WORD OF WARNING TO ALL TRANSLATORS:

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This is an excellent example of the translator’s vulnerability (not visibility, or responsibility, or deontology – to name just a few current buzzwords) in the face of bureaucratized and less than responsible publishing practices.

LvF


(Excerpt: p.38-43 and 64-97)

Translated by Luise von Flotow

Toward Translation Criticism

The Concept of Translation Criticism

The very expression “translation criticism” may cause misunderstandings since it appears to refer only to the negative evaluation of translations. Examples are Meschonnic’s analyses of du Bouchet’s translation of Celan,¹ or of Chouraqui’s translation of the Bible.

¹ This text is a model of this type of criticism, not only for its severe and rigorous approach but also for the scandal it set off in the Parisian poetry milieus of the time.
Less harsh but equally uncompromising are Pierre Leyris’ evaluations of Saint–John Perse’s translation of a T.S. Eliot poem, and Valéry’s of a Thomas Hardy poem; his comments deal mainly with serious changes in register, in other words, with processes of loss.²

The root of such misunderstandings lies well outside translation, and is located in a duality inscribed in the very structure of the critical act. We can never remove every last shred of negativity from this act. Benjamin speaks of the unavoidably negative moment of this concept.³

Since the Enlightenment, criticism has always dealt with negatives, regardless of its object. But we should not forget that the other face of the negative is the positive. Criticism is in essence positive, whether it is operating in the area of linguistic production, in the domain of art in general, or in other aspects of human existence. Not only is criticism something positive, but this positive aspect is its truth: purely negative criticism is not real criticism. This is why Friedrich Schlegel, the founding father of modern, and not only German, criticism, reserves the term “criticism” for the analysis of works of “quality,” and uses the term “characterization” for the study and evaluation of mediocre or low-quality work.

Let us turn now to these positive aspects of the criticism of literary works, and their translations. Whatever form such criticism may have taken since its inception early in the 19th century, and whatever deviations and losses in practice and theory (always compensated by constant renewal) may inevitably have arisen, criticism is clearly a

² Palimpsestes, 2, Paris 1990, 7-27.
necessity, by which I mean it is an a priori requirement of the literary works themselves. For these works call for and authorize something like criticism; they need criticism in order to communicate themselves, in order to manifest themselves, to complete themselves, and to perpetuate themselves. They need the mirror that criticism holds up to them. It is true that the thousands of paratextual forms that respond to this need often produce the opposite result: criticism can distance, obscure, suffocate, and even kill works (we need only think of students who only read the secondary literature and never the work itself). But whatever the danger may be – and it cannot be avoided – criticism is ontologically linked to the literary work.

This does not mean that in order to “understand” Proust you must read Poulet, Blanchot, Deleuze, Genette or Henry (who have produced important critical texts on his work). Nothing obliges us to do so. But the existence of this corpus of criticism changes La recherche du temps perdu. By virtue of this “criticisme,” the body of criticism that the work has engendered, it has now become the work that produced this critical material, which is not what it was at the outset. And the critical material constantly sheds new light on it. All the more so in the case of Proust where the critical works are accomplished, true works of criticism. Criticism of this type makes literary works fuller by revealing their in-finite meanings. Further, it enriches the readers’ experiences. It is always gratifying to read a work of criticism that casts new light on a work we love.

The criticism of works of literature is thus vital for these works, and consequently, for human existence in as far as we exist also, and essentially, within and

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4 Translator’s note: “criticisme,”: a neologism devised by Berman, which here refers to the entire body of criticism around an original text.
through literary works. Of course, it is not always easy for criticism to assume such a lofty mission, and critics must continuously struggle against letting their work deteriorate – whether through erudite, scientistic or simply formalist aspects of their praxis. The level at which this mission is situated was defined in very original terms by Schlegel,

This poetic criticism […] will present anew the already represented, will once again form what is already formed, […] it will complete, rejuvenate, newly re-fashion the work.

Among the many types of criticism of literary works are those that focus on work “resulting” from transfer, from the transmission of a work from one language to another; they focus on what have been referred to, since the time of Leonardo Bruni, as translations. We know that translation is just as necessary as criticism for literary works - for their expression, their completion, their perpetuation, their dissemination, though there is a more obvious empirical necessity. It is important to note that criticism and translation are structurally related. Whether or not translators refer to works of criticism to translate a foreign book, they act as critics at every level. When a translation is a re-translation, it is implicitly or explicitly a critique of previous translations, in two senses of

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8 The critical nature of translation has been often discussed in the past. Steiner says, for example, “There are translations which are supreme acts of critical exegesis, in which analytic understanding, historical imagination, linguistic expertness articulate a critical valuation which is at the same time a piece of totally lucid, responsible exposition.” in *After Babel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992 (Second Edition), p. 429.
the term: it “exposes” them in the photographic sense for what they are (translations of a certain era, a certain state of the literature, or the language, or the culture), but may also reveal that these translations are deficient or outdated. Again, we see the duality of an act of criticism.

And yet, there seems to be a certain tension between criticism and translation, as revealed by the critic’s frequent indifference to the “problems of translation” and by the fact that great translators seldom turn out to be great critics (and vice versa).

To criticize a translation is thus to criticize a text that is itself a work of criticism. It is a delicate operation that has only recently developed in its present “modern” form, a form comparable to direct literary criticism. Though translation criticism in the form of judgments has existed for a long time (at least since the 17th century), it has never been as developed as the criticism of original works.

Usually, critics of original works study these in the original language, or in translation, “forgetting” that they are indeed dealing with a translation. They simply study a “foreign work.”

Not only has there been little development in translation criticism, but when it has appeared it has been primarily negative, seeking and often obsessed with, the “flaws” in a translation, even in a successful one. Positive criticism has so far been very rare—especially in any pure state, i.e. without negative elements. Until recently the impetus of these two forms of criticism, with the exception of scholarly studies of ancient

9 See my article, “Critique, commentaire et traduction (Quelques reflexions à partir de Benjamin et Blanchot)”, in Poèse, 37, Belin, Paris 1986. I think I may have exaggerated this tension on the basis of a debatable notion of the critical act, and that, moreover, critics’ indifference toward translation, their distance from it, belongs to an era that is coming to an end.

10 The modern form of criticism is twofold: on the one hand the critic’s work takes the form of an essay, on the other, it is a scientific analysis. Literary criticism exists in this double mode, and as we shall see, it is the same for translations. “Literary” criticism and “scientific” criticism may co-exist in a critical work, as Roland Barthes has shown.
translations, has been *judgmental*. Literary criticism, without foregoing this stance (for instance, in the press) has also been deployed in many different ways and discourses, hence its power and richness.

The tendency to want to “judge” a translation, *and to want to do only that*, derives from two basic characteristics of any translated text; one of these is the expectation that the “second” text is supposed to correspond to the “first” text, is supposed to be true, truthful. The other is what I propose to call *defectivity*, a neologism with which I want to express all the possible kinds of flaws, errors, mistakes that affect *every* translation. The translated text *calls for* judgment because it raises the question of its truthfulness and because it is always somehow defective (which puts this truthfulness into question.) Every translation “has its flaws,” as they say, even though many try to hide them. The best translators have been known to nod off and produce translations compared to which Steiner’s example of Horace being angry with “good Homer” seems harmless. Without being dogmatic, it can be said that most translations are insufficient, mediocre, average, even poor, though this in no way puts into question the “talent” or the “professionalism” of their authors; in fact, the translated text seems to be affected by an original sin, its *secondariness.* This very old accusation of not being the original, and being *less* than the original (it is easy to move from one assertion to the next) is the scar in the translational psyche and the source of all its guilt: it is not only wrong to undertake this

11 Translator’s note: “défectivité”; this neologism will be rendered as “defectivity” throughout.
12 At idem indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus, cited in Steiner *After Babel*, 311. (Translator’s note: the reference is to Ben Jonson’s literalist translation of Horace “but am more/ Angry, if once I heare good Homer snore.”)
13 Georges Mounin opens his *Belles infidèles* with the following statement, “Every argument against translation can be summed up in one single line: a translation is not the original.” (Cahiers du sud, 1955, 7). This obvious point is somewhat undermined when we consider that the concept of “original” only dates from the 16th century, and that the most intimate essence of any “original” is that it can and must be translated. Though the translation is not the original it is not separate from the original; it is its metamorphosis.
defective labour (works *should not* be translated, they do not wish it), but it is impossible
(they *cannot be* translated.)

It is true that this morose discourse on the defectivity of translations has always
been accompanied by another, more positive one that says, defective or not, translations
are of obvious communicative use, and contribute to “enriching” the translating language
and literature. However, since this positive aspect was – until Goethe, Humboldt and
Schleiermacher - never able to do more than produce an apology for the collateral
blessings of translation, and since it never emphasized the ontological connection
between an original and its translations, it was easily drowned out by the negative
discourse which forgets (or negates) this connection.

