

Introduction

Literary translation's long history, the clarity of its ostensible function – to bring texts in foreign languages to those without knowledge of those languages – make the question 'Why translate?' seem virtually unnecessary. But such a question *is* necessary, and its answer depends less on what translation is, than on what it does. How does translation act, in and on the world? Translation is not a linguistic service. It is a project of relationship, a way of creating textual futures, whose instruments are the fundamentally human activities of reading and writing, listening and speaking. How can translation change consciousness, what kinds of expressive experience does it promote, how does it change our perception of language, what kinds of existential value does it trade in, what view of the literary does it ask us to envisage, how does it position us ecologically and environmentally? These questions, it seems to me, relate to a philosophy of translation. Of course, they have consequences for practice. But it is likely that the translator who has pondered them will feel thereafter that he/she is serving the enterprise of translation rather than any particular text, that any particular text is only an agent of translational designs. One is not a translator by professional qualification, nor even by virtue of skills – however much these may affect the quality of the product; one is a translator by conviction, by the conviction that translation is an inescapable practice, a meliorative practice, a practice which immerses one more fully in the sensible world and its community. The book's title calls up *the* philosophy of translation, rather than *a* philosophy, not in the sense of 'the one and only', but of a problematic issue, a challenge to our thinking.

To try to establish a philosophy of literary translation is to provide an alternative to, even implicitly or explicitly to discredit, a 'science' of literary translation. What distinguishes a philosophy of literary translation from a theory we shall shortly come to. For the moment, I wish to set myself against those notions of objectivity and objectivization by which scientific enquiry continues to be animated, and to set the task of a philosophy in

the midst, not of conceptual thought, but of the experiential and the existential. We know what our principal quarrels with empirical enquiry are: with an isolational approach in the interests of clinical validity; with the transformation of events/persons/objects into data; with an absorption of the qualitative into the statistical. In many senses, the shortcomings of empiricism derive from the identification of discrete causal and motor mechanisms to be found in neurological, physiological or cognitive accounts of perception. But if one takes a participatory stance, if all elements are interactively related in a *Lebenswelt*, then consciousness can never be divided from its own relational and variational complexity. Furthermore, for the phenomenologist, perceptual situatedness is the source of a multiplication, not only of elements active in the situation (visible and invisible), but also of the percept's variational possibilities. This process is intimately connected with the very process of translation.

These may sound like grand words for a common enough experience, but I say them because translation too often finds itself obliged to work against its best instincts, separating meaning (the translatable) from verbal substance (the untranslatable), isolating the literary as a set of effects (tropes, acoustic patterning) in such a way that they can occupy new locations in the target text (TT) or can be compensated for, in balance-sheet transactions. This is to oust from the literary enterprise its psycho-physiological integrity, its connections with the pre-dualistic, the pre-prioritising, the pre-predicative. Translation also, and again against its will perhaps, seems to entail an objectivization of the text, partly because this seems to be the only way to preserve a linguistic fidelity, partly because the skill of translation is seen to reside in the tactfulness of decisions, the outwitting of difficulty, the solution of linguistic problems, rather than in the communication of the implicatedness of readerly consciousness in the constitution of a text's sense: the text exists but I, as a reader, bring it into being; the text is already there, but it cannot change its position in the world without the reader's intervention; my living-in-the-text as reader involves me in the genesis of its sense. There is always the danger that the translator feels that he/she comes too late to the text; that it has already acquired its authority, which must then be respected, that it has accumulated to itself already so rich an inheritance that the translator is powerless to affect its future. But the art of translating is the art of translating a tyrannical in-itself to a fluid, undecided for-itself. Translation is the production of a dehiscence of text.

