

THE RHETORIC OF TRANSLATION

Roland Barthes, in the preface to his *Essais critiques*, illustrates the problems of writing—and the nature of literature—with some notes on composing a letter of condolence:

Un ami vient de perdre quelqu'un qu'il aime et je veux lui dire ma compassion. Je me mets alors à lui écrire spontanément une lettre. Cependant les mots que je trouve ne me satisfont pas: ce sont des 'phrases': je fais des 'phrases' avec le plus aimant de moi-même; je me dis alors que le message que je veux faire parvenir à cet ami, et qui est ma compassion même, pourrait en somme se réduire à un simple mot: *Condoléances*. Cependant la fin même de la communication s'y oppose, car ce serait là un message froid, et par conséquent *inverse*, puisque ce que je veux lui communiquer, c'est la chaleur même de ma compassion. J'en conclus que pour redresser mon message (c'est-à-dire en somme pour qu'il soit exact), il faut non seulement que je le varie, mais encore que cette variation soit originale et comme inventée.¹

In rather un-modern terms, we see here a message (my compassion, the thing itself) and a choice of codes to communicate it—in a word, a rhetorical situation. And two pages further on, Barthes places the literary need for original variation explicitly under the sign of the suspect discipline of rhetoric, which he calls 'la dimension *amoureuse* de l'écriture' (p. 14). He was later to publish an 'aide-mémoire' on classical rhetoric, towards which he remained ambivalent—rejecting its falseness and conventionality, while recognizing its value as a necessary and often appealing form of mediation.² As Gérard Genette suggested, in a perceptive early essay, we can understand Barthes's fascination with the codes of writing and signification as an oblique way of dealing with his nostalgia for an unattainable Nature in which expression is direct, uncoded—a Romantic nostalgia which finds an echo in many modern writers and theorists.³

Compared with rhetoric, translation seems to have interested Barthes surprisingly little. But the translator's situation clearly echoes that of the author of a letter of condolence, a parliamentary speech, or indeed a fictional narrative. In this rhetorical view of things, a body of themes, forms, and ideas—in the case of the translator, a pre-existing text—lies before the writer, whose task is to find a new form which can do justice to the material, transporting (translating) it so as to bring it home to a more or less clearly defined public, deploying what Barthes would have called the 'codes' that govern discourse in a given society. Translating, like many other genres of speech or writing, is a *mediation*, and in this essay I want to explore the parallels between those two mediators, the orator and the translator, and in particular to reflect on the rhetorical situation of the literary translator.

In early modern Europe—and nearer our own times—rhetorical training in the schools gave a good deal of classroom time to verbal exercises. The *progymnasmata* of the ancients, adapted and extended in such works as Erasmus's *De*

¹ Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), pp. 11–12.

² See Peter France, 'Roland Barthes: A Rhetoric of Modernity', *Proceedings of the Canadian Society for the History of Rhetoric*, 2 (1989), 67–84.

³ Gérard Genette, 'L'envers des signes', in his *Figures I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 185–204.

duplici copia or the textbooks of the Jesuits,⁴ aimed at giving young students a mastery of the resources of language, whether their native language or the foreign language which was at the heart of education, Latin. In their awareness that there can be many different ways of saying the same thing (even if each formal choice inflects the subject differently), these rhetoricians prefigured many of the practices of more recent modern-language teachers; they might ask their pupils to find a dozen different variations, increasingly copious and figurative, on a simple theme, to construct a full-blown narrative on the bare bones of an Aesop fable, or conversely, to strip down a Bossuet funeral oration to the skeleton on which it is built, thus revealing all the rhetorical devices of ‘amplification’.

It is not difficult to see how exercises of this sort shade over into what we call ‘original composition’. Long before writing his *Fables*, the young La Fontaine had probably to ‘amplify’ the fable of the wolf and the lamb, a classic early exercise—even if there is a world of difference between ‘Le Loup et l’Agneau’ (*Fables*, 1. 5) and the Latin version we find in the *Novus candidatus rhetoricae* of Father Pomey.⁵ Two centuries later, Gustave Flaubert’s first attempts at fiction, narrations such as ‘L’anneau du chartreux’, are essentially *lycée* exercises.⁶ More interestingly, perhaps, in the twentieth century we see the creative potential of the kind of verbal inventiveness that traditional rhetoric had developed in its young devotees. I am thinking of OULIPO, the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, created in Paris in the 1960s by such writers as Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec, and Italo Calvino, which demonstrated the fertility of what might at first sight seem no more than five-finger exercises. The most notorious of these is no doubt the lipogram, a time-honoured game in which the writer (or speaker) denies him- or herself the use of one or more letters of the alphabet—an entertaining party game, but also the basis of Perec’s novel *La Disparition*. Like complex rhyme schemes or stanzaic forms, such voluntary constraints are an engine of creativity.