Is it not true, though, that while a translation sets out to “render” the original, to
become its “double” (thus confirming its secondary nature), it also aims to become a
literary work? A literary work in its own right. Paradoxically, this purpose of acquiring
the autonomy and durability of a literary work reinforces, rather than contradicts, its first
purpose. When a translation achieves this double purpose, it becomes a “new original.” It
is true that few translations achieve this status. A certain number manage; a few - the
great translations - reach the level of major works and exert an influence over the target
culture that is matched by few “indigenous” works.

Thus, the criticism of translations takes as its object texts that are “critical” in the
same way criticism is, and ones that are either weak echoes of the originals (the most
frequent occurrence) or (much less frequently) true literary works that prevail over this
criticism from the height of their achievement.
If we consider that literary criticism is an essential part of the life of literary works (and of reading, which is a stage of this life), then we must consider translation criticism in the same way, and as seriously as literary criticism. I have said that translation criticism is, as yet, hardly developed. But it is currently burgeoning, and in a plurality of forms and modes that are increasingly differentiated and rich. What is still lacking, however, and is also lacking for translation itself, is a certain symbolic status, the *secret dignification*\(^{14}\) without which no “discursive practice” can establish itself. One of the ambitions of translation studies is to contribute to this dignification, which literary criticism acquired in the 19\(^{th}\) century. It is hardly necessary to add that such dignification would carry over to translations, to translation in general, and perhaps to translators.

[...]

**Sketching out a Method**

I will now try to sketch out the framework of a translation analysis that takes into account forms developed by Meschonnic and the Tel Aviv School, and elaborates a methodology and concepts that are at least partially its own, though based on Benjamin’s notion of *translation criticism* as presented above. I will present here the most developed and exhaustive form of this framework, which may well become a book rather than an article. It hardly needs to be pointed out that this most expanded form can be adapted to the particular objectives of each analyst, and to all sorts of standardized text formats (article, lecture, study, literary work, review, thesis, etc.) It is less a question of presenting a model, than one *possible analytical pathway*.

\(^{14}\) Translator’s note: “dignification” – a neologism by Berman.
My analytical pathway is divided into a number of steps (as befits any method). The first steps deal with the preliminary work: the actual *reading* of the translation (or translations) and of the original as well as the many related readings that support those of translation and original. The next steps deal with the crucial stage of the act of criticism itself as it will appear in its *written form*. In this section, I will also present the basic *categories* that structure this criticism, and that are quite different from those of Meschonnic or the functionalist school.

The *form* of this type of analysis slowly came to me over the course of “practising” the study of translations, and trying to detail (and systematize) the processes. The first steps owe much to my work as a literary translator, specifically to the difficult translation of Roberto Arlt’s *Los siete locos*, which I did together with Isabelle Berman. By reading and rereading the successive versions of the translation – alone or together – and by going back and forth between these versions and the original, more or less in the order I will describe, we learnt a lesson that is far from obvious: *how to read a translation*.15

*Reading and Rereading the Translation*

Rather than take a suspicious approach, or a totally neutral and objective one, let us look at the translated text receptively, all the while maintaining a healthy scepticism. The basic approach to the critical act is to suspend hasty judgments, and engage in the long patient work of reading and rereading the translation, or translations, while *completely setting aside the original*. The first reading is inevitably that of a “foreign work.” The second

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15 The journey that I propose is thus a compendium of several personal journeys. Its actual forms will vary according to the analysts, the translations, and the originals under discussion.
time through the text will read like a translation, which implies a change in the way the reader views it. For, as we have just said, one is not naturally a reader of translations, one becomes a reader of translations.

We cannot stress enough the need to set aside the original and resist the compulsion to compare. Only this type of reading lets us sense if the translated text “works.” Works has a double meaning here: does the text work as a piece of writing in the translated language, in other words does it operate within the “norms” of standard writing practice of the target culture. And then, beyond this basic requirement, does the translation work as an actual text (systematicity, co-relativity, organicity of all its elements). What such reading and rereading uncovers is the text’s immanent consistency quite apart from any relationship to the original. And the intensity of its immanent life. There are translations that are “cold,” “stiff,” “remote,” “lively”, etc., as literary critics working for magazines well know, though they never go beyond such adjectives.

The rereading always also lays bare “problem spots” where defects become visible; either the translated text suddenly seems to weaken, go flat, lose its rhythm, or it appears too fluent, too smooth, too impersonally idiomatic; it may suddenly display words, turns of phrase, or sentence forms that don’t work, or be invaded by terms and expressions that are too close to the original language and a sign of linguistic contamination (or “interference”).

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16 Is it “well written” in the most basic sense. Many translations that are widely read do not satisfy this criterion. One example is Hannah Arendt’s essay “On Revolution” published in French as “Essai sur la révolution” (Gallimard, coll. de poche “Tel”, Paris 1967, tr. Michel Chrestien). The translation is virtually unreadable because of its defective awkward syntax, while Arendt is known for her clear, fluid, and smooth style. In this case, it is immediately obvious that the translated text does not “work.” This, however, does not prevent an important book from circulating without ever having been subject to criticism. A widespread phenomenon.
On the other hand, such rereading can also, though not always, uncover what I would call “miracle spots,” passages that go beyond good to become translational writing that no target language author could have produced, writing in which the foreign passes seamlessly into the target language, or shakes up the target language with beneficial results. These “miracle spots” where the translator has written foreign in the target language, thus renewing the target language, are spots where the translated text attains a state of grace and richness. When, for example, you read Naufrage du Deutschland or other poems by Hopkins translated by Leyris, you sense both the long labour of translation and the joy it has finally become.

I insist on the importance of these “impressions;” they alone orient our final work, which is analytical. To let yourself be invaded or moulded by these “impressions” is to provide solid ground for the critique that is to come. It must not stop there, of course, for not only can impressions be deceiving but many a translation is deceiving and thus produces deceiving impressions.

We have read and reread the translation; we have got an impression (or an impression has developed in us). Now we need to turn to, or turn back to, the original.

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17 Emmanuel Hocquard, introduction to the anthology 49+1 nouveaux poètes américains, eds. Emmanuel Hocquard and Claude Royet-Journoud, coll. “Un bureau sur l’Atlantique,” Royaumont, 1991, p.10: “… I sometimes read American poetry in English. But my real pleasure comes from reading it in French. That’s when “I suddenly see something.” My pleasure can be explained in the following terms: “that is something no French poet would have written. […] I love the idea that translation is the kind of representation I need to better see and understand (in) my own language.”

18 This may occur in another area. When, for example, a critic writes of a “brilliant” or “elegant” translation, there is reason to be suspicious; often translations seduce their readers in order to conceal their defectivity or ethnocentricity. But there are also excellent translations that merit such descriptions, mainly because they also apply to the originals.
Reading and rereading the original\textsuperscript{19}

These readings set aside the translation. But they do not ignore those “spots” where the translation seemed either a little problematic or particularly successful. They go over and over these spots in order to prepare for the upcoming comparison.

They move quickly from a cursory read-through to a \textit{textual pre-analysis}, noting all the stylistic aspects, whatever they might be, that \textit{individuate} the writing and the language of the original\textsuperscript{20} and form a network of systematic relations. While it is impossible to do an exhaustive reading, the focus is on locating certain types of phrasing, certain meaningful ways of connecting clauses, certain uses of adjectives, adverbs, verb tenses, prepositions, etc. It picks up recurrent words, key words.\textsuperscript{21} More globally, such readings seek out the relationship between writing and language in the work and the rhythmic aspects that carry the text as a whole. \textit{Basically, the critic does the same work of reading that the translator did, or should have done, before and during the translation.}

The same – and not quite the same. For the reading that the translator does, is, as I outlined it in \textit{L’épreuve de l’étranger},\textsuperscript{22} already a pre-translation, a reading that is carried out with a view to and within the horizon of the translation; and all the individuating

\textsuperscript{19} These readings, like the preceding ones, are done in combination with related readings – of other texts by the author, of critical or informative works, etc. But I think these related readings should come a bit later, after the first two basic readings. First of all a sort of intimacy needs to be established between the translated text on the one hand and the original on the other. Without too much mediation.

\textsuperscript{20} Paul Ricoeur, \textit{Du texte à l’action, Essais d’herméneutique II}, “Style is something that individuates a text, it produces something distinctive” p.109.

\textsuperscript{21} See Michel Gresset, “De la traduction de la métaphore littéraire à la traduction comme métaphore de l’écriture,” in \textit{Revue française d’études américaines}, No. 18, 1983, 502-518. This work includes locating all the networks of metaphors in a literary text, which translators often neglect. Sylviane Garnerone, whom Gresset cites (509) says quite rightly, “If the translator does not “pursue” the various networks of metaphors [in Faulkner] […] he/she cannot hope to communicate the symbolism of the whole work since the metaphors are its flying buttresses.” Not only are there systems of metaphors, there are also systems of signifiers, terms, and concepts, and Gresset also adds intertextual elements (such as references by the author to another of his/her works) and hypertextual aspects (such as references to the works of other authors). Logical.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{The Experience of the Foreign} p. 154-155. In this section the concept of hermeneutics is presented too restrictively, too closely linked to Romantic hermeneutics (Schleiermacher).
characteristics of the work are uncovered as much during the movement of translation as before. This is where the criticism, the critical capacities inherent in and proper to translation, are located. It is clear that this criticism cannot be purely and simply based on the interaction between the translator and the original. It must be based on the many other related texts, other works by the same author, various books on the author, the era, etc.

