# IN PRAISE OF OPACITY

# A LITTLE LARGER THAN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE



*Old and enormous are the stars.*
*Old and small is the heart, and it*
*Holds more than all the stars, being,*
*Without space, greater than the vast expanse.*
FROM PESSOA'S RUBA'IYAT
IN THE MANNER OF OMAR KHAYYAM

Much has been made of Fernando Pessoa's last name, which means, in Portuguese, "person." Famous for splitting himself into a multitude of literary alter egos he dubbed "heteronyms"—more than mere pseudonyms, since he endowed them with biographies, religious and political views, and diverse writing styles—Pessoa claimed that he, within that self-generated universe, was the least real person of all. "I've divided all my humanness among the various authors whom I've served as literary executor," explained Pessoa in a passage about the genesis and evolution of his fictional writer friends. "I subsist," he explains further on in the same passage, "as a kind of medium of myself, but I'm less real than the others, less substantial, less personal, and easily influenced by them all." The lack of any certainty about who he is, or even if he is, stands out as a major theme in Pessoa's poetry, and he uses the heteronyms to accentuate his ironic self-detachment. In a prose piece signed by Álvaro de Campos, a dandyish naval engineer and the most provocative of the heteronyms, we read that "Fernando Pessoa, strictly speaking, doesn't exist."

Pessoa's last name, in light of his existential self-doubts, is especially appreciated by the French, since *personne* means not only "person" but also, as in the phrase *Je suis personne*, "nobody." Pessoa, however, was very definitely, or very indefinitely,

*somebody*. And that his last name meant "person" was surely not incidental to his monomaniacal concern with his own personhood, its multiplication and its perpetuation, through his literary oeuvre. I mean that Pessoa, who may or may not have believed in God but who very much believed in destiny and in destiny's symbols and signposts, had his name to live up to. It was, in a slight way, determining.

More determining, of course, was the cultural and family setting in which Pessoa, as a person and an artist, developed. For all his obsession with the inner life, he was keenly aware of how outer circumstances shape and define who we inwardly are. In a prose piece titled "Environment," signed by Campos and published in 1927, he observed: "A place is what it is because of its location. Where we are is who we are." But while he recognized the defining role of environment, Pessoa was by no means a hard-core determinist. In a longer version of the piece just cited, he wrote: "The man who jumped over the wall had a wall to jump over." The wall, being a necessary condition, was in that sense determining, but not compelling, since the man could choose whether or not to jump it.

Pessoa's particular genius is at least partly explained by the two environments that shaped him—Lisbon, where he spent his first seven years and the whole of his adult life, and Durban, South Africa, where he lived during his intellectually and emotionally formative years, from age seven to seventeen. Pessoa's basic personality was no doubt set in place before he moved with his mother from Lisbon to Durban, but his literary output was clearly the product of the meeting, or clash, of those two environments and their different languages, their different cultures. It's as if English culture—and Durban, at the time, was more thoroughly, traditionally English than England itself—were a wall that the young, displaced Pessoa successfully jumped over, while remaining forever and utterly Portuguese.

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa was born in 1888 on June 13, the feast day of St. Anthony and an official holiday in Lisbon, where elaborate festivities are organized in honor of the saint and in honor of the city itself. St. Anthony's day is Lisbon's day, and

no birthday could be more appropriate for Pessoa, who is his native city's quintessential writer. Even more, I would argue, than Kafka is Prague's writer, or Joyce is Dublin's writer. Though Kafka spent his whole life in Prague, the city isn't much felt in his writing, except in the diaries. Joyce, on the other hand, wrote obsessively about the city of his birth, but from memory, having spent very little time there as an adult. Pessoa rarely left Lisbon as an adult, and he wrote about the city both directly (especially in *The Book of Disquiet*) and out of imaginative memory, through the voice of footloose Álvaro de Campos, who on return visits from Britain (where he was supposedly living) produced the nostalgia-imbued "Lisbon Revisited (1923)" and "Lisbon Revisited (1926)," two of his most striking poems.