Among the exercises of the rhetoric classes, translation had an important place, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And in more modern times it was for many decades, and in some quarters still is, regarded as one of the essential ways of acquiring the mastery of a foreign language, particularly in its most literary register. In the exercise revealingly known as ‘prose composition’, generations of students toiled to translate into accurate and elegant French difficult—some might say untranslatable—passages by Virginia Woolf or John Ruskin. And schoolroom translation, like rhetoric, might well lead to published writing, whether translated or original: many of Wordsworth’s earliest poems are translations from Latin and Greek,⁷ and Byron’s first collection, *Hours of Idleness* (1807), was subtitled ‘Poems, Original and Translated’.

Like other rhetorical skills, translation does not come naturally, even though

⁴ The most celebrated French example is the *Candidatus rhetoricae* (1711) of Fr Joseph Jouvancy, published only a few years before the French-language rhetoric by Charles Rollin of the University of Paris, *De la manière d’enseigner et d’étudier les belles-lettres* (1726).

⁵ See Peter France, *Rhetoric and Truth in France: Descartes to Diderot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 3–4.

⁶ See Jean Bruneau, *Les Débuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1962).

⁷ See Richard W. Clancey, *Wordsworth’s Classical Undersong: Education, Rhetoric and Poetic Truth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

some individuals appear to have a greater natural gift for such things. There are times, to be sure, when translators feel that the new text they are creating flows spontaneously through them. But characteristically, they have to submit to a variety of constraints and perform all kinds of ‘unnatural’ operations in order to do justice to their source text and bring it across effectively to the audience they are wooing. Most translators could offer examples of this from their own experience; let me here just cite one case from a fairly recent publication. In his highly personal, often infuriating, but illuminating book *Le Ton beau de Marot* (1997), subtitled ‘In Praise of the Music of Language’, Douglas R. Hofstadter responds to the challenge of a short lyric in rhyming lines of three syllables by Clément Marot, ‘Mignonne | Je vous donne | Le bonjour’. How can it be translated? He identifies a number of formal features (to do with rhyme, sentence structure, register, and so on) that seem to him essential, and goes on to offer eighty-eight English versions of the poem, by himself and others; these differ widely, but they all respect the same formal pattern even while they create new versions of Marot’s poem. Disdaining the widely held view that a translator might well choose to ignore some or all of these constraints in order to re-create the poem more effectively in a new environment, Hofstadter demonstrates, along with many other things, that the translator can go beyond what comes naturally in order to create something original which in its very newness (as Barthes might have said) does justice to the original impulse.

If rhetoric and translation share some approaches to writing, they have also been subject to criticism or abuse on similar grounds. The denunciation of rhetoric has been a constant theme in European thought and literature, the devices and stratagems of rhetoric being routinely opposed to the search for truth or to the expression of genuine feeling. The Romantic movement in particular downgraded the role of verbal art in the interests of spontaneity and sincerity, however much many Romantic poets owed to the rhetorical tradition; Keats’s dictum that ‘if poetry comes not as naturally as leaves to a tree it had better not come at all’ has been echoed and re-echoed over the past two hundred years. And in a more practical or scientific domain, few scientists, social scientists, historians, or politicians care to admit the need for the mediations of rhetoric. Descartes can speak for those who think that language should represent reality in as direct a way as possible; in the opening section of the *Discours de la méthode*, reviewing the subjects taught in his Jesuit college, he declares:

Ceux qui ont le raisonnement le plus fort, et qui digèrent le mieux leurs pensées, afin de les rendre claires et intelligibles, peuvent toujours le mieux persuader ce qu’ils proposent, encore qu’ils ne parlissent que bas Breton, et qu’ils n’eussent jamais appris de rhétorique.⁸

The objection to schoolroom rhetoric here is above all that it is superfluous, a waste of energy and ingenuity on a task for which nature has equipped us well enough (though it may be noted that the description of those who can do without rhetoric already implies a strong rhetorical consciousness). In addition, though Descartes does not say this openly, the devotee of rhetoric is open to

⁸ Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. by F. Alquié, 3 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1963–73), I, 574.

the charge of vanity—the speaker who speaks less to convince than to gain applause. A specific French example of this criticism is La Bruyère's satirical picture of fashionable preachers, sacrificing their real duty (the salvation of souls) to authorial vanity:

L'on fait assaut d'éloquence jusqu'au pied de l'autel et en présence des mystères. Celui qui écoute s'établit juge de celui qui prêche, pour condamner ou pour applaudir, et n'est pas plus converti par le discours qu'il favorise que par celui auquel il est contraire.⁹