When Chateaubriand undertook the re-translation of Paradise Lost, he said he surrounded himself “with all the disquisitions of the sages.” To re-translate the Odyssey with an emphasis on its often formulaic style, Jaccottet read German specialists of Homer. Leyris read Gilson’s book on Duns Scot to translate Hopkins and understand his inscape. For his recent translation of Pindar, Savignac read him in French and German translation and consulted the works of the major modern Hellenists on Greek culture.

In general, translating requires enormous amounts of wide-ranging reading. An ignorant translator, who does not do this kind of reading, is a deficient translator. We use books to translate. We call this necessary recourse to reading (and to other “tools” in Ilich’s sense) support for the act of translation. This notion is linked but not identical to that of support for the translation itself.

The fact that the act of translation needs support in no way reduces its fundamental autonomy. By this I mean that, first of all, the readings the translator does

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23 Chateaubriand, “Remarques” (on the translation of Milton) in Poësie No. 23, Belin, Paris 1982, p.120.
26 And not only with the dictionary.
27 Support for translation includes any number of paratexts that come with it: introduction, preface, postface, notes, glossaries, etc. A translation cannot be left “naked” for otherwise it will not accomplish the literary transfer. Today, the support for translations proposed during the Classical period and more recently during the philological age (19th century) is no longer sufficient. It must be rethought, and is being rethought by certain translators. Questions about this new support and a new consensus on this issue are of crucial importance.
are not constrained; they are free.\(^{28}\) Contrary to some notions and ideas propagated a few years ago, somewhat naively, by Vinay and Darbelnet that translation is “applied linguistics”, no one type of “textual analysis” can constitute the *obligatory* framework for a translation, not even the analysis that a translator could carry out if they were capable. The most illuminating textual analysis – even an analysis that seeks to locate the “translemes”\(^ {29}\) – is not and cannot be more than just one support among others for translation.

In general, it is absolutely necessary, especially now that literary translation is being taught, to prevent translation from being *subordinated* to some theoretical discourse that might directly or indirectly dictate “what should be done;” this applies to textual analysis, poetics, linguistics, but also, (and maybe especially) to “translation studies” of all kinds. Translation studies/translation theory should develop its discourses on translation without *ever* claiming to govern the praxis of translation. And these discourses should be addressed (ideally) to both translators and non-translators. Praxis should not be subordinated to theoretical discourse (translation is no more a province of translation studies/translation theory than translation theory is a simple description of what goes on in the process of translation.)

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\(^{28}\) Yves Bonnefoy, “La traduction de la poésie,” in *Entretiens sur la poésie*, Mercure de France, Paris, 1990, pp.155-156. “[...] in *The Sorrow of Love*, when Yeats writes that the girl with the “red mournful lips” is “doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships,” I couldn’t help translating “labouring” as “qui boitent/au loin” [who limp in the distance]. These words did not come to me via a short circuit that some believe runs through the translator from text to translation, but via a loop through my entire past [...] and, of course with Verlaine in mind, I drafted a kind of poem [...] a poem I never finished – and that I have just now, twelve years later, suddenly torn up, basically so that my translation should live.”

\(^{29}\) See Annie Brisset, “Poésie: le sens en effet, étude d’un translème”, in *META* 29, No 3, Sept. 1984. “I call a semiotic unit of translation a *transleme* because it is a system-unit made up of elements related in meaning [...]. A transleme is a network of relations that incorporates in a semantic relationship a set of elements that are part of either the text’s expressiveness or its content.” (p.263). Further along Brisset comments as follows on the “overcoded” aspect of poetic texts: “The translation of a poetic text necessarily proceeds from the *hierarchization of the translemes* within a translational program.” As we shall see, in the actual work of the translator, such a hierarchization is based on a “translation project.”
I have called the readings done by the translation critic a \textit{pre-analysis} because they are \textit{only} carried out to prepare the comparison. In this they are like the translator’s readings which also constitute a part of the reading cycle. The critic’s readings are more closely linked, more systematic than those of the translator, but they are not subject either to any specific kind of analysis, though we agree with Meschonnic, Toury and Brisset, that the knowledge about the works and texts of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century that has been gleaned through linguistics, poetics, structural analysis, stylistics is an essential [“un incontournable”]\textsuperscript{30, 31} for critical work. But not in the sense that these sciences, this knowledge, might impose limitations. Rather, to the extent that our approach to the language, to the text, or to the literary works themselves is informed by what these approaches have taught us.\textsuperscript{32} The translation critic is bound much more by these “sciences” than the translator since the critic must produce a discourse that is conceptually rigorous.

After the pre-analysis of the original and the readings that are part of it, comes the painstaking work of selecting \textit{stylistic examples} (in the widest sense) that are pertinent and meaningful. Unless the text is short and “everything” can be analyzed, a rigorous confrontation must be based on examples. Their selection is a delicate and essential step.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Translator’s note: Berman uses the adjective, “incontournable,” as a noun “un incontournable,” which I render as “an essential”. It could also be “an unavoidable”, “an ineluctable,” etc.
\item This adjective “incontournable” [tr. “essential, unavoidable, ineluctable’] that is so fashionable at the moment, and considered pedantic by some, was first used in a meaningful way thirty or so years ago when André Préau translated Heidegger’s term \textit{unumgänglich} in \textit{Essais et conférences}. Heidegger used it to say that History was “the essential” component of historical science, and Nature “the essential” component of physics, etc. In other words, an already given dimension, that was, by definition, boundless for these disciplines. The term then slowly got around, among Heideggerians, of course, and more recently in all French circles, including politicians and media people. It’s an old word that came from translation, and from a meritorious translator.
\item Who could read a myth today the way they did before Lévi-Strauss?
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
These passages from the original, taken from spots where the work is most condensed, representative, meaningful, or symbolic, are selected and extracted on the basis of an interpretation of the text (which will vary with each analyst). They are the meaningful points where a work achieves its own objective (not necessarily that of the author) and arrives at its own centre of gravity. At these points the writing has a very high degree of necessity. Such passages are not always visible at first reading, and this is why, most often, the work of interpretation reveals them or confirms their existence. In a poem, this can be one or more lines; in a novel, certain passages; in a collection of short stories, the last sentence of the last story (as in Joyce’s *Dubliners*); in a play, one or two responses that in one moment of blinding precision provide us with the meaning of the whole piece; in a work of philosophy, sentences whose structure clearly shows the movement and the struggle of the thought processes. Contrary to classic “anthologized selections,” these passages are not always the aesthetically most “beautiful.” But whether they are or not, they all manifest the meaningfulness of the work in writing that possesses the highest degree of necessity possible. All the other parts of the work bear the mark of contingency to varying degrees, regardless of their apparent formal perfection, in the sense that, since they have no absolute scriptural necessity, they could have been written “differently.” This applies to even the most apparently perfect poem, a truth evidenced across the great expanse of literature by the “drafts”, “versions”, “stages” and “variants” of texts. The final work is complete, definitive, but always retains something of its gestational phase, of the uncertainty it has turned away from in order to embrace its final

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33 James Joyce, *Dubliners* (The Corrected Text, with Explanatory Note by Robert Scholes), Richard Clay, LTD, Bungay, Suffolk, 1967, p. 256. “His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.”

form. Whatever the final degree of systematicity and unity in a work, it always includes a certain amount of contingency. If there is too much contingency, or rather, if the weight of contingency is greater than that of necessity, the work is affected; at times this seems to be the case with certain parts of *Les Fleurs du mal*. If, on the other hand, the proportion of necessity (as far as this can be deliberate) is greater than that of contingency, the work is undermined by a certain monological formalism, in Flaubert or Valéry for instance. The contingent has its own necessity in the economy of a text.

This “dialectic” of necessity and contingency (which must not be confused with the distinction, itself necessary and contingent, between what is “marked” and what is “not-marked”) is a determining factor for the critic and the translator. As Genette says,

> the *untouchability* of the poetic is a “modern” idea and the time has come to shake it up a little.\(^{35}\)

In a note on the same page, Genette stresses that the notion of the poem or the literary text being untouchable is linked to the idea of untranslatability, another dogma that is not particularly modern but has been constantly reiterated in our era by both poets and theoreticians (such as Jakobson). The coexistence of elements that must not be touched with elements that may be touched is of incalculable importance for the translator; it determines how much room for manoeuvre there is. Failing to distinguish between “marked” and “unmarked” terms, between necessary items and the contingent items, destroys the translator’s freedom of choice and leads to disastrously literal renderings, especially where syntax is concerned.

In summary: before any concrete analysis of the translated text can be done, the critic must carry out

1) a textual pre-analysis that selects a certain number of fundamental stylistic characteristics of the original;

2) an interpretation of the work that allows these significant passages to be selected.