Both of Pessoa's parents fostered his cultural development. The family lived just opposite Lisbon's opera house, where as a small boy Pessoa may have attended a performance or two with his father, an impassioned music critic as well as a government employee. Pessoa's mother, who was from the Azores, was unusually well educated and taught her son to read and write at a very young age. But Pessoa's early Lisbon years were also, ultimately, marked by loss and separation. One month after his fifth birthday, his father died from tuberculosis, and six months later his baby brother died. Between the two deaths, the family moved to smaller quarters. In the following year Pessoa's mother met her second husband, a naval officer who left Lisbon some months later to take up a new post in Mozambique, and soon thereafter was made the Portuguese consul in Durban, capital of the English colony of Natal.

The prospect of his mother moving to Africa to be with her future husband and of Pessoa perhaps being left behind with relatives prompted his first poem, in July of 1895:

To My Dear Mother

*Here I am in Portugal,*
*In the lands where I was born.*
*However much I love them,*
*I love you even more.*

This quatrain is often cited as a demonstration of Pessoa's filial devotion, but it is also proof of his unusual affection for his homeland—"unusual," since a seven-year-old whose personal relationships are mostly with his immediate family could hardly be expected to have a very clear idea of what a nation is, much less feel emotionally attached to one. Throughout his life Pessoa, though he would criticize the Portuguese for being provincial and revile Portugal's political leaders and its economic system, was fiercely loyal to the country of his birth.

In February of 1896 Pessoa and his mother, married to her second husband by proxy two months earlier, arrived at Durban, where the boy was enrolled in a primary school run by Irish and French nuns. Three years later he entered Durban High School, where he received a demanding, first-rate English education. Pessoa, despite being a foreigner, immediately stood out as a brilliant student, and when he sat for the Matriculation Examination of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, in 1903, he won the Queen Victoria Prize for the best essay in English. There were 899 examinees.

Pessoa's African experience was basically a bookish experience. Though liked well enough by his classmates, he did not participate much in sports or cultivate many friends, and neither the town of Durban nor the surrounding country seems to have left much of an impression on him. Among the hundreds of literary pieces he wrote during his adult life, Africa was never explicitly referred to until the year of his death, when in "*Un Soir à Lima,*" a poem evoking his mother playing the piano at home in Durban, he recalls listening to her from next to the window while he gazed outside at the vast African landscape, lit up by the moon. Pessoa's environment, while in Africa, was mostly that of English literature: Shakespeare and Milton, the romantic poets—Shelley, Byron, Keats, Wordsworth—and Dickens and Carlyle for prose. He also read and admired Poe.

Pessoa very nearly became an English writer. What "saved" him for Portuguese literature was a year-long trip that the family—Pessoa, his mother and stepfather, and several children born to the new couple—made to Portugal in 1901–02. It was there that Pessoa wrote his earliest known poems in Portuguese

(besides the above-mentioned quatrain to his mother), one of which was published in a Lisbon newspaper in 1902. Both in Lisbon and on the island of Terceira, where the family went to visit Pessoa's mother's sister, the budding adolescent, who suddenly had a lot of time with no schoolwork to fill it, invented a series of elaborate, make-believe newspapers containing news, jokes, commentary and poems credited to a team of fictional journalists, several of whom he invented biographies for.

Back in Durban, Pessoa, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, invented Charles Robert Anon, his first alter ego to sign a substantial body of creative writing, including poems, short stories, and essays. This English proto-heteronym was soon joined by the even more prolific Alexander Search, either while Pessoa was still in Durban or else shortly after his definitive return to Lisbon, in the fall of 1905. Search, who likewise wrote in English but was supposedly born in Lisbon on the same day as Pessoa, expressed, like Anon, the intellectual concerns and existential anxieties of a young man on the threshold of becoming an adult. Pessoa, in a certain way, remained forever on that threshold. Instead of getting down to the practical business of living, he continued to wrestle with theoretical problems and the big questions: the existence of God, the meaning of life and the meaning of death, good vs. evil, reality vs. appearance, the idea (is it just an idea?) of love, the limits of consciousness, and so on. All of which was rich fodder for his poetry, thriving as it did on ideas more than on actual experience.