In order to counter this fatal tendency of rhetoric, many theoreticians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were careful to distinguish between 'true rhetoric', a natural-seeming form of communication in which art was unobtrusive, and the 'false rhetoric' of verbal display.¹⁰

Alongside the accusations of uselessness and vanity, but most damaging of all, is the constantly recurring charge that rhetoric teaches the art of twisting the truth, being concerned above all with persuasion. This argument is given a classic statement in Plato's *Gorgias*, and in spite of Quintilian's insistence that the orator is 'a good man, skilled in speaking', the notion of rhetoric as deception lived on to resurface in strength in the age of Enlightenment. John Locke's dismissive view of the discipline is typical:

All the arts of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions and thereby mislead the judgement; and so indeed are a perfect cheat.¹¹

So 'my Lady Rhetoric', the impressive female figure in many medieval and Renaissance allegories, is easily transformed into the harlot rhetoric.

Metaphors of femininity find their way equally into the way translation is characterized.¹² The notion of the 'belles infidèles', which emerged in France in the seventeenth century, suggested that translations were like women, either faithful and plain or beautiful and unfaithful. The translator is sometimes seen, like the orator, as driven by vanity, glorying in borrowed plumage or using the original for a pointless display of his or her own virtuosity. But the recurrent criticism of translation is in many ways similar to the most serious objections to rhetoric. It is not so much that translation is superfluous—though for many it is at best an unfortunate necessity in the post-Babel world—but that

⁹ La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, ed. by R. Garapon (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 445.

¹⁰ A modern avatar of this distinction can be found in the work of the American historian of rhetoric W. S. Howell, who praises the 'new rhetoric' that he finds exemplified in certain French, British, and American thinkers of the eighteenth century. For a critique of this puritanical view see Brian Vickers, 'Rhetorical and Anti-Rhetorical Tropes: On Writing the History of *elocutio*', *Comparative Criticism*, 3 (1981), 105–32; see also his *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) for an account of attacks on rhetoric.

¹¹ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 508.

¹² On this subject see Sherry Simon, 'Gender in Translation', in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. by Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 26–33, esp. pp. 29–30. One recurrent notion, which might distinguish the translator from the male orator is that translation is essentially subordinate and ancillary compared with the potent original. John Florio, even though addressing himself to female dedicatees and patrons, writes in the preface to his great translation of Montaigne's *Essays* of 'this defective edition (since all translations are reputed females, delivered at second hand)'.

it falsifies, adulterating the original to flatter the taste of the receiving culture. *Traduttore — traditore*, as people never tire of saying.

Often the criticism concerns simple misunderstanding of the original, as in the recent spate of criticism of Helen Lowe Porter's translations of Thomas Mann.¹³ Or else there may be the deliberate falsification for ideological or other purposes. More damaging, though, is the awareness that all translation is interpretation, so that all translators inevitably inflect their originals in ways unintended, perhaps unimagined, by the original authors. It is not certain that this argument is much affected by the Derridian notion that in this sense all communicative language is a form of translation in which it is an illusion to speak of an 'original'. More powerful still is the contention that since each language constructs the world in a different way, any translation is bound to force the text into the disfiguring disguise of an alien idiom. But of course if this view is taken to its logical outcome, and if translation has to be understood as the provision of an exact equivalent of the source text, it becomes strictly impossible. And yet it is indispensable.

We have, then, two sorts of mediation, both of them necessary in the world as it is, both of them suspect, and both of them driven to invent strategies for deflecting criticism. Probably the most characteristic defence in both cases is the tactic of self-effacement. The orator may proclaim himself to be no more than a channel through which the truth passes; this was one of the metaphors used by Bossuet to describe the ideal eloquence of the pulpit (which was a focus for disquiet about the powers of oratory, as we saw in the reflections of La Bruyère). Against the rhetoric of display the most virtuous, but also the most persuasive, form of eloquence is that which goes unnoticed. As Pascal famously put it, 'la véritable éloquence se moque de l'éloquence'.

So too in translation—with which the rest of this essay will be principally concerned. For many reviewers and readers, the ideal translation 'does not read like a translation', the translator being the unobtrusive servant of the original. Never mind whether the text we are reading resembles the work of a Dostoevsky or a Flaubert as it exists in Russian or French; the reader cherishes the illusion of unmediated closeness to an original, just as the audience are happy in the impression that they are privy to the true thoughts and feelings of a speaker. It is not surprising that such an approach to translation is almost omnipresent in child readers, who are not likely to know or care that Hans Andersen, Jules Verne, or Tove Jansson did not write in English in the first place. But it is not only children who react in this way; the dominant rhetoric of translation in Britain, France, and many other cultures has been to give the illusion of listening to the voice of the author as he or she would have spoken had they been born in our time and place.