We have soaked up the translated text, identified its weak and its strong points; we have analyzed and interpreted the original and developed a “file” of examples that are exhaustive, reasoned, and representative. Are we ready for the comparison? Absolutely not. We may know the stylistic “system” of the original, but we know nothing about the stylistics of the translated text. We have “felt” that there is a system to the translation because it seems to “work,” (I shall stay with this expression), but we know nothing about how, or why, or about the system’s logic. If we proceed with fleeting comparisons between the work and its translation, for instance in a bilingual edition of poetry, we may well perceive an overall correspondence, but also choices, divergences, and various modifications that may not be shocking but are astonishing: why did the translator “render” this by that, we say, when…

If you read Claire Malroux’ version of Dickinson36, or Masson’s translation of Yeats, you cannot help but wonder about the reason for this permutation, this extension, or that suppression of conjunctions, etc. without, however, putting into question the obvious quality of these translations. You wonder about the “reasons” for a thousand little “divergences” that seem to add up to the idiosyncracy of the translation. This type of questioning becomes more complex when you compare these translations of Yeats and Dickinson with those done by Bonnefoy and Reumaux, for example. More divergences,

and different ones(!) (it is a fact that every translator has their own systematicity, their own coherence, their way of “setting aside,” of “spacing” as du Bellay might have said). And so, to understand the logic of the translated text, we must turn to the work of translation itself, and, ultimately, to the translator.

In search of the translator

“Seek out the translator,” this is a crucial phase of our methodology, one that is all the more essential now that we know that one of the tasks of a hermeneutics of translation is to take into account the translating subject. Thus, the question who is the translator? must clearly be asked. After all, in regard to a literary work, we always ask “who is the author?” But these two questions do not really address the same thing. The question about the author is focused on biographical, psychological, existential aspects that supposedly shed light on the work; while these are considered of limited value for a structural, immanent analysis, it can hardly be denied that it is not easy to fully grasp the work of, say, du Bellay, Rousseau, Hölderlin, Balzac, Proust or Celan, without knowing something about their lives. Literary work and life are linked.

The question who is the translator? has a different purpose, however. With some few exceptions, such as Saint Jerome37 or Armand Robin, the lives of translators have hardly concerned us, and even less their emotional states. Nonetheless, it is becoming less and less likely that translators should remain so completely unknown. On the contrary, it is important to establish whether the translator is from France/the translating culture or is a foreigner, whether they are “only” a translator or have another profession such as

37 Besides the classic by Larbaud, Saint Jerome is also the subject of a colourful Quebec novel (Jean Marcel, Jérome ou De la traduction, Leméac, Montreal, 1990).
teaching (which is the case for a large group of literary translators in France); we would want to know whether they are also a writer and have produced books; into and from which languages they work, what kinds of relationships they have with these languages, whether they are bilingual and to what extent; what genre of work they normally translate and what other works they have already translated; whether they are polytranslators (the more frequent case) or monotranslators (like Claire Cayron\textsuperscript{38}); we would want to know what their linguistic and literary domains are, whether they approach translation in the way outlined above, and what their major works have been; whether they have written articles, studies, theses or works on the books they have translated; and finally, whether they have written on their particular praxis of translating, on the principles that guide them, on their translations, and on translation in general.\textsuperscript{39}

This is already a lot, but the information we collect may consist of mere “facts.” We have to go further, and determine the translator’s translational position, their translation project, and their horizon of translation.

\textit{The translator’s position}

Every translator has a specific relationship to their work, a certain “conception” or “perception” of translation, its meaning, its objectives, its forms, and modes. This “conception” or “perception” is not purely personal since the translator is informed by a whole body of historical, social, literary, and ideological discourse on translation. The translator’s position is a “compromise” between the perception of the task of translation


\textsuperscript{39} This list is incomplete. Have they translated together with other translators? How? etc.
that is held by the translator as a subject, driven by the urge to translate,\textsuperscript{40} and the way the translator has “internalized” the contemporary discourse on translation (the norms). The compromise that underlies this translational position is the result of an elaboration: it is the self-positioning of the translator in regard to the translation, a self-positioning that, once it has been chosen (for it is a choice), is binding for the translator, binding in Alain’s sense of “character as pledge.”\textsuperscript{41}

The translator’s position is not readily formulated, nor is this necessary. But it can be verbalized, manifested, and transformed into representations. However, these representations do not always express the truth of the translational position, especially when they appear in highly codified texts such as prefaces or conventional statements made in the course of interviews. In these cases, the translator tends to let the ambient doxa and the impersonal topoi on translation speak through them.

Through the elaboration of a translational position, the translator’s subjectivity develops and acquires its own meaningful depth; this is a subjectivity that has been under constant threat from three major sources: chameleon-like amorphousness, capricious freedom, and the temptation of self-effacement. Every translator has a translational position. And there are as many translational positions as there are translators. These positions can be reconstituted from the translations themselves, in which they are implicit, as well as from various statements the translators have made on their

\textsuperscript{40} In a letter to A. W. Schlegel, Novalis uses the expression Übersetzungstrieb, urge or drive to translate with regard to German writers; a striking expression that must be read with reference to the meanings that Trieb has acquired in the history of the language, in literature and in German thought, but also, and unavoidably, with reference to the meaning given it by Freud and later by Lacanian readings of Freud. The drive-to-translate is what makes a translator a translator: it is what “pushes” them to translate, what “pushes” them into the space of translation. This drive can develop by itself, or be awakened by a third party. What is this drive? What is specific about it? We don’t know that yet, since there is not yet a “theory” of the translating subject. All we know is that this drive is at the root of all the destinies of translation.

\textsuperscript{41} Translator’s note: Alain (Emile-Auguste Chartier), philosopher 1868-1951.
translations, on translation in general, or on any other “topics.” Further, they are linked to the translators’ *positions with respect to language*: their relationship to foreign languages and their mother tongue, to their being-in-languages (which can take a thousand different empirical forms but is always *a specific being-in-languages*, distinct from other beings-in-language unrelated to translation) and to their *writing-position* (their relationship to writing and to works of literature). Once we know how to take into account the translational position, the linguistic position, and the writing-position of the translator, all at the same time, it will be possible to construct a “theory of the translating subject.”

*The translation project*

In my presentation at ATLAS’ “Journée Freud” in 1988 I tried to sketch out the concept of a translation project[^42] for the first time.

The happy combination of autonomy and heteronomy in a successful translation can only be the result of what could be called a translation project, a project which does not need to be theoretical […] On the basis of a pre-analysis the translator determines what degree of autonomy or heteronomy they will confer on their translation – I say pre-analysis because you have never truly analyzed a text before you translate it. It is the pre-analysis of a text to be translated.^[^43]

Every coherent translation is sustained by a project, a conscious intention. This project, or intention, is determined both by the translational position and by the specific constraints set by the work to be translated. It need not be stated, or further theorized. On the one hand, the project defines the manner in which the translator will accomplish the literary *transfer*, and on the other, the way in which they will carry out the actual work of translation. Let us take as an example the translators who decided to make the work of

[^42]: I first borrowed the term from Daniel Gouadec who employs it in the context of specialized translation.
[^43]: In *Cinquième assises de la traduction littéraire*, op.cit. p. 114
Kathleen Raine known in France. They had several options: an “anthology” of poems by Raine based on her various books, or the translation of these books, in part or completely. They decided to translate several of her books in their entirety. Then, they had the option of proposing a monolingual (French) version, or a bilingual one. They chose the second option. Finally, they could choose to present a “bare” translation, without paratexts, such as an introduction, or produce a supported translation (with paratexts). They decided on the second option. This was their project of literary transfer. A study of their translations (and not of their paratexts since these say nothing about the work of translation) reveals the “mode” of translation they chose, their “manner” of translating, which is the second aspect of their project.

The forms that a translation project can take, as presented by the translators, are multiple. Take the case of Shakespeare translations over the past forty years: while Leyris describes his project very briefly, Bonnefoy presents his in detail, linking it to what he calls “a certain notion of translation”; Déprats’ is not only completely explained (as are the Freud translations by PUF), but theorized as a global project that both addresses the mode of translation, and includes thoughts on drama translation, Shakespeare translations in particular, and the types of paratexts that support translated texts.

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The critic thus works within an *absolute* – but not a vicious – *circle*. The critic must read the translation from the perspective of its project, though the truth of this project is only really accessible via the translation itself and the type of literary *transfer* it carries out. For everything a translator can say or write about their project only becomes reality in the translation. Yet the translation is never anything other than the realization of the translation project; it goes *where* the project leads it and *as far as* the project takes it. It manifests the truth of the project only by revealing *how* it was carried out (and not that it was carried out) and what the *consequences* of the project were in regard to the original.

It is therefore quite impossible to say communities “that seems a good project, but let’s wait for the results.” For these results are nothing more than the outcome of the project. If the translation does not “work,” the fault lies only with the project, or some aspect of it.

Under these conditions all the critic can do is enter the circle and navigate it.