In December of 1904 Pessoa took the Intermediate Arts Examination and received the highest score in Natal, which would have earned him a government grant to study at Oxford or Cambridge, but there was a hitch: applicants had to have spent the four previous years at a Natal school. Because of the trip he made to Lisbon in 1901–02, Pessoa was disqualified. Instead of going to England, the precocious seventeen-year-old returned to Lisbon, where he studied literature at a college for almost two years before dropping out. He earned no academic credits, having missed the first year's exams due to illness, and the second year's exams due to a student strike. While at the college and afterwards, he spent long hours at the National Library

studying Greek and German philosophy, world religions, psychology, and evolutionary thought (cultural and social more than biological). He read a wide range of Western literature, especially in French (Hugo, Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Rollinat, among others), in English, and in Portuguese, his readings in this last language filling a serious lacuna in his South African education.

And he wrote steadily: poetry, fiction, philosophy, sociology, and literary criticism. During his first years back on home turf he occasionally wrote in Portuguese, somewhat more often in French (Pessoa's solitary French heteronym, Jean Seul, emerged in 1907), and most of all in English. Pessoa's ambition, even after he had returned to Lisbon, was to become a great poet in English, and he continued to produce poems in that language up until one week before his death. In 1917 he submitted a book-length collection of verse, *The Mad Fiddler*, to a London publisher who quickly rejected it, but one of the book's poems appeared three years later in the prestigious magazine *Athenaeum*. In 1918 Pessoa self-published two chapbooks of his English poems, with two more following in 1921, and these received guarded praise from the British press. About his *35 Sonnets* (1918), a note in the *Times Literary Supplement* remarked: "Mr. Pessoa's command of English is less remarkable than his knowledge of Elizabethan English. . . . The sonnets . . . will interest many by reason of their ultra-Shakespearean Shakespeareanisms, and their Tudor tricks of repetition, involution and antithesis, no less than by the worth of what they have to say." The *Glasgow Herald* was also complimentary, but noted "a certain crabbedness of speech, due to an imitation of a Shakespearean trick."

Pessoa's English was the English of the books he read, and these included contemporary novelists, such as H. G. Wells, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and W. W. Jacobs, but it lacked the brutal naturalness of a mother tongue. His English, though fluent in the literal sense of that word, was *his* English—a more literary, slightly archaic, and occasionally stilted variety of the language. The poetry he wrote in it is interesting for the ideas and emotions it contains, as well as for its skillful use of poetic devices, but like a piano out of tune or a camera out of focus,

Pessoa's English introduces a slight distortion that mars the overall effect.

The English language provided a modest but dependable income for Pessoa, who made his living by translating and by drafting letters in French and English for Portuguese firms doing business abroad. He also tried to do business himself, mainly as an agent for Portuguese mining companies in search of investment capital from Britain and elsewhere, but it doesn't seem that he ever cut any profitable deals.

Where English best served Pessoa, however, was in the poetry and prose he wrote in Portuguese. If Anglo-American literature influenced *what* Pessoa wrote, the English language itself influenced *how* he wrote. English is more apt than the Romance languages to repeat words—for the sake of clarity, for syntactical straightforwardness, or for a rhetorical effect—and Pessoa followed this usage in Portuguese (in *The Book of Disquiet*, for instance). And whereas Pessoa's English sonnets employ a convoluted syntax derived from his Elizabethan models, modern English seems to have inspired the directness of expression that characterizes the poetry attributed to Alberto Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos.