Introduction

3

But I would further emphasize that my subject is not a theory of translation but a philosophy of translation, and what I understand by such a distinction is this: my purpose in addressing translation is not to formulate a view about the origins or functions or methods or goals *peculiar* to translation, about a *sui generis* of translation, a view that then might be tested against other views and found either wanting or enlightening, but rather a desire to set translation *within* life practices, to explore it as experiential value, as a practice of consciousness, to suggest its significances as a language activity. Theory I understand as a circumscribed and organized set of ideas, tending towards the systematic and applied to a particular issue; it has the objective both of explaining that issue and acting as a future model of conduct and/or methodology in relation to it. Philosophy, on the other hand, is an open field of thought, looking to identify the general principles governing a subject or branch of knowledge, the better to understand how that subject or branch of knowledge operates within the larger sphere of human activity. The field of thought does indeed look to realize itself in applications, but principally in order to explore, to experiment with, attitudes and behaviours, and to stimulate further reflection. It is for this reason that the book's subtitle is *Dialogue, Movement, Ecology*; even though the book has a progressive structure – two Parts and seven Chapters, plus a Coda – each chapter enjoys a certain independence, as a line of reflective inquiry, and invites the reader to further wanderings in its chosen field.

I cannot, in the chapters that follow, hope to do proper justice to the philosophical sources out of which I develop my lines of argument. It is virtually impossible for the commentator who uses a variety of philosophers to elaborate the 'philosophy' of a particular topic not to look like an asset-stripper, an opportunist of available ideas, whose choices are guided by ulterior motive and who has little to show at the last, other than a patchwork of quotations. But at least I can hope that, however economical my treatment of any philosopher and his/her thinking, however manifold my omissions, I have committed no misrepresentations, and have at least convinced the reader that translation can only see its complexity properly accounted for if it engages with a much broader panorama of thought and reference.

During the course of this book, I shall, despite my 'declaration' (Chapter 4), many times ask what translation is, and will give many answers. In his notes for his course of 1953–4 at the Collège de France, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes: 'Comment la langue n'est pas un *datum* inerte. Comment il y a [...] un mouvement immanent à la langue, un

projet linguistique’ (2020: 213–14) [How language is not an inert *datum*. How there is [...] an immanent movement in language, a linguistic project]. Language often seems to conceal its own self-extending project, to wish only to endorse its stabilities – how else will the language system survive as system? But the language system, like Lovelock’s *Gaia*, is a self-adapting mechanism. Translation brings this linguistic project to the surface, although monoglot translation (translation for the monoglot reader ignorant of the source language (ST)) by its very nature does little to serve it. Monoglot translation perpetuates the notion of the work (the text for itself) as the *telos* of translational activity, and this is why its purpose is always eliminatory, that is, to eliminate unchosen variants/ variations. But Giorgio Agamben suggests that there is a state of *désœuvrement*, whose model is poetry and which ‘repose en elle-même et contemple sa puissance de dire’ (2019: 51) [rests in itself and contemplates its capacity to say]. I do not want to argue that translation enjoys a setting of untroubled leisureliness, as *désœuvrement* might imply; indeed, I will propose that it is beset by peculiar urgencies. But translation, too, is a contemplation of its ‘puissance de dire’, of the texts it makes possible, of its expressive inexhaustibility, and that is why our view of translation addresses itself to the polyglot reader. In this view, those who chase the mirage of the perfect *corrigé/fair* copy betray translation. Such translators may feel that they serve the text, but translational service is not to a text, but to the act of translating, to a dialogue with language(s), to our ‘puissance de dire’ *on the basis of* a text. The ST is a first draft which begins to lay out what capacity to say has been conferred on the translator.

This is a book, then, which puts its arguments together through a sequence of encounters with particular philosophers, critics, scientists, accompanied periodically by forays into translation itself. These encounters do not occur in any particular order and vary in length and significance, but one presence is more persistent than others: my gravitation towards a phenomenological view of translation means that the work of Merleau-Ponty is a principal point of reference, as it was in my *Translating the Perception of Text: Literary Translation and Phenomenology* (2012a); but in this text, rather different aspects of his thinking are addressed. And since I am not trying to construct a single model of translational practice but rather attempting to outline the parameters of a particular field of translational activity, the focus of my translations varies as different features of the process are foregrounded. I would further add that the examples I translate are principally drawn from my area of professional operation, that is, French poetry of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries –

Introduction

5

Lamartine, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, Hugo, Verlaine, Laforgue, Heredia, Perse, Éluard – but that, exceptionally, in Chapter 4, I offer versions of Rilke's Orpheus sonnet I, V ('Errichtet keinen Denkstein. . .'), originally undertaken as part of a celebration of the seventieth birthday of the much-valued literary scholar Hugh Haughton; and Chapter 7's closing analysis preoccupies itself with translations of the sestet of Hopkins's sonnet 'Henry Purcell'.