These assertions will only shock those who confuse the *project* (possibly due to the use of this term) with *theoretical project* or *a priori plan*. It is obvious that any project that has been completely explained and fixed runs the risk of becoming rigid and dogmatic. A case in point is the increasingly (and understandably) accepted “rule” that a marked term in the original must *always* be rendered by the same word, whatever the “context” – a rule that has little or no traditional precedent and can easily become a straightjacket. It is true that when Georg Trakl uses the adjective *leise* in his poetry, it should always be translated in the same way, since it is a fundamental adjective in his

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48 Cf. remarks by Bernard Lortholary after my presentation at the “Journée Freud”, *Cinquièmes assises de la traduction littéraire*, op.cit. pp.146-151.

work. The same goes for *gerne* in Hölderlin, or *because* in Faulkner. A foreign translator would be subject to the same exigency for the adjective *vaste* in Baudelaire. 

*But this is not something that can be generalized.* In my view, the rule stops being absolutely valid when, because of contingent or stereotypical elements that exist in any text, a key word loses its characteristic markedness for a time. This is the case for the words *Wunsch* and *wünschen* in a text by Freud.

The sentence in French from the PUF translation reads, “S’agissant de telles fructueuses difficultés, le cas de maladie à décrire ici ne laisse rien à souhaiter” [tr.: “In regard to such fruitful difficulties, the case of ill-health to be described here leaves nothing to be wished for”]. The last part corresponds to the German “nichts zu wünschen übrig” (my emphasis). Since *wünschen* [to wish], like *Wunsch* [wish], are key terms in Freud’s work, the translators decided to render it by “ne laissait rien à souhaiter, [tr.: “left nothing to be wished for”] and not by the appropriate fixed expression in French, “ne laissait rien à désirer” [tr.:“left nothing to be desired”]. This is not only an awkward rendering, but it seems to me that *wünschen* is part of a standard German expression and has lost any special meaningfulness; it should therefore be rendered by “désirer” [tr.: “desire”] even if, in the same text by Freud there are numerous marked uses of both *wünschen* and *Wunsch*.

One last remark on the translation project: its existence in no way contradicts the immediate, intuitive aspects of translation that are so often invoked. For intuitiveness is informed, from beginning to end, by the capacity to reflect. What Hölderlin said about the poet also goes for the translator: “their emotions must be completely organized.”

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Meyer Clason, the German translator of Latin American writers, once told me he was a *Bauchübersetzer*, a translator who translates with his gut. That’s what every translator should be if they want their translations to get us exactly there, in the gut. But Meyer Clason, who translated *Grande sertão: veredas* by Guimarães Rosa, a work itself marked by a mix of popular oral language and reflection, knew very well that his work had demanded considerable reflection, which he later discussed in an insightful article.

*The translator’s horizon*

The translator’s position and the project of translation are both bounded by a *horizon*. I borrow the term and the concept from modern hermeneutics. Developed in philosophy by Husserl and Heidegger, it was elaborated with a more concrete and epistemological orientation by H.G. Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, and in the area of literary hermeneutics it was very fruitfully employed by Hans Robert Jauss. In this guise it is particularly apt for a hermeneutics of translation.

As a first approximation, the horizon may be defined as the constellation of all the linguistic, literary, cultural and historical parameters that “determine” how a translator feels, acts, and thinks. I put “determine” into quotation marks because these are not simple determinations in the sense of causal or structural conditionings. Let us take as an example Philippe Brunet and his retranslation of Sappho in 1991. The horizon of his retranslation, *the-point-from-which* his retranslation starts, is located in a plurality of

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52 George Belmont tells a story about the Savoyard cook of one of his friends who was present when an Irish poet translator read his version of a poem by Belmont. The cook listened, and then said, “I don’t understand, but it must be beautiful because it put thunder in my gut”, in *Encrages, “Poésie/Traduction,”* Université de Paris VIII, Paris, 1980, no. 4-5, p. 183.

horizons whose links to each other are more or less clear. First, there is the “state” of contemporary French lyric poetry. Then, the scholarship on Greek lyric poetry, as well as, more generally, the Greek “culture” developing in France today, which is profoundly different from the scholarship of earlier centuries. This knowledge itself embodies a different relationship to ancient Greece, and to Greek and Roman Antiquity more generally. It is worth noting that Brunet’s retranslation came at a time when French historians were publishing numerous texts on Greek and Roman poets, when translations and re-translations of Greek and Roman poets were appearing regularly in France, and a special collection of the texts of the great “classics” of Antiquity (Seneca, Cicero, Pliny, Ovid, Plutarch, etc.) was brought out. Events that, taken together, are evidence of a considerable movement within our culture toward ancient Greece and Rome, a movement whose meaning and scope we cannot yet know, and which attests to the existence of a certain “horizon of expectation,” to use Jauss’ expression, displayed by a certain sector of the French public, turning/returning toward all things Greek and Roman.54

There is also the relationship that contemporary French lyric poetry (along with all the “templates” it offers the translator) has with its own past (rejection, distancing, integration, continuity, rupture, etc.) This relationship will (or will not) allow the translator a certain recourse to earlier forms of lyric poetry, if necessary, to retranslate Sappho.

Then there are all the existing Sappho translations in France, from the 16th century onward. Whether a translator decides to refer to these translations, they are still part of a lineage that makes them a re-translator with everything that this position implies.

And finally, (but is this list actually exhaustive?), there are the contemporary discussions in France (and elsewhere in the West) on the translation of poetry, and on translation in general.

It is not difficult to see that all these parameters constitute the multifarious horizon within which the translator of Sappho is circumscribed.

The notion of horizon is twofold. On the one hand, it designates the-point-from-which the action of the translator is meaningful and can unfold; it plots out the open space of this action. On the other hand, it marks what closes things off, what encloses the translator in a circle of limited possibilities. Linguistic usage bears out this duality: on the one hand, we speak of a “life with no horizon” (without an opening, without perspectives) and, on the other, of someone who has a “narrow horizon.”

By using this concept of horizon, I want to get away from the functionalism and “structuralism” which reduce the translator to a “relay,” entirely determined by social and ideological considerations, and which reduce the real to a series of laws and systems. Instead, to cite Ricoeur and Jauss, I am concerned with horizon, experience, world, action, de- and re-contextualization, all closely linked concepts fundamental to modern hermeneutics, and which, at least in the case of the first four, manifest the same dualities, as concepts that are both objective and subjective, positive and negative, related to finiteness or to infiniteness. These are admittedly not “functional” concepts – they do not

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55 Theatre also plays a role here, inspiring noteworthy retranslations; for example Bruno Bayen, director, writer and translator, who translated and staged Oedipe à Colonne (Bourgois, coll. “Détroits,” Paris, 1987), or Théâtre du Soleil staging Euripides in a refined translation by Mayotte and Jean Bollack. J.-C. Bailly is right when he says, “the horizon is what closes off” (in Le paradis du sens, Bourgois, Paris, 1988, p. 79).

56 I do not deny the existence of these determinants or the value of the analyses exploring them, nor do I contest more generally what Foucault once said, “Everything may be thought within the order of the system, the rule, the norm.” (Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, tr. Unknown, New York, Vintage Books, p. 360.)
lend themselves to the construction of models or formal analyses - but they give a better grasp, I feel, of translation as experience unfolding within dialectic constraints.

Given that the basic axes of our “translatology” include poetics, ethics, and history, it seems quite justified to resort to modern hermeneutics, which is at the same time a reflection on poetics, ethics, history, and politics; in other words, at a certain point, the autonomous development of our translation research converges with hermeneutics, a field that has not, however, touched on questions relating to translation as such (except rather vaguely in the case of Gadamer).

Here, though, we must, of course, avoid doing “philosophy of translation” or getting wholly engaged in that problematic. Translational hermeneutics, like literary hermeneutics, is only a sub-section of philosophical hermeneutics, which in turn is only one “strand” in the modern Babel of philosophy. Other philosophical traditions have also been concerned with translation: Benjamin, Heidegger, Derrida, Serres, Quine, Wittgenstein (in fact, no modern philosophy has avoided the encounter with translation.) Moreover, reflections in psychoanalysis on translation and being-in-languages have been constant since Freud himself. Finally, there is a whole body of work on translation in

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57 This is not the place to develop the link, which is itself historic, between translation and politics in the widest sense: in the Arabic and Christian Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the establishment of nation-states was supported by veritable “translation policies.” It is much the same today, though differently. In regard to such policies in Europe and their possible development, see my article “Les systèmes d’aide publiques à la traduction en Europe,” in Encrages, “Journées européennes de la traduction professionnelle,” no. 17, Université de Paris VIII, 1987, pp. 12-22.


59 Briefly one could cite studies by or references in Lacan, Laplanche, Bettelheim, Granoff, Allouch and the journal Littoral, Bernard Thys, German Garcia, and others. Their analytical writings on translation go from reflections on the “problems” of translating Freud (and more recently, Lacan) to more radical questions on translation itself and human being-in-languages. This psychoanalytic thinking on translation is not transferable, in the sense that it can only be the work of psychoanalysts themselves; and here I would like to point out that The Experience of the Foreign has found attentive readers among psychoanalysts.
linguistics, and in anthropology (Malinowski, Clastres, and many others), though it is less developed.

This then is the third stage in our journey, itself divided into three moments:

- studying the translator’s position;
- studying the translation project;
- studying the horizon of translation.