After Pessoa's first wave of poetic creation in Portuguese, with about a dozen surviving poems dating from when he was thirteen and fourteen, he didn't go back to writing poetry in his native tongue (except for an odd example here and there) until he was close to twenty, three years after returning to Lisbon. By 1911 he was writing perhaps as much poetry in Portuguese as in English, and a year later he published, in an Oporto-based magazine, two large articles on the state of recent Portuguese poetry from, respectively, a "sociological" and a "psychological" point of view. Fernando Pessoa was coming into his own. In 1913 he published his first piece of creative prose, a passage from *The Book of Disquiet*, which he would work on for the rest of his life, and in 1914 he published, in Portuguese, his first poems as an adult. That was the year when four of Portugal's greatest twentieth-century poets were born: Alberto Caeiro, Álvaro de Campos, Ricardo Reis, and Fernando Pessoa himself.

Alberto Caeiro, who emerged from Pessoa's soul in the late winter of 1914, lived in the country, had no formal education, and said he wanted to see things as they are, without any philosophy:

*What matters is to know how to see,*
*To know how to see without thinking,*
*To know how to see when seeing*
*And not think when seeing*
*Nor see when thinking.*

Caeiro claimed to be "the only poet of Nature," but his vision of nature was ideal, his appreciation of it abstract, and his poetry is almost pure philosophy. To *talk about seeing* things directly is tantamount to *no longer seeing* them directly. Caeiro was a moment of poetic nirvana, an impossibility embodied in weightless verses of rare, crystalline beauty. Pessoa called him the Master and reported—twenty years later—that Alberto Caeiro "appeared" in him on March 8, 1914, the "triumphal day" of his life, when he wrote all at once, "in a kind of ecstasy," over thirty of the forty-nine poems that make up *The Keeper of Sheep*, Caeiro's (and Pessoa's) most sublime poetic work. From the manuscripts we know that this account is not quite true, but close to thirty poems were written over the course of two weeks in March of that year, and later poems written in Caeiro's name rarely attain the astonishing clarity of that initial outpouring.

"Born" on April 16, 1889, Caeiro was in various ways a tribute to Pessoa's best friend, the writer Mário de Sá-Carneiro (1890–1916). *Caeiro* is *Carneiro* (the Portuguese word for "sheep") without the *carne*, or "flesh," and Alberto Caeiro, by profession, was an idealized shepherd ("I've never kept sheep / But it's as if I did," he explains at the beginning of *The Keeper of Sheep*). His zodiac sign, naturally enough, was Aries, the ram. Sá-Carneiro committed suicide in 1916, a few weeks before his twenty-sixth birthday, and Alberto Caeiro, according to his "biography," also died young, at age twenty-six, from tu-

berculosis. About one as about the other Pessoa wrote: "Those whom the gods love die young."

Caeiro was initially conceived not just as "Nature's poet" but as a multifaceted modernist, responsible for "intersectionist" poems inspired by cubism and for a planned series of "futurist odes." But the intersectionist poems were ultimately assigned to Pessoa–himself, and the futurist ambitions were transferred to Álvaro de Campos, who came into being in early June of 1914, an offshoot of Alberto Caeiro. The organic relationship between the two is reflected in their similar-sounding names. Not only that, *de campos* means "from the fields": Álvaro came from the fields where Alberto tended his imaginary or metaphorical sheep.

Campos, according to his script, was born in the Algarve in 1890, studied naval engineering in Glasgow, traveled to the Orient, lived for a few years in England, where he courted both young men and women, and finally returned to Portugal, settling down in Lisbon. Campos's early poems, such as the "Triumphal Ode," celebrated machines and the modern age with loud and sustained exuberance. His later poems are shorter and melancholy in tone, but the basic Campos creed remains:

> *To feel everything in every way,*
> *To live everything from all sides,*
> *To be the same thing in all ways possible at the same time,*
> *To realize in oneself all humanity at all moments*
> *In one scattered, extravagant, complete and aloof moment.*

Álvaro de Campos was the most public heteronym, airing his views on political and literary matters in articles and interviews published (apparently with the help of Pessoa) in Lisbon-based magazines. He was fond of contradicting the opinions of his creator, whom he censured for being too rational-minded, with the "mania of believing that things can be proved," and he also enjoyed meddling in Pessoa's social life. He would occasionally turn up in lieu of Fernando at appointments, to the chagrin and ire of those who were not amused by such antics.

