translation and poetry, identity and difference, authority and position. To segue into my final discussion of the horizontality and verticality of contemporary translation in poetry, I will only mention another approach to that ever-receding or blurred region of displacement translation seems to point to regarding origins. In his following after Benjamin and de Man, Homi Bhabha considers translation through what he calls the "space of the untranslatable." In the essay "How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation," he more or less locates this space in the subject, or the subject representation, or subject representations in narratives, as the mobile-marginal area of cultural displacements.<sup>11</sup> For Bhabha, the cultural overlap of translation, "the performative nature of cultural communication," which is also untranslatable, also however points to synchronicities, as the irresolvability of identity nevertheless manifests multiple appurtenances. In his discussion of Benjamin, de Man wants to signal the *historicity* in poetry and the *relation among languages* in translation. Bhabha's discussion finds translation inscribing the meeting of multiple times with the inscription of multiple identity. What we have been considering as the gap or potential continuity between poetry and translation articulated horizontally or vertically, what Benjamin and de Man indicate at the junction of languages as such and expressions of historicity, and Du Bellay locates in imitation's essential yet indirect continuity versus translation's disseminative non-inventive function, becomes for Bhabha that element of resistance which cannot be translated yet still is, carries over and continues to be however otherwise in different contexts or locations of a post-colonial world. This is an excellent way of viewing the matter but, even as the essay ends with a discussion of Derek Wolcott's poem *Names*, this theorization of translation/the untranslatable begins to sacrifice some of the complexity and potential of what writing, what poetry, can do and does, in favor of concentrating on the politics and manifestations of motivating identity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf., Zohn's English rendition of this passage in "The Task of the Translator," p.78.

<sup>11</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994, p. 212-35.

<sup>12</sup> For a look from a theorist's side at how poetry is avoided by theory, see Avatal Ronell's "On the Misery of Theory without Poetry: On Heidegger's Reading of Hölderlin's "Andenken" in the forthcoming PMLA. It concerns a much more thorough leaving out than what I am about to indicate.

Contemporary translation *in poetry* has several means of expressing itself in looking across from one culture (or several) to another (or several) in work or part of a work where (a) communication of and between models and cultures, (b) formal innovation, and (c) identity articulation are all important. Thus in the recent *Going Home to Landscape: Writing by Filipinas* (ed. Marianne Villanueva and Virginia Cerenio, Calyx Books, 2003) there is a certain centripetalness in which concentric circles of multiple appurtenance—colonial, immigrant, race, sex—effectively seem to fill in with horizontal articulations of that untranslatable yet expressible in-betweenness of identity. Verticality is also in play, for nostalgia, change over time, and these appurtenances express historical factors.

On the other hand, in her introduction to *Sin Puertas Visibles, an anthology of contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women*, Jen Hofer sees translation and poetry as coeval practices, as she always recognizes multidirectional compromises which include the geographical, temporal and cultural limitations to the poet's task as translator. Here, poetry and translation together make a space like a continual going toward from an outside that is at once an irremediable condition and a powerful motivating force. This effort to get it and to include, like her description of her call for work through all sorts of venues throughout Mexico is informed by eminently horizontal aspirations.<sup>13</sup>

The energy flow of both collections (the one of “original writing” compiled in terms of cultural identity and the other a bilingual collection of writing presenting everything from its dedication and introduction to its poems in both Spanish and English) may be considered centripetally horizontal, as they show the different sides of how cultural identity, appurtenance, and communication are staged. At the same time, consideration of their modes of imitation and identification, that is how they define their distance and difference and degree of outside from one literary tradition to another reveals functions that can also be ascribed to a vertical axis of culturally determined models, whether as recuperation, nostalgia or identity-formations involved in spurring the writing. For instance, as the Filipina writer of *Going Home* reaches across the globe and feels the weight of a post-colonial context and identity, her identifications and identity formulations also come about in relation to the problematics of her cooptations of predecessors, the assigning of values and the development of forms and procedures in terms of temporally or historically previous domains with an explicit sense of looking back. This can be compared to the vertical Roman “elevator” model superinduced to a different sort of source.