These three moments do not follow in linear progression. While the analysis of the horizon normally comes first, the translational position and the project can hardly be analyzed separately. As laid out in the circle described above, the analysis of the project itself comprises two phases:

- a first analysis is based on a reading of the translation or translations, which allows the project to appear as though by X-ray, and on everything the translator has said in texts (prefaces, postfaces, articles, interviews, whether it is related to the translation or not: everything

\[60\] In my article “La traduction et ses discours”, op.cit. pp. 83-95, I did not give sufficient importance and space to the part that linguistics has played in the reflection on translation. The piece reveals a certain “anti-linguistic” prejudice, that may be due to what I consider the excessive reputation assigned to George Mounin’s *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction*, a work that is absolutely worthy of interest but not central (not even in the work of Mounin). I now think that linguistics, applied correctly, can supply indispensable information for a rigorous reflection on translation; take the work of Benveniste, for example. More generally, I think that the hermeneutics of translation is not the only discourse on translation that might hold some truth, but rather that the translational dimension concerns all fields of knowledge and all disciplines, and that these have the “right” to deal with it. There is thus substantial reason to study, listen to, and take on what these disciplines and fields of knowledge have to say about translation. It is indeed essential. On the other hand, translation studies [la traductologie] – whether in the hermeneutic, functionalist, or other mode – is the only discourse that deals only with the translational dimension. So, on the one hand there are the various discourses outside translation studies that treat translation from their perspectives, and on the other a set of discourses, called *traductologie, translatologie, science of translation, Übersetzungswissenschaft* – that are often heterogeneous but deal only with translation.
serves as a clue) when such texts exist. If you look hard enough, the translator always has something to say on translation, though it may need some interpreting. Total silence is rare.

the comparative work itself is by definition an analysis of the translation, the original, and the modes used to carry out the project. The truth (and validity) of the project is thus measured in itself and in its product.

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*Analyzing Translation*

This brings us to the concrete and decisive stage of translation criticism: the *grounded* comparison of the original with its translation (grounded in the sense that a number of *bases* have been established from which to effect such a comparison).

*The forms of analysis*

The form that the analysis takes may differ, depending on whether it is concerned with *one* translation (*one* poem, *one* short story, etc.), or with the translation of a *collection* (a collection of poetry, for instance), or with the *entire work* of a translator. In each of these cases, the analysis focuses on *entire pieces* and not on isolated extracts. It is not always easy to distinguish between these approaches since work on *one* translation by *one* translator can hardly be done without also considering other translations of the same *piece*. It is just that each type of criticism will have a different centre of gravity.
The analysis will also differ depending on whether it is concerned with a translation by one translator (in one of the modes mentioned above), or whether it involves comparison with other translations of the same text. Examples are studies of the German translations of *Les fleurs du mal* (by Stefan George or Walter Benjamin, for instance). Even though the basic methodology remains the same, the form of the analysis changes. But even if one is considering only one translation of a work, it is always productive to compare it to other translations, if they exist. The analysis of a translation then becomes the analysis of a re-translation, which is almost always the case anyway. That, at least, is its most productive form, for the analysis of a “first translation” is often quite limited, and can hardly be anything else. This is because every first translation, as Derrida suggests in the note cited above, is imperfect, or rather, impure; it is imperfect because the defectivity inherent in translation and the impact of “norms” are manifested most powerfully in a first translation; it is impure because it is both an introduction and a translation. This is why every “first translation” demands a re-translation (which does not always happen). It is through re-translation, or better, through successive or simultaneous *re-translations*, that translation develops. Not only in the target language and culture, but in other languages and cultures as well. From this perspective, the horizon of a French re-translation is threefold, and it includes:

- previous translations, into French;
- other, contemporaneous translations in French;
- translations into languages other than French.

A translator will often “consult” foreign translations when rendering a work of writing into their own language, even in the case of a first translation. It is enough for them to
know, if only by hearsay, that the work has already been translated somewhere else, for the nature of their work to change. They are not “the first”. I have encountered both situations; when I was translating Yo el Supremo by Roa Bastos I consulted the earlier German translation; for the translation of Schleiermacher’s Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens, the Spanish translation by V. Garcia Yebra was quite helpful. In the case of Robert Arlts’s Los siete locos, we knew that both a German and an Italian version already existed. We were coming “after”. In fact, you can consider any translation that comes after another, regardless if it is in another language, as ipso facto being a re-translation; there are thus many more re-translations than first translations!

It follows that the analysis of a “translation” is almost always the analysis of a re-translation, and though the analysis may centre on one particular translation, it also “calls up” other translations; it must, in fact, do so. It would be hard to imagine a study of Goldschmidt’s French translation of Kafka’s Der Prozeß that did not refer to the earlier one by Vialatte.

There is much to be learned by referring to other translations when analyzing a translated text. The “solutions” that each translator devises (in keeping with their respective project) are so varied and so unexpected, that even as we analyze them, and with no further commentary, we grasp the doubly plural nature of the undertaking: the plurality which is translation, and that of the original work, which is also (infinitely) plural. Such an analysis allows the reader or listener to free themselves of naïve assumptions as well as dogmatism. As a learning experience, this multiplicity of translations for one single text is stimulating, for despite the large number of translations
of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, you realize that *you too* can re-translate them. Many re-translations, especially of poetry, are triggered by the reading of a translation.

Finally, the actual form the criticism takes will vary according to the genre of the works translated, and the particular works under discussion.

*Comparing the Texts*

The comparison operates at four levels.

First, certain selected elements and passages from the original are compared with the corresponding passages of the translation. Then, “problems spots”, parts of the translation that seem either problematic, or particularly accomplished, are compared with the corresponding parts of the original.

Clearly, this work of comparison should involve more than mere mechanical juxtaposition as though they were the parts of a puzzle.

Then, there is also, in most cases, the comparison with other translations.

Finally, the work of translation is considered in terms of its project. This reveals how it was ultimately carried out, and links it to the translator’s subjectivity and their most intimate decisions. Even if projects are almost identical, the translations are always different. This part of the analysis also reveals what the project “resulted in,” what were its “consequences.”

This final comparison should not normally uncover any disparity between the translation project and its outcome. If it does, it should determine the nature, forms, and causes of the disparity. Most often, when there seems to be such disparity, it is due to the
project and its results having been analyzed incompletely – which can easily happen when the project has to be reconstituted after the fact.

But what may appear as a disparity, or as a “gap” between project and translation, is actually due to the defectivity inherent in the act of translation. However logical and coherent a project may be, and whatever the project may be, there is, and there always will be defectivity in a translation. While the absence of a project may unleash all manner of defectivity, the existence of a project is no guarantee against this either.

What may seem to be disparity can also result from the coexistence of contradictory parts of a project. But these can only be latent, or local, contradictions; otherwise there is incoherence, and thus no project. For the very existence of a “project” presupposes “coherence.”

Since defectivity ultimately arises from specific choices, and, more generally, at isolated points of contact with the original (through questionable final decisions, errors, omissions, slips, etc.), it is more appropriate to blame any disparities between the translation and its project on the translator’s subjective decisions than on the project.

Other (minor) disparities can result from translation choices that may, momentarily, violate the project because they are subject to outside influences. This situation is not rare, and is due to interferences from the “dominant” discourse (for instance, when a translator starts unduly clarifying, expanding, or “domesticating”61) which no translator can ever completely avoid. To summarize, any disparities with the translation project are best “explained” as the result of the translator’s limitations. While these moments may be isolated, they can be quite numerous.

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61 Translator’s note: Berman writes “franciser” here, i.e. “to gallicize”. In this English version it makes more sense to me to use the term “domesticate”, which entered English translation studies/criticism in the 1990s.
The style of the comparison

As a piece of writing, the comparison must take into account its communicative function, i.e. its readability. Many translation analyses are difficult to read, and this is due to several factors:

- jargon is used, and the technical nature of the terminology derived from linguistics, semiotics, etc. is left unexplained;
- the language of the original or of a foreign translation is deployed in the analysis;
- the focus on miniscule details of the text results in an analysis that can be so dense it is impenetrable;
- the isolated, highly specialized nature of the analysis limits it to mere comparison and does not open up other questions.

Jargon or highly technical terminology are found equally in the work of Meschonnic, Toury and Brisset, and these elements reduce the readability of the text, though, in the case of these authors, they also ensure a more rigorous discourse. There is nothing negative per se about technical elements in a critical text, along with an apparatus of concepts and new terms, or terms drawn from other disciplines. This has its uses; but it can also defeat the basic objective of criticism, which is to open up a text for a diverse public – one which is neither too broad nor limited to the happy few. It is logical that the act of opening up a text should be open itself. Translation critics should, in one way or another, make explicit the terminology and the concepts they apply, and aim for a less
hermetic discourse (unless, of course, the context and circumstances prevent this). But that is little more than a detail.