Ricardo Reis, the third in the trio of Pessoa's full-fledged heteronyms, also emerged in June of 1914, probably a few days after Álvaro de Campos. A physician and classicist, whom Pessoa defined as a "Greek Horace writing in Portuguese," Reis composed metered, nonrhyming odes about the vanity of life and the need to accept our fate:

*Since we do nothing in this confused world*
*That lasts or that, lasting, is of any worth,*
*And even what's useful for us we lose*
*So soon, with our own lives,*
*Let us prefer the pleasure of the moment*
*To an absurd concern with the future . . .*

Ricardo Reis, according to his creator, was born in 1887 in Oporto, which became the focal point of the surviving monarchist forces after the founding of the Portuguese Republic, in 1910. In 1919 the monarchists took control of Oporto but were soon defeated, at which point Reis, a royalist sympathizer (his last name means "kings"), fled to Brazil, where he presumably lived out the rest of his days, though there is, among the thousands of papers left by Pessoa at his death, an address for Dr. Reis in Peru.

All three heteronyms were expressions of "sensationism," one of the literary movements (like intersectionism, mentioned above) invented by Pessoa and taken up by his modernist writer friends. In a passage signed by Thomas Crosse—a fictional English critic and translator created a year or two after Caeiro, Reis, and Campos—Pessoa neatly differentiated among the three poets and the types of sensationism they represented: "Caeiro has one discipline: things must be felt as they are. Ricardo Reis has another kind of discipline: things must be felt, not only as they are, but also so as to fall in with a certain ideal of classic measure and rule. In Álvaro de Campos things must simply be felt."

The year 1914 also marked a turning point in the poetry of the "orthonym," who signed himself Fernando Pessoa but who was not the same person as the flesh-and-blood Pessoa known to

be living at this time with his Aunt Anica. Álvaro de Campos reports that Pessoa the orthonym (meaning "true name"), after meeting Caeiro in 1914 and hearing him recite *The Keeper of Sheep*, experienced a "spiritual shock" that resulted in his most original work to date.

Beyond all the self-fictionalization, there occurred in fact a profound transformation, or culmination, in Pessoa's literary art. Caeiro, Campos, and Reis were the most visible result of that transformation, for they represented something totally new, but heteronymy as such was no novelty. Besides the aforementioned heteronyms who wrote in English and French, several of the Portuguese journalists invented in Pessoa's adolescence—Dr. Pancrácio and Gaudêncio Nabos—wrote outside the pages of the newspapers where their "careers" began, with Mr. Nabos remaining "active" until at least 1913. Vicente Guedes, the first heteronym to write extensively in Portuguese, was invented already in 1908. Heteronymy, in fact, goes all the way back to Pessoa's infancy, when as a six-year-old he wrote letters to himself signed by a personage called the Chevalier de Pas.

Pessoa described his artistic enterprise as "a drama divided into people instead of into acts." He created, in other words, a series of characters but no play for them to act in. What they played out, in a certain way, was the life that their shy, retiring creator chose not to live in the physical world. "I've created various personalities within," he explained in a passage from *The Book of Disquiet*. "Each of my dreams, as soon as I start dreaming it, is immediately incarnated in another person, who is then the one dreaming it, and not I. To create, I've destroyed myself. . . . I'm the empty stage where various actors act out various plays."