This attitude has a long history and in one of its earliest formulations it is explicitly connected with rhetoric. In the argument between 'word-for-word' and 'sense-for-sense' translation, Cicero, speaking of his translations of the Athenian orators Aeschines and Demosthenes, writes: 'I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or

¹³ See, for instance, Timothy Buck, 'Loyalty and Licence: Thomas Mann's Fiction in English Translation', *MLR*, 91 (1996), 898–921.

as one might say the “figures of thought”, but in language which conforms to our usage.”¹⁴ So the *interpretes* follows the original slavishly, the *orator* has freedom. Such a position became common, even for sacred texts, which might seem to demand greater literalism; it can be found, for instance, in Jerome’s letter to Pammachius, where the translation of Scripture is related to the work of Terence and Plautus. Lawrence Venuti has argued that the noble fluency implied by this rejection of the ‘word-for-word’ became hegemonic in Augustan Britain, when John Denham could declare: ‘If Virgil must needs speak English, it were fit he should speak not only as a man of this Nation, but as a man of this age.’¹⁵ And even if there was no unanimity on the right way to translate even at this period, it is undoubtedly true that the principal rhetorical aim of eighteenth-century translators, in France as well as in Britain, was to assimilate their texts to the receiving culture.

In most branches of translation such a position has remained dominant, but the nineteenth century saw the beginnings of a counter-movement, a refusal of this form of oratorical translation, or rather the choice of a different rhetoric of translation. Not surprisingly, this is less in evidence in the translation of prose works for large audiences than in more ambitious kinds of translation, such as that of poetry or sacred texts. It was in relation to the Bible that Friedrich Schleiermacher developed his now famous theories about the best method of translating.¹⁶ In a move characteristic of translation theorists, he placed the translator before a quite unnecessarily dramatic choice: either to leave the reader undisturbed and ‘take the author to the reader’—this is the assimilative method characteristic of French culture, and Schleiermacher dismisses it as barely worthy of the name of translation—or else (and this of course is the ‘true’ method) to ‘take the reader to the author’, in other words to flout the norms of the target language in order to bring home to the reader the foreignness of the text in question.

There are some famous nineteenth-century examples of this ‘foreignizing’ rhetoric of translation: Hölderlin’s literalist versions of Sophocles, Chateaubriand’s translation into singularly un-French prose of a text that is at once biblical and poetic, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, or the lexicographer Émile Littré’s refashioning of a section of Dante’s *Commedia* in Old French (archaism is a common form of alienation). And following Schleiermacher many theorists have argued for different forms of foreignization (to use Venuti’s term), often from radically different standpoints. For Walter Benjamin, in the influential yet puzzling essay on ‘The Task of the Translator’, a bad translation is one in which the communication of meaning is paramount, whereas for Vladimir

¹⁴ Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum*, 14. 3 (‘nec conuerti ut interpretes, sed ut orator, sententiis isdem et earum formis tamquam figuris, uerbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis’), cited in *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, ed. by Douglas Robinson (Manchester: St Jerome, 1997), p. 9.

¹⁵ Sir John Denham, Preface to *The Destruction of Troy* (1656), cited in *English Translation Theory 1650–1800*, ed. by T. R. Steiner (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), p. 65.

¹⁶ This essay, ‘Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens’ [On the different methods of translating], may be read in English in *Translation/History/Culture*, ed. by André Lefevere (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 141–66, esp. p. 149. For a useful critique of the false dilemma posed by Schleiermacher see Anthony Pym, ‘Schleiermacher and the Problem of Blending’, *Translation and Literature*, 4 (1995), 5–30.

Nabokov, defending his literalist version of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, all the normal beauties which readers hope to find in a translation must be sacrificed to the precise rendering of contextual meaning. What all these theories have in common, however, is the refusal of the rhetoric which seeks to make things easy for the reader. This is reminiscent of the arguments put forward by some theorists of preaching in late seventeenth-century France, for whom normal pulpit rhetoric was a shameful concession to the taste of the audience and should be replaced by a deliberately shocking anti-rhetoric.¹⁷ Solecism might be construed as a sign of holiness—so too in the debates about translation, the strangeness of different kinds of literalism is read as a sign of integrity, a guarantee that one is getting closer to the thing itself.