The second risk that translation analyses face at this point is more serious: this is the incursion of both massive and fragmented amounts of the language of the original into the critical discourse. This is the language that the readers are supposed not to know. The critic should assume that, even if empirically this is not the case, their first reader is a reader of the translation, in other words, precisely that person who reads the translation because they cannot read the original. In order for the analysis to be both open and productive for this reader, the fragments of the original that are brought into the text must be accompanied by explanations. In such cases, any “re-translations,” if these are used, should aim, not to correct or provide better “solutions,” as in the case of Meschonnic, but to simply make the foreign text understandable.\(^{62}\) The “key words” of a foreign text are often untranslatable; words like self in English,\(^ {63}\) or goce in Spanish, or Sehnsucht in German, and so on; they must be explained, and it is always possible to explain in your own language, in other words, to unpack all the meaningfulness of a word that is fundamental in another language,\(^ {64}\) even if this word has no equivalent, no already established translation.

The third “risk” the analyst may face arises from the very density and detail of their work, an aspect that renders it heavy and fragmented, loose and tightly-woven at once – and which risks making it both unattractive and static -, while the objective of criticism is to engross the reader in a movement that constantly and passionately opens up

\(^{62}\) Etkind does this in his book.


The reader should not only be caught up in the movement of this comparative analysis, but should find this movement transparent, rich, functioning as an opening onto the multiplicity of perspectives and horizons that lie at the very heart of translation. Meschonnic’s dense and detailed comparison of fragments from both the original and the translation is doubtless strategic, and not just an arbitrary series of remarks, and while the “density” of this comparison is offset by its often rather violent tone, a tone that is not amusing, as in the case of Etkind, it still arouses the reader’s attention. Still, once the demonstration gets too long, as in Meschonnic’s admittedly remarkable analysis of the translations of Humboldt, the reader begins to tire. This is not in itself particularly important but it prevents the reader from re-reading, in other words, from accomplishing the act that Meschonnic himself describes in *La rime et la vie* and through which we truly appropriate a text. One should always try to write in such a way that readers want to re-read your text. For the analysis to be transparent, rich, and open to the many “questions” raised by the phenomena of translation, three “procedures” can be suggested that turn the analysis into a true work of writing.

The first is *clarity of expression* (to cite Hölderlin), a clarity, which has nothing to do with the tenets of classicism but entails a number of concrete stylistic requirements.

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65 An accumulation of citations in the foreign language and the translated language may create the impression of a mosaic that is at the same time scattered and dense.


67 Henri Meschonnic, *La rime et la vie*, Verdier, Lagrasse, 1989, p.113: “Reading only starts with re-reading […] as soon as you re-read, and a certain difference appears between the first and the second reading, and each time some new difference comes up, then reading itself begins to appear, through reading itself, as an act that has its own historicity, its own aspect, separate from its object.”

68 The translational dimension raises many dialectical questions/answers that the analysis must address, each in its own unique way. For the dialectics of questions/answers in the literary domain, see Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, tr. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, U of Minnesota Press, 1982, op. cit. pps. 16-62.
for the critic, and demands a certain self-discipline on their part: avoidance of excessive jargon, bombastic syntax, ellipses – to a certain point, or more precisely, to the point where such control does not prejudice the movement of thought, or its rigor.

The second is the constant reflexivity of the discourse, which “opens up” the face to face confrontation between the original and the translation, and is best achieved through digressions. To say that the analysis, which must inevitably be concerned with isolated textual moments, is reflective, means that it must not remain stuck to the two texts concerned (it cannot remain glued only to them, nor can it glue them to one another.) On the contrary, it must continually distance itself in order to shed light on them, and also reflect on its own discourse and assertions.

Thirdly, an analysis must be digressive. This means whenever necessary opening up a series of questions, perspectives, and insights about some textual element, and reflecting on these for a certain, limited, time.\(^7\) To take one example that I will discuss in the second part of this book: when the French translators of John Donne translate the following lines

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth’d must be} \\
\text{To taste whole joyes [...],}
\end{align*}
\]

as

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Il n’est qu’âmes sans chair et que chairs dévêtues}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^6\) “There is nothing that is harder for us to learn than the free use of reason. And yet, I believe, that clarity of expression is originally as natural to us as fire in the sky is to the Greeks.” (my translation).

Another published translation of Hölderlin says: “There is nothing we learn with greater difficulty than how to freely use the national. And, I believe clarity of presentation is as natural to us as fire from heaven is for the Greeks.” Hölderlin, Friedrich. Essays and Letters on Theory. Ed. and tr. Thomas Pfan. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 149. (Translation adapted by LvF.)

\(^7\) In literature, there are forms of unlimited digression that can be intentional or semi-pathological, sometimes both, and that make it both captivating and stifling to read. Thomas de Quincey is a good example. See Eric Dayre, “Thomas de Quincey: la mer n’est pourtant pas si sublime qu’on pourrait d’abord se l’imaginer...” (Sur le vacancier romantique: théorie de la digression), in Po&öie, No. 54, Belin, Paris, 4th trimester 1990.
at least three “questions” arise in regard to the translation “choices” that were made: first of all, the translation of body as “chair” (whereas Donne thematizes the difference between body and flesh in other places); then, the translation of to taste whole joyes as “jouir pleinement” (while joy is a term that is fundamental in Donne’s poetry, and even in the poetry of the West); and finally, though less obviously, the translation of the negative terms unbodied/uncloth’d, which are balanced in Donne’s poem, first by “sans chair,” a weak expression of deprivation, and then by a negative term “dévêtues,” without recreating the parallelism in unbodied/uncloth’d, without even considering the existence of this parallelism, or the frequency of negative terms in Donne (five in the poem in question) and in English poetry and in poetry in general, let alone their importance in colloquial speech as well as in mysticism and philosophy – three “domains” to which Donne’s poetry is linked. This reflection that the translators failed to make, anymore than they considered the terms body and joy, should become part of the analysis. It thus illuminates the passage in the original for the reader – allowing the reader to feel what kinds of poetic “stakes” are involved in such “mere details;” it criticizes the translators’ choices equitably, and as we shall see later, paves the way for other choices, other solutions, other translation projects.
At the same time, these digressions allow the analysis to move away from traditional “textual analysis;” they ensure its scriptural autonomy,\textsuperscript{71} and give it the status of a commentary, or what I will call commentativity.\textsuperscript{72}

The basis of the evaluation

The last problem the translation analyst faces is sizeable, and you may well wonder why it should only come up now. If the analysis must necessarily end in an evaluation of the work of the translator in order to be a real “critique,” thereby fulfilling the expectations of the readers and responding to the nature of every reading of translation, will it not, despite all possible justifications, merely reflect the critic’s own ideas and theories on literature and translation? Unless the evaluation is meant to remain neutral, how can it avoid being dogmatic, or at least privileging one particular notion of translation?

I believe it is possible to avoid this danger by basing any evaluation on double criteria that reflect a certain consensus about what translation is and has been, although this consensus is never total and is much too implicit.

These two criteria are located in the realm of ethics and poetics (in the broadest sense).

The poetic nature of a translation manifests itself in the textual work of a translator who has written text that corresponds more or less closely with the textuality of the original. The fact that the translator must always write text in no way pre-defines

\textsuperscript{71} See Abdelkebir Khatibi, “De bi-langue,” in Écritures, publication of conference proceedings from the University of Paris 7 (UER de Textes & Documents), April 1980, ed. A.-M. Christin, Le Sycomore, pps. 196-204.
\textsuperscript{72} See Antoine Berman, “Critique, commentaire et traduction,”, op.cit., pps. 88-106.
either the mode or the objective of the translation;\textsuperscript{73} translations as diverse as Perrot d’Ablancourt’s version of Lucien (a type of “belle infidèle”), Galland’s Mille et Une Nuits [The Thousand and One Nights], Baudelaire’s version of Poe, Chateaubriand’s Paradis perdu [Paradise Lost], Leyris’ version of Hopkins, Jaccottet’s Odyssee [The Odyssey], Klossowski’s Énéide [Aeneid], and the “untranslated poetry” of Robin have only one thing in common, and that is the work of making text, in the broadest sense and the creation of true literary works. Even if the translator considers their work little more than a “pale reflection” or an “echo” of the “true” text, the aim must always be to create a literary work.

The ethical aspect resides in the respect, or rather in a certain respect for the original. Jean-Yves Masson defines this ethics in a few dense and elegant lines:

Concepts that derive from a reflection on ethics can be applied to translation through the notion of respect. If the translation respects the original, it can, and even must, enter into dialogue with it, confront it, stand up to it squarely. This dimension of respect does not annihilate the person who respects their own respect. The translated text is first and foremost an offering made to the original text.\textsuperscript{74}

In all the translations mentioned above, even in Perrot’s, this respect is present, “confronting,” and “standing up squarely” to the text, and thus positioning itself as an “offering.” But we know that for the translator such respect is the most difficult thing. Masson notes the “prejudice” that considers that translation is “simply” a matter of respecting the text’s alterity, and which thus implies both the annihilation of the translator

\textsuperscript{73} By objective I mean the global objective of the translation: for example, to appropriate Plutarch, gallicize his work, integrate it into the French canon. By mode I mean all the strategies of translation deployed to achieve this result.