It is no wonder that Pessoa, who considered himself to be "essentially a dramatist," admired Shakespeare and Milton (whose *Paradise Lost* is practically a verse drama) above all other writers. Pessoa published one short, ethereal play, *O Marinheiro* (The Mariner), which he termed a "static drama," and he left a score of unfinished plays, in Portuguese and English, but only the "static" ones, where no action is expected, are of much interest. Like Robert Browning, a poet he much read and

appreciated, Pessoa put his dramatic instincts to better use in his poetry. But he went further than the English poet, for his dramatis personae were more than poetic subjects; he made them into quasi-autonomous poets.

All of this becomes fascinating when we delve deeper into the heteronymic system, which includes an astrologer, a friar, a philosopher, various translators, diarists, a nobleman who commits suicide, and a hunchback girl dying of tuberculosis. Yet I still haven't explained (if it's possible to explain) what caused the explosion in 1914 that transformed Pessoa into a great writer. I have mentioned the vast range of literature and learning that the writer-in-progress absorbed as a schoolboy and as a young man, during and after his abbreviated university career, and to these ingredients one must add the French symbolists (Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Maeterlinck, a Belgian writing in French), whom he read between 1909 and 1912. It was also in this period that Pessoa steeped himself in Portuguese poetry, from its earliest manifestations in thirteenth-century troubadour songs (some of which he translated into English) to contemporary work by Teixeira de Pascoaes (1877–1952) and other *saudosista* poets, who promulgated a nationalistic nostalgia as a spiritual value and a creative energy. But what finally seems to have ignited this complex mixture of linguistic and literary acquisitions, provoking a kind of alchemical reaction, was Walt Whitman, arguably the single greatest influence on Pessoa's poetry and, more generally, on Pessoa the artist.

It is not, as several critics have supposed, that Pessoa was a "son" of the American poet. The Whitmanian influence is clearly discernible in the poetry of Alberto Caeiro and Álvaro de Campos, but neither heteronym is a mere derivative, for they could not have existed without numerous other inputs from Pessoa's rich literary background. Whitman, though, seems to have acted as a key to open up Pessoa and the power of his own personality. *Song of Myself* is a song of the whole cosmos—the cosmos felt and substantiated in the self—and it was this audacity, this chutzpah, that galvanized Pessoa and his heteronymic cosmos, which otherwise might not have been more than a curious psychological phenomenon and stylistic exercise, without real

literary consequence. Pessoa indicated as much in a two-part article, "Notes for a Non-Aristotelian Aesthetics," signed by heteronym Álvaro de Campos and published in 1925. In it the naval engineer advocates an aesthetics based on inner, personal force—the force of personality—rather than on outward beauty and, concomitantly, an art based on sensibility rather than on intelligence. The article ends with the bold affirmation that "up until now . . . there have been only three genuine manifestations of non-Aristotelian art. The first is in the astonishing poems of Walt Whitman; the second is in the even more astonishing poems of my master Caeiro; the third is in the two odes—the 'Triumphal Ode' and the 'Maritime Ode'—that I published in *Orpheu*."

*Orpheu* was a literary review founded in 1915 by Pessoa, his friend Mário de Sá-Carneiro, and other vanguard writers and artists. In its brief life—only two issues were published—it introduced modernism into Portugal. Several members of the group were in contact with the cubists and futurists in Paris, while Pessoa, through his readings, kept abreast of the latest literary currents in Britain, Spain, France, and elsewhere (he obtained copies, for instance, of *Blast*, a vorticist review where Ezra Pound published poems in 1914). *Orpheu* prompted reactions of outrage and ridicule in the press and the literary establishment, but the genius of Pessoa's work was quietly recognized.

In 1917 Pessoa published, in the name of Álvaro de Campos, an inflammatory *Ultimatum* in the one and only issue of *Portugal Futurista*, which was immediately seized from the newsstands by the police. Portugal supported the Allies in the war, and while Pessoa-Campos's ranting manifesto was not pro-German, it heaped as much abuse on the British, French, and other Allied leaders as on Wilhelm II and Bismarck. After lambasting the present age for its "incapacity to create anything great," Campos's manifesto calls for the "abolition of the dogma of personality" and affirms that "no artist should have just one personality," since "the greatest artist will be the one who least defines himself and who writes in the most genres with the most contradictions and discrepancies." The greatest artist, in other words, will have multiple personalities

("fifteen or twenty," states the manifesto farther on), like Fernando Pessoa.