It should be noted that 'foreignization' is not necessarily tied to the notion of faithfulness—this is not quite a rerun of the old beauty/fidelity debate. Rhetoric may have a political objective. Venuti, after describing in rather negative terms the establishment of the fluency tradition in the English-speaking world, writes that 'foreignizing translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism'.¹⁸ And even if one may doubt the political effectiveness of an anti-fluency rhetoric, in the narrower field of cultural practice foreignization can effectively advance an interventionist agenda: 'Translation became a key practice in modernist poetics, motivating appropriations of various archaic and foreign poetics to serve modernist cultural agendas in English.'¹⁹ Here, far from being an unobtrusive servant, translation draws attention to itself, the 'madness' of the translated text. In rhetorical terms, this is akin to the 'false rhetoric' that most theorists repudiated; instead of offering an apparently unmediated communication with the original, it draws attention to itself, whether to underline the gap between the 'origin' and the 'trace' (not for nothing was Jacques Derrida interested in translation), or to glory in its own creativity.

The translator, therefore, is in a rhetorical situation. Translation, particularly literary translation, is not a scientific procedure but a personal initiative, akin to that of the orator situated between a subject and a public. With Roland Barthes, the rhetorically aware speaker or writer knows that, contrary to a certain Romantic orthodoxy, there is no one right way of expressing a given set of ideas or feelings. A choice of tactics, a choice of language, is inevitable, and the awareness of this can be paralysing or exhilarating. So it is with the translator, faced with choices at every turn, negotiating between author and readers, between source culture and target culture (or cultures, since translations are not confined to a particular cultural moment). And readers of translations too, once they have gone beyond the belief in the one definitive translation, may come to read symptomatically and sympathetically, understanding and welcoming the various rhetorical strategies that underlie the different translations of the same text. In the space that remains, I should like to illustrate this with some English-language translations of Rousseau and Dostoevsky.

¹⁷ See France, *Rhetoric and Truth*, p. 28.

¹⁸ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau knew the agonies of rhetoric as well as anyone. He was not a natural speaker, and his writing, far from being spontaneous, was the outcome of a lengthy process of elaboration. At the same time, he was anxious to avoid all suspicion of artificial rhetoric, and generally to good effect, since his apparently sincere eloquence has won the hearts and minds of readers in his own time and ever since. One of his favourite rhetorical moves is to start a discussion with a brief and memorable sentence, often exaggerating his thought for greater effect. So the *Contrat social* opens with the sentence ‘L’homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers’, often rather misleadingly translated as ‘Man is [rather than was] born free, and everywhere he is in chains’. The equivalent declaration at the beginning of *Émile*, his novel-cum-treatise on education, is: ‘Tout est bien sortant des mains de l’Auteur des choses, tout dégénère entre les mains de l’homme.’ How is the translator to find a rhetoric adequate to this?

Already we find different approaches in the two eighteenth-century translators of *Émile*, William Kenrick and Thomas Nugent, Kenrick (Rousseau’s regular translator) feeling free to cut and adapt in the name of readability, Nugent following the original more scrupulously, at the cost of a certain ponderousness.²⁰ Nearer our own time there is a striking contrast between two twentieth-century translators, Barbara Foxley and Allan Bloom. Foxley, writing for the broad British readership of Everyman’s Library, where her text was first published in 1911, clearly wanted to make the text work as a fluent modern text, imagining how Rousseau might have expressed it in clear and simple English: ‘God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil.’²¹ There is a degree of interpretation here. The good/evil dichotomy is more moral than Rousseau’s text quite warrants, and the characteristically eighteenth-century circumlocution ‘l’Auteur des choses’ has been simplified to the clear-cut modern ‘God’, who is the subject of the first clause, as ‘man’ is the subject of the second. The God/man contrast now structures the sentence, whereas in Rousseau the subject in both cases is ‘tout’—which through repetition suggests a note of hyperbole lacking in the translation. This is one element in Foxley’s reworking of the syntax, the other (and more important) being that Rousseau’s two-part sentence becomes a three-part *story*: God makes, men meddle, things become evil.

The approach of Bloom, writing in 1979, could not be more different. Where Foxley adapts Rousseau’s formulation to what is presumably the taste of her likely audience for clear, elegant sentences, he remains fiercely literal, defining his translatorial stance by saying that the translator ‘is a messenger, not a plenipotentiary, and proves his fidelity to his great masters by reproducing what seems in them to the contemporary eye wrong, outrageous, or incomprehensible, for therein lies what is most important to us. He resists the temptation to make the book attractive or relevant.’²² So for the opening he follows the original

²⁰ See *Emilius and Sophia: or, A New System of Education*, trans. by [W. Kenrick], 4 vols (London: Becket and De Hondt, 1762–63); *Emilius: or, An Essay on Education*, trans. by Thomas Nugent, 2 vols (London: Nourse and Vaillant, 1763).

²¹ Rousseau, *Émile; or, Education*, trans. by Barbara Foxley, introd. by P. D. Jimack, Everyman’s Library (London: David Campbell, 1993), p. 5.

²² Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. by Allan Bloom (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. vii.

text as closely as possible, both lexically and syntactically, retaining both the circumlocution (with its capital A) and the antithesis: 'Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of the things: everything degenerates in the hands of man.' The result, in my view, lacks force and clarity; from one point of view, it is thus a less adequate rendering than Foxley's of Rousseau's initial rhetorical flourish. But Bloom's rhetoric no doubt corresponds to another situation: his translation, published in the American series Basic Books (and subsequently in Penguin Classics), was also aimed at a large public, but by 1979 this was largely composed of students, some of whom (or their teachers) might wish to compare the translation with the original; for such an audience literalism would function as a sign of the conceptual accuracy which is the first requirement of the student reader. As Bloom puts it, 'this translation is meant to give the reader a certain confidence that he is thinking about Rousseau and not about me' (p. viii).

The comparison of Foxley and Bloom might suggest a more general move in the twentieth century from fluency to fidelity. But of course it is not simply a question of change over time; as we have seen, the likely audience is also a crucial determining factor. This is evident in the versions of another Rousseau opening, that of the *Confessions*, where the most domesticating translation came in the middle of the twentieth century. Rousseau's text begins:

Je forme une entreprise qui n'eut jamais d'exemple, et dont l'exécution n'aura point d'imitateur. Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature; et cet homme, ce sera moi.

Moi seul. Je sens mon cœur et je connais les hommes.

The rhetoric here and throughout the preamble is a high-risk one. His hyperbolic self-presentation has won both friends and enemies, and once again it presents the translator with a problem: how closely to imitate his possibly embarrassing way of writing, how far to adjust it to the sweet reason of the average reader. As with *Émile*, we find different strategies in the various modern translations.²³

Some two decades before Foxley's *Émile*, an anonymous translator produced a new version of the *Confessions*, which was at first privately printed (being unexpurgated) before being adopted by Everyman's Library (where it can still be found). It is relatively literal, though by no means so literal as Bloom's *Émile*. In comparison, J. M. Cohen's translation, done in 1953 for the recently inaugurated Penguin Classics, goes some considerable way along the road of domestication, as was generally the case in the early volumes of this collection, which aimed to make the classics accessible to a wide public. Both translators, however, balk at reproducing certain aspects of Rousseau's brutal exordium. In the second sentence, for example, the anonymous translator, while staying close to the original, cannot bring him or herself to follow Rousseau in showing the reader 'a man' and prefers: 'I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature.'²⁴ Cohen goes one step further, riding roughshod

²³ There were also two different eighteenth-century translations, which continued to be reprinted from time to time in the twentieth century; for a fuller account see my article 'Rousseau's *Confessions* in English', *Franco-British Studies*, 2 (1986), 27–39.

²⁴ Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. anon., ed. by P. N. Furbank, Everyman's Library (London: David Campbell, 1992), p. 1.

over the specific meaning of the original: 'My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature.'²⁵ And it is the same with what follows: the shocking repetition of 'Moi' and the ultra-simple 'Je sens mon cœur et je connais les hommes' are toned down by both translators, who offer us a Rousseau somewhat more modest than the original.

Two translations of the *Confessions* published more recently both work harder to stay close to the French text. One of these, translated by Christopher Kelly and published in 1995, figures in the new collection of Rousseau's works in English edited by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly.²⁶ Here the Utopian desire to produce a 'standard reference for scholarship' with 'texts that have not been deformed by the interpretive bias of the translators and editors' leads to a strongly literalist approach, even at the cost of 'some awkwardnesses'. More recently, in a translation made for a series that is both popular and academic, Oxford World's Classics, Angela Scholar produced a text that manages to be both close and readable:

I am resolved on an undertaking that has no model and will have no imitator. I want to show my fellow-men a man in all the truth of nature; and this man is to be myself.

Myself alone. I feel my heart and I know men.²⁷

The shock value of Rousseau's brutal simplicity is retained, yet the translation remains, as the translator puts it in a prefatory note, 'accessible enough for the [reader] to read his heart and soul with sympathy' (p. xxxiii).

For the translator working for a general public, the besetting rhetorical temptation is no doubt a certain timidity, an unwillingness to offer the original 'in all the truth of nature'. Against the continuing desire to offer a faithful account of the foreign text must be set the requirement of *acceptability*, a requirement not just external to the translator but in most cases fully interiorized. Nor is this to be regretted; once again, all will depend on the rhetorical situation. In particular, the situation of the first translator of a new and potentially unsettling text is radically different from that of subsequent translators of the same text once it has been adopted as a classic. The Englishing of Dostoevsky is a case in point.