While an anthologizing project may of necessity stress (a) communication among models and cultures and (b) the role and articulation of identity with different degrees and kinds of interest in (c) formal innovation,

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<sup>13</sup> In her introduction Hofer refers to calls for work in literary magazines, and postings in local newspapers and cultural centers, p. 1, 10-11.

the last examples I'd like to mention come from a couple of issues of *Chain* where formal and other sorts of innovation, an essential characteristic of poetry is, arguably, always at least as important as the other two means. These examples are horizontal in their use of sources, and compositional and projective aspects, and can still be discussed in terms of the modalities in relation to which translation has traditionally been theorized and practiced in the West: rhetoric (delivery, moving people emotionally and morally) and hermeneutics (commentary, culling).

Catalina Cariaga's "The Mercy" presents multiple languages—Japanese, English, Filipino dialects, multiple forms, is about crossings from culture to culture and then context to context, bounces off the experience of seeing Huk Kyung Cha's already hybrid film/installation, *Exilée*, and has a number of rewritten intertexts from different traditions and moments. Culling, orchestration, multiple languages and perspectives are in constant tension with the centripetal force of the primary narrative. Warren Burt's "A Post-Colonialist Poem on the English Language for Readers" is made up of two phrases, "Werrabee Mitsubishi" and "Minnesota Bonsai Society" developed into a program of infinite permutations of its 12 or 13 syllables (he collapses "bee" and "bi" into one) to become a loose score for sound poetry. When the machinic output ("Be Miss Too Sub..." etc.) is presented live to an audience the syllabic dispersal becomes projective, almost in a now performed Olsonian sense, with the voices' transfer of energy enlivening the field of syllables. These works of Cariaga and Burt appear in *Chain* 5.

Scott Macleod uses texts relating to war and other texts, gathered and fed through computer translators. The project seeks to make the orchestration of computer translations into the expression of certain ideas: that war devalues symbolic forms, that it may be possible to refer (as Macleod explains) to historical baggage without actually having to carry it, that bad translation, like war, may be an agent for change. With this last, Du Bellay's and Benjamin's apprehension about the value of translations of translations becomes a motor for composition itself, with the expectation that a moral message can ensue. Like some excerpts of Macleod's "Tales of the Ootd War," Joan Retallack's translation, "Mountains & Waters & Rivers," appears in *Chain* 10. Joan Retallack's contribution is another sort of performative compilation which takes the second through ninth definitions of translation from the *American Heritage Dictionary* as a sort of pre- or base structure for translating Dogen's Rivers and Mountains Sutra. She makes a text where the disparate realms of definitions, theology, physics, and aeronautics, prepare the way for a text with a spread-out, airy and gnomic everythingness of apparent contradictions—like the original.

These examples reveal how there are many analogs in current writing to the way (a) that Renaissance translation was allied to imitation through a felt need to go elsewhere in order to invent, compose, or move the state of the art along, and (b) that in the Middle Ages translation as interpretation included compilation and extension, even in verse, as in the *Ovide moralisé*. The global[ized/izing] impulse, or reality, contributes to a horizontalizing tendency in poetry where both of these sorts of characteristics are in evidence. Perhaps a reaching back for models within the global context and including the contemporary compiling impulse, has effected a new critical turn in composing with translation itself, as in Macleod's projects or Caroline Bergvall's orchestrations of forty-eight plus English translations of the first three verses of the *Inferno* (also in *Chain* 10).

For the use of translation in composition obviously blurs the distinction de Man suggests between the relations among languages and historicity—through poetry and translation. The essay de Man uses to propel his talk on Benjamin is Gadamer's "The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century." Gadamer's essay ends by pointing to Greek, Kantian and Hegelian influences which "foreground our consciousness" (127). In discussing Hegel in this regard, Gadamer notes, "the basics of any critique of subjective spirit... this concept of spirit that transcends the subjectivity of the ego has as its true counterpart the phenomenon of language, which is coming increasingly to the center of contemporary philosophy" (128). Today, questions of subjectivity and subjective spirit are often allied to the problematics of identity and identity politics. From this perspective, the turn toward horizontally writing with translation, for instance by reaching toward other languages, cultures and techniques in poetic composition, seems to reside in endeavoring to find new ways of stretching the subjective and linguistic means through which the world is experienced and consciousness is foregrounded and enticed through new kinds of writing. It may be too soon to tell, but it may also be that the metonymical or compiling cooptations of *Beowulf* or Dante in projects by such poets as Macleod and Bergvall are either not vertical or a new kind of verticality.