\textsuperscript{74} J.-Y. Masson, “Territoire de Babel. Aphorismes,” op.cit. p. 158.
and a “servile” attachment to the text. The ethics of translation are in fact threatened from the opposite quarter, a much more widespread failing: lack of truthfulness, and deceit. This includes all the ways the original can be manipulated, which Meschonnic has detailed, (and more), all of which reflect a profound lack of respect on the part of the translator, not only for the original but also for the readers. It is true that lack of truthfulness is only an issue if such manipulations are carried out in silence. Not to say that you plan to adapt rather than translate, for example, or to do something other than what you have announced, these are the actions that have earned translators the Italian adage traduttore traditore, and should be severely denounced by critics. Translators have all the rights provided they play with an open hand. When Garneau in his version of Macbeth says, “I omitted lines 38 to 47 because they are a jumble)”\(^{76}\) (Act III, Sc. 6), this is quite acceptable; the manipulation was clearly admitted, and the translation thus tends in the direction of an adaptation. When Yves Bonnefoy translates Yeats’ Sailing to

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\(^{75}\) Dolet, like many others, denounces this servility, “Je ne veux laisser ici la folie d’aucuns traducteurs: lesquels au lieu de liberté se submettent à servitude. C’est assavoir, qu’ils sont si sots, qu’ils s’efforcent de rendre ligne pour ligne, ou vers pour vers. Par laquelle erreur ils dépravent souvent le sens de l’auteur, qu’ils traduisent, & n’expriment la grace, & perfection de l’une, & l’autre langue. Tu te garderas diligentement de ce vice: qui ne démontre autre chose, que l’ignorance du traducteur.” From Paul A. Horguelin, Anthologie de la manière de traduire, op.cit. p. 54. “I do not wish to ignore here the folly of any translator, of those who devote themselves to servitude instead of liberty. One should recognize that those who endeavor to translate line by line or verse by verse are fools. This error often leads them to deprave the meaning of the author they are translating, failing as they do to express the grace or completeness of either language. You who would intentionally retain the vice demonstrate nothing but ignorance of translation. Dolet, Étienne, How to Translate Well From One Language to Another, tr. David G. Ross, in Douglas Robinson, Western Translation Theory: from Herodotus to Nietzsche, St. Jerome Publishing, Manchester, UK, 1997, p. 96.

The extreme literalism of some translations, such as those of Francois Fédier, show how contemporary this “prejudice” is, especially when it is accompanied with confusing justifications about “decentring,” the translation as a “report” or as a … “test of the foreign.” J.-Y. Masson has managed to describe this narrow line – in the area of ethics, and not poetics - in a few words. I feel qualified to pronounce on this since I have worked on the problem of literal translation and abandoned the term because of the insurmountable ambiguity it harbours; like it or not, “literal translation” means word for word, line for line, and the destructive attachment to this word for word, line for line process. However, at the same time, literal translation also means attachment to and respect for the letter of the text. Can one completely give up a word that means both the most naïve and the most intimate rapport with the text? \(^{76}\) Brisset, Annie. A Sociocritique of Translation: Theatre and Alterity in Quebec, 1968-1988. Tr. Rosalind Gill and Roger Gannon. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 119.
Byzantium as Byzance, l’autre rive, a translation that is very “Bonnefoy,” there are no grounds for saying that that he is imposing his poetics on Yeats since he has discussed at length both this aspect of translation and the freedom of the translator.77 Perrot d’Ablancourt in no way concealed his omissions, additions, or embellishments: he discussed them openly in his prefaces and notes. Armel Guerne, who translated Novalis’ Fragments in a very explanatory and gallicizing way (one we consider quite unacceptable because of his contempt for the poet’s style, concision and “mystical terminology”), at least openly presented his approach.78

We have tried to lay out the basis for the broadest, most equitable, and most consensual evaluation of translation; the proposed criteria can be applied equally to traditional texts and modern texts, and imply no a priori partisanship in regard to the objectives or modes of translation. Ethics and poetics will guarantee that there is some correspondence or connection79 to the original and its language. I deliberately use the words correspondence/connection here for their polysemy as well as their indeterminacy. “Correspondance” is a fundamental existential and ontological signifier (cf. Baudelaire’s “correspondances”). With “connection” it is also a very concrete signifier, as in railway terminology, where you can “make” or “miss” your connection, or in the vocabulary of epistolary writing, where you maintain a correspondence”, etc. Translation must always “correspond/connect” in the multiplicity of all these meanings.

Ethics and poetics ensure that the processes of creating works take place in the translating language, enlarging, amplifying, and enriching it at every possible level. By

77 Yves Bonnefoy, Quarante-cinq poèmes de Yeats, followed by La Résurrection, translated and introduced by Yves Bonnefoy, Hermann, Paris, 1989, pps. 7-31.
79 Translator’s note: “Connection” works better in English for the second part of Berman’s analogy.
asserting this, we return to the traditional discourse around translation. There is nothing innovative here, and we do not seek to innovate, but the creation of literary work-in-correspondence has always been viewed as the highest purpose of translation. The discussions on literal translation, and on freedom, on source-oriented or target-oriented translation, on the sourciers and the ciblistes, etc. have not been meaningless, but are reminiscent of what Foucault says in Les mots et les choses on the topic of Marxism (and which was shocking at the time):

their debates may well make some waves and cause a few ripples on the surface, but they are nothing more than tempests in a baby’s bathtub […]

What is certain, though, is that these debates can only arise on the basis of this intellectual consensus about translation. This is why we are not presenting a “new concept” of translation. Not only has the Idea of translation been “handed down” to us “once and for all,” but in each era, the Idea is embodied in a specific trope that entirely, or largely, determines our personal “idea” of what translation is. Currently, this trope corresponds to the one fashioned by the German Romanticism of Goethe, Humboldt and Hölderlin, though it long ago lost its “romantic” aspect and became the modern figure of translation. Contemporary translators can only position themselves in some relation to this figure. They can reject it, and translate according to an earlier trope, from Classicism - say, Yourcenar translating from the Greek, for example, - or even from the Middle Ages (limiting themselves to the translation of meanings and terms, as in specialized translation). In any case, whether conscious of their actions or not, translators act in

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80 Les mots et les choses, op cit. p.274.
relation to the modern trope of translation. They can do so: this freedom is also their right.

*The reception of translation*

This aspect of translation criticism, which I shall not study at length, may be independent or integrated into other levels of analysis. It is very important, as is any study of the reception of a work of literature – but may not always be possible in the case of translated works. Reception is geared far more to “foreign works” (in the literary sections of the newspapers, weeklies, in journals and literary magazines, in critical works on foreign authors, and so on) than to actual “translations.” One must first know whether the translation was *perceived* as a translation (was it clearly described as a translation done by X…). If so, then one needs to know whether it was evaluated or analyzed, in other words, see how it *appeared* to the critics, and whether it was *judged* and *presented* as such to the “public.” Generally, not much is written about translations, although things have been improving in the press over the past few years, or are developing. Critics seldom venture to discuss the work of translators in any detail. When they do so, it is usually to attack them. Praise, which is rather rare, is generally as *unfounded* as criticism, in other words, equally unjustified. When I analyzed Klossowki’s translation of *The Aeneid*, I encountered an exception, however; Gallimard’s press file contained over forty articles and studies that came out the same year the translation appeared, in journals and reviews from francophone countries around the world (and even from Spain). There were as many serious articles (by Deguy, Leyris, Brion, Picon, etc.) as there were articles from daily papers. In this case, a study of the translation’s reception was possible – and
productive. But since 1964, no other translation into French has provoked such a response.

*Productive criticism*

This sixth and final stage of our work only really applies when the analysis has dealt with a translation that demands a re-translation, either because it is too defective or unsatisfactory, or because it is outdated. In such a case, the analysis should be a positive, “productive,” form of criticism, in Friedrich Schlegel’s sense when he spoke of

A criticism that would not be so much the commentary on an already existing, finished, and withered literature, as the organon of a literature still to be achieved, to be formed, even to be begun. An organon of literature, therefore a criticism that would not only explain and conserve, but that would be productive itself, at least indirectly…

When applied to translated literature, such productive criticism will indicate, or try to articulate, the *principles* for the re-translation of the work under discussion, and thus the new translation projects. It should not propose *a* new project (that is the work of the translators themselves) or set itself up as a consultant, but it should as rigorously as possible prepare the terrain for a re-translation. The presentation of the principles that might guide a re-translation must be neither too general nor too limited or exclusive, since the very *life* of the translation resides in the unpredictable multiplicity of successive or simultaneous versions of the same work. The appearance of two translations of Yeats – by Bonnefoy and Masson – at almost the same moment, with related translation projects but different results, is a positive event. It is the *copia* of translation.

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With this last stage, and as the reference to Schlegel attests, the analysis of translation becomes *criticism* in the highest possible sense; it achieves fulfillment as a *productive, enriching, critical act*. In the case of the analysis of a “successful” translation, its only objective, as Schlegel said in the text cited by Benjamin, is to

[...] present the presentation anew, [...] give new form to what has already been formed [...]84

that is, demonstrate the excellence of the translation and the reasons for this excellence. The productive power of the analysis resides both in demonstrating to the reader the *positive literary creativity of the translator* and the *exemplary status*85 of the translation itself.

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84 Cited in Berman’s *The Trials of the Foreign*, p. 154
85 A translation being *exemplary* does not mean it is a *model*. 