Written for the most part one or two decades earlier, Dostoevsky's novels still seemed shockingly new and exotic when they began to be translated into English in the 1880s. Even to their great promoter in the West, Melchior de Vogüé, they seemed in many cases badly written and incompetently constructed.²⁸ Some forty years later, Virginia Woolf, a great admirer who knew Dostoevsky principally through Constance Garnett's translations of 1912–20, admitted that the Russian 'soul' he portrayed was 'confused, diffuse, tumultuous, incapable, it seems, of submitting to the control of logic or the discipline of poetry'.²⁹ It

²⁵ *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. by J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), p. 17.

²⁶ *The Collected Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, 10 vols to date (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1990–).

²⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. by Angela Scholar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 5.

²⁸ Melchior de Vogüé, *Le Roman russe* (1886), 4th edn (Paris: Plon, 1897), pp. 203–79.

²⁹ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 1st ser., ed. by Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1984), p. 178.

was only in the second half of the twentieth century, partly under the influence of Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, that Dostoevsky's apparent faults, what Nabokov had called his 'intonation of obsession' and 'vulgar soapbox eloquence', came to be valued as crucial elements in his 'dialogic' representation of social reality, not only in the speech of the characters but equally in the voices of his narrators.

It is not surprising, therefore, that earlier translators into French and English felt the urge to eliminate some of the asperities in Dostoevsky's writing, bringing him closer to the norms of the target culture, while later translators proclaimed the need to get closer to the unvarnished original. In English Frederick Whishaw's somewhat slapdash but readable translations, done in the 1880s for the firm of Vizetelly, were largely replaced in the second decade of the twentieth century by the classic renderings of Constance Garnett, which held the field for some forty years. Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, new translations by David Magarshack, Jessie Coulson, and others began to be published by Penguin, and versions by Andrew MacAndrew by Bantam Books in the USA. All of these, in their different ways, attempt to acclimatize Dostoevsky to English-language culture, sometimes going to the length of translating the names of St Petersburg streets or replacing the Russian first-name-plus-patronymic form of address by 'Mr'.

In the 1980s and 1990s a new wind began to blow. Constance Garnett's translations were criticized not just for inaccuracy, but for the way in which they normalized Dostoevsky's idiosyncratic Russian, missing much that was specific and bringing both the narrative and the dialogue closer to the more elegant style of Turgenev (Garnett's first love).³⁰ The two principal new translators of this period, David McDuff (whose translations replaced those of Magarshack in Penguin) and the Russian-American team of Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonskaia, both proclaimed the necessity of translating in a way that might shock the reader through exposure to the roughness of the original. The publicity material for the Penguin quotes McDuff as saying:

My aim has been to convey the vitality and physical strength of Dostoevsky's prose, and to stay in touch with his attitude to language. This has involved retaining his original choice of expression instead of trying to replace it with words and phrases that sound more conventional and more acceptable.

A similar rhetoric of authenticity can be found in the pronouncements of André Markowicz, whose deliberately shocking translations of Dostoevsky stirred up a storm among French readers in the same period. In a provocatively entitled interview about his version of *The Idiot*, Markowicz remarked that an earlier French translation, though readable, had ignored the difficulties of the original; he, on the contrary, wanted to preserve Dostoevsky's 'stylistic incoherence' and the oddity of his dialogue: 'Il n'y a aucun Russe qui parle comme ça. Il faut garder l'ordre des arguments, respecter les ellipses, ne pas mettre de

³⁰ See, for instance, A. N. Nikoliukin, 'Dostoevskii in Constance Garnett's Translation', in *Dostoevskii and Britain*, ed. by W. J. Leatherbarrow (Oxford: Berg, 1955), pp. 207–27 (article first published in Russian in *Russkaia literature*, 2 (1985)).

conjonction où il n'y en a pas, ne jamais expliquer. Quand il y a l'obscurité, laisser l'obscurité.³¹

Many French readers, including those who knew Russian literature very well, found Markowicz's striking translations quite unacceptably vulgar. Like the deliberate clumsiness of the orator seeking to demonstrate his sincerity and unwillingness to flatter, the rhetoric of inelegant translation is a risky one. But it has its place, above all perhaps when the text being translated is a classic, already well assimilated into the target culture and in need of reinvigoration by a return to the lost strangeness of the original. In their day, Constance Garnett's domesticating translations seemed exotic enough; even if she made the narrator and the characters talk in voices familiar to the educated public, the impact of Dostoevsky's artistic vision was powerfully unsettling. By the end of the twentieth century, however, a new, more literalist, approach seemed justified. Let us compare the very different rhetoric of translations in a passage of *The Brothers Karamazov* as translated by Garnett and by McDuff.³²

The passage in question comes close to the end of the novel, where the upper-class Katya and the prostitute Grushenka come face to face after Dmitry's trial. The Russian runs as follows:

V komnatu vnezapno, khotia i sovsem tikho, voshla Grushen'ka. Nikto ee ne ozhidal. Katia stremitel'no shagnula k dveriam, no poravnyavshis' s Grushen'koi, vdrug ostanovilas', vsia pobelela kak mel i tikho, pochti shepotom, prostonala ei:

— Prostite menia!