The book's first Part, 'Positions and Propositions', is devoted to setting up haeres and exploring underlying concepts and suppositions relating to translation. Its structure is somewhat sandwich-like, with two longer critical explorations flanked by two shorter propositional pieces: first, an inquiry into reading (Chapter 1), and more especially into reading-to-translate; then a longer rumination on the nature of language as envisaged by the translator (Chapter 2), a rumination which, among other things, sets Wilhelm von Humboldt against Julia Kristeva; and, after that, an engagement with Hans Georg Gadamer and others, including Friedrich Schleiermacher and Lawrence Venuti, about translation's relationship with interpretation (Chapter 3); the final chapter of Part I, Chapter 4, is again shorter in length and acts both as a drawing together of certain concepts set in motion in the previous chapters, and as the beginnings of a translational credo.

At first sight, Part II may give the impression that, after the conceptual and contextual preliminaries, the book is coming to a serial treatment of its main topics of preoccupation. But this is not entirely so, partly because the book is concerned with these topics throughout its length, and partly because they are more intimately interwoven than may at first appear. Chapter 5, 'Dialogue and Dialectic in the Translational Act' explores the intimate relationship between dialogue and dialectics and sets out to describe the version of dialectics which translation seeks to promote and which provides translation – the dialogue between the ST and the TT – with its peculiar momentums and fruitfulness. This involves passing dialogues with the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Émile Benveniste, Schleiermacher, Theodor Adorno and David Bohm. Bohm's thinking about the implicate and explicate orders provides the route into Chapter 6, 'Movement, Duration, Rhythm', which is presided over by the presence of Henri Bergson, although Humboldt also has a significant contribution to make. The chapter explores the issues connected with the dynamic of duration in language, and the affiliated notion of intuition, and it briefly examines Bergson's assumptions about translation. As it comes to consider the function and activity of rhythm in relation to translation, it

once again takes its bearings from Benveniste. Chapter 7 is an examination of what translation offers us in the way of a linguistic model for environmental participation and action, how translation might release us from environmental disconnection, from policies of preservation and conservation, and draw us instead into relational and developmental strategies. This entails arguments for translation's favouring idiolect over style, and 'alterity' over 'alterity', arguments, too, about the polarized position of the translational subject, negotiating between situatedness and expansion, and about the recovery of indexical and iconic values in language. The chapter's sources range from Jakob von Uexküll and his notion of *Umwelt*, through Gadamer and biosemiotics, to C. S. Peirce and George Steiner. The book ends not with a Conclusion, drawing threads together from the whole venture and finalizing the case made, but with a Coda which acts as a codicil to Chapter 7, with further, qualifying reflections on the ecology of translation, in particular on the role of page-space, on translational perspective, on the blind field of text and the nature of the translating subject.

My general arguments for translation remain what they have been, principally: (a) that translation should seek to capture not the meaning of text – made otiose by the assumption that the reader is polyglot rather than monoglot and can already address the meaning of the ST – but the translator's response, the adventures of the translator's consciousness in reading, such that the translation is in the manner of an experiential, not to say existential, encounter; and (b) that translation is concerned with the invisible (see Appendix) of the ST – its further formal and expressive potentialities, its latencies – which gives it a future, which projects it into other modes of selving. But I want to make more explicit what has been consistently implicit in my approach to translation, namely that we should always translate towards speech or what Linell (2005) calls 'talk-in-interaction'. I do not by this mean that literary texts should be translated into 'spoken language', but rather into a written language deeply informed by spokenness; and by 'spokenness' I mean a language which (a) is deeply embedded in a paralinguistic atmosphere (understood in its superordinate sense, to include kinesics, proxemics and any non-verbal, non-vocal material – including typography, graphics, etc. – designed to give speaking body to the verbal); (b) is vividly situated in time and space, that is, under the pressure of situatedness and the contingencies of situation, operating in the mode of deixis and indexicality; and (c) is in-action, with a performative nature and a perlocutionary capability, language with a protagonistic force, intervening in the world.