This was not the first time that Pessoa predicted, or promoted, his own artistic greatness. In the articles on Portuguese poetry that he published in 1912 he envisioned the imminent emergence of a "Great Poet" who would overshadow even Luís de Camões, universally regarded as Portugal's premier poet. It is clear, in retrospect, that Pessoa was setting the stage for his own grand entrance (or entrances, thanks to the heteronyms). But personal greatness, in the form of literary immortality, was only part of his dream. In an addendum to those articles, likewise published in 1912, Pessoa also foresaw the dawning, in Portugal, of a "New Renaissance," which would spread from the nation's borders to the rest of Europe, as had the Italian Renaissance centuries earlier.

Pessoa would subsequently recast his vision of a Portuguese Renaissance in the doctrine of the Fifth Empire, a new take on an old prophecy, from the Book of Daniel, chapter 2. The prophet's interpretation of a dream of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, had traditionally been understood as a history of the Western world's great military empires—Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman, with the fifth sometimes being understood as the British Empire. Pessoa, adopting a "spiritual" or cultural point of view, understood the five empires to be those of Greece, Rome, the Christian West, post-Renaissance Europe, and—on the near horizon—Portugal. The idea was that Portugal, through its language and culture, and most especially through its literature, would dominate the rest of Europe. An "imperialism of poets," specifies one of the passages Pessoa wrote on the subject.

Pessoa's nationalism was as constructive as it was ardent. He had no illusions about Portugal's relative backwardness vis-à-vis the rest of Europe, and his goal was to make it catch up. He took the British and French cultures as models to emulate, at least in certain respects, and the English-speaking world as the best outlet for promoting Portuguese culture abroad. Already in 1909 he had planned to publish, in a printing office founded with a small inheritance left by his paternal grandmother, a

long list of classic and contemporary Portuguese works translated into English, as well as a collection of foreign classics, including Shakespeare's complete works, in Portuguese. The Empresa Ibis, as the press was called, was also supposed to publish magazines, political treatises, and scientific works, and—last but not least—numerous works by Pessoa and his heteronyms, in English and in Portuguese.

Pessoa's personal literary ambitions were, as he saw it, in perfect accord with his concern to make Portugal more cosmopolitan and to promote its culture abroad. His writings aimed, either directly or by example, to educate the Portuguese, to make them more European. For their sheer originality and quality (Pessoa was never modest), his writings would convince foreigners of the worth and cleverness of contemporary Portuguese literature. Pessoa, by promoting his own work, felt that he was promoting Portugal. This rationale was perhaps justified, in view of his considerable literary talents, but his entrepreneurial skills were wanting, and economic difficulties forced the Empresa Ibis to close its doors forthwith.

In 1919 Pessoa filled up a notebook with copious plans for an even more grandiose enterprise—tentatively called Cosmópolis, or Olisipo—whose mission would be to foster cultural and commercial exchange between Britain and Portugal. A conglomerate with offices in Lisbon and London, it would provide information for businessmen and travelers, translation and interpretation services, legal advice, publicity and public relations expertise, research and editorial assistance, and a host of other services. The Lisbon branch would also include a subsidiary company for promoting Portuguese products and encouraging new industries, a school offering courses in business training and cultural enrichment, and a publishing house that would publish not only books by contemporary authors but also literary classics in cheap editions, magazines, business directories, and guidebooks.

What finally emerged from all these plans, in 1921, was a small commercial agency and publishing house called Olisipo, which did little more than publish half a dozen books, including two chapbooks of Pessoa's English poems, a re-