Ta posmotrela na nee v upor i, perezhдав мгновение, iadovitym, otravlenным злобой golosom otvetila:

— Zly my, mat', s toboi! Obe zly! Gde uzь nam prostit', tebe da mne? Vot spasi ego, i vsiu zhizn' molit'sia na tebia budu.

Garnett's translation (p. 811) is:

Grushenka walked suddenly and noiselessly into the room. No one had expected her. Katya moved swiftly to the door, but when she reached Grushenka she stopped suddenly, turned as white as chalk and moaned softly, almost in a whisper:

'Forgive me!'

Grushenka stared at her and, pausing for an instant, in a vindictive, venomous voice, answered:

'We are full of hatred, my girl, you and I! We are both full of hatred! As though we could forgive one another! Save him, and I'll worship you all my life!'

And McDuff's (p. 974):

Into the room, suddenly, though very quietly, Grushenka had come. No one had expected her. Katya took an impetuous step towards the door, but, on drawing even with Grushenka suddenly stopped, turned white as chalk all over and quietly, almost in a whisper, moaned to her:

'Forgive me!'

³¹ André Markowicz, 'Le traducteur est toujours un imposteur', interview with Nicole Zand in *Le Monde*, 12 November 1993.

³² Respectively *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by Constance Garnett (1912) (London: Heinemann, 1951), and *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by David McDuff (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993). It is worth noting that this translation of the title is itself foreignizing in relation to the more normal *The Karamazov Brothers*.

The other stared at her and then, after a moment's wait, in a venomous, malice-poisoned voice replied:

'It's wicked we are, mother, you and I! Wicked, both of us! How can it be for us to forgive, you and I? Now if you rescue him, all the rest of my life I will pray for you.'

Both translations are reasonably accurate to the sense of the original; one could argue about the appropriateness of 'full of hatred' and 'wicked' to translate the capacious Russian adjective *zloi* (spiteful, malevolent, etc.), and about the translation of the expression *molit'sia na tebia* (where Garnett's 'worship you' is more accurate than McDuff's 'pray for you'). What strikes one, however, is the different approach to register and above all syntax, with McDuff adhering closely to Dostoevsky's usage even where this does some violence to normal English, while Garnett produces a text which is strong but more classical in effect. In the first sentence, for instance, Garnett disregards Dostoevsky's inversion and commas to give us a simple description of an action, whereas McDuff adheres strictly to Dostoevsky's order (except for the final 'Grushenka had come' rather than 'had come Grushenka'), breaking up the sentence in a jarring way and even adding an extra comma. Later McDuff produces the odd but exact 'turned white as chalk all over' for *vsia pobelela kak mel*, while Garnett again simplifies to the more acceptable 'turned as white as chalk' (stopping short, however, of the clichéd comparison 'white as a sheet'). McDuff's 'malice-poisoned' is a literal calque of *otravlennym zloboi*. But it is in the dialogue that the later translator's foreignizing rhetoric is most apparent; one cannot read his colloquial 'mother' (directed to someone younger than the speaker) without being made forcibly aware that this is happening in another world, and the rest of Grushenka's short speech with its repetitions and broken rhythms is far stranger—and in its strange way, more memorable—than the cooler, better-formed sentences of the Garnett translation.

I do not wish to adjudicate between these two versions, or indeed the many others that are currently available. The different rhetorics of the two translators correspond to different situations. Garnett, producing the first English translation of the novel (and her first Dostoevsky translation), faced the formidable task of introducing this extremely alien voice into the concert of English literature. She treads a fine line between excessive discordance and excessive fluency, and for all one may say against the resulting text, it achieved its aim triumphantly, making Dostoevsky present in twentieth-century English-language culture as no other Russian writer was. The existence of this translation (and of similar translations in other languages) gave him a key position in modern world literature—and thus opened up the way for further translations which would seek to go one better, either by adjusting Dostoevsky more fully to contemporary Western culture or else—as we have seen—by seeking to get back to the 'real Dostoevsky'.

The debate about literalism and adaptation, foreignization and domestication, has accompanied translation for centuries in one version or another and is not going to be resolved in a hurry. Different periods and different cultures have different priorities. What matters is not to prolong the pointless debate about the 'correct' method of translating, but to become aware of the way in which the

translator, like the orator, negotiates between a subject and an audience, seeking out a rhetoric adequate to the situation, just as Barthes's correspondent sought for a convincing and appropriate way of expressing feeling. Communication is inescapably rhetorical; this is as true of translation as it is of public speaking or letter-writing.

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