It is this ambition which makes my choice of topics – dialogue, movement, ecology – a natural development. ‘Dialogue’ is to suppose that the reader-translator is actively engaged dialogically with the ST, that is, vocatively rather than accusatively, a dialogue through whose dialectical procedure we construct/co-author an ever-developing world, a co-productive proliferation. It is here important to understand that, if translation is a face-to-face interaction, if ST and translator are co-present, then they occupy the same space and time. The ST is not a text of the past, or something existing outside time and invulnerable to it, protected by its own ‘aesthetic’ autonomy. The ST speaks out of the present, asks for re-assimilation into a present, the translator being the only one who can act as guarantor of that re-assimilation. For the translator, therefore, the ST must still be in production, still informed by its own creative process. If this were not so, the language of the ST would already risk disembodiment, or being seen as disembodied.

Movement helps us to grasp the text, in terms given a new currency by Wilhelm von Humboldt, as *energeia* [activity, *Tätigkeit*] rather than *ergon* [product, *Werk*], to see linguistic exchange as having a progressive aspect (speaking language rather than spoken language, languaging). Translation is not a gathering together of appropriate reified components, the exercising of a competence, but a performance, a dynamic whole-body behaviour,¹ animated by its own environmental embeddedness, by its own restless adjustments of view. In this sense, translation takes place in the passage of real time, and like the operations involved in the production of, and response to, speech, becomes a sequence of ‘transient events which partially overlap and occur at very high rates’ (Linell, 2005: 18).² The ST is a script, and the TT likewise; they are an initiation of performance, of a multiplicity of constructive imaginings, *sine die*. They are not transcripts, an attempt to provide an inevitably approximate record of a live event.

If translation has, in its writing, the spirit of situated speakingness; if its ambience/atmosphere is made of the flesh of paralinguage; if its deictic and indexical colourings are greater, then we might well speak of the ecological implications of translation. The translator is not a servant of the text, a mediator between languages, but rather the subject of the text, the agent of the text’s becoming, of the text’s itself becoming subject. That is partly to say that the language of translation does not *represent* the world, does not become the representation (TT) of a representation (ST); translation’s language-as-embodiment is part of the flesh of the world, is directly

of the world's being, is a percept in the world. In speakingness/the speaking word, the non-verbal of paralanguage is as active as the verbal, is an agent of inhabitation, of physical contact, of social interaction; through the non-verbal, the verbal becomes existentially constitutive. It is this account that gives translation its ecological significance.

Two final and important caveats should be added. First, throughout the book, I have used the classical vocabulary of extended metrical feet – ionic (x x / /), choriamb (/ x x /), bacchic (x / /), antispast (x / / x), third paeon (x x / x), etc. – to designate the phrasal rhythms of translations. This may strike the reader as a foolhardy and perverse decision, given that metricity, patterns of accentual recurrence, general identifications, are the last things I wish to suggest. I will instead be arguing that such 'feet' are to be understood as a shifting web of modalities, as the *genetic* force, the discursive meshwork, the irreversible onward duration, of rhythmic impulses and configurations. But a convenient nomenclature *is* necessary, and I do believe that the classical terms can be harnessed to a new function, without any inevitable misunderstanding, particularly since most of the 'feet' I am employing are not normally the constituents of what Gerard Manley Hopkins would have called 'running rhythm'.

Second, a recurrent problem for the commentator who argues for the hitherto neglected significance of paralanguage in the business of translation and for the correspondingly multi-dimensional nature of rhythm – including not just accent/syllable, but tone, intonation, tempo, amplitude, pausing, phrasing, enunciation – is how to present these features without becoming embroiled in unfruitful differences of opinion, or in analyses too intricate for the good of the general argument. The failure to develop workable tools of notation – other, perhaps, than in relation to pitch/intonation – and the difficulty of imagining what might constitute such tools (see Scott 2018: 221–37) must be confronted, but not to the extent that such considerations monopolize attention. Accordingly, I shall not, in the translations included in this book, practise detailed multi-dimensional scansion. But I do ask the reader constantly to bear in mind the paralinguistic ramifications of rhythm, even when these are not expressly referred to. This may seem to be something of an evasion of responsibility, but the alternative, would, I fear, constantly stop the argument in its tracks and produce deflective controversy, both about the paralinguistic features notated and their particular attributions.

In order briefly to illustrate what I mean, I offer a reading/translation of a stanza of Victor Hugo's 'Booz endormi' (1859) (Hunt, 1968: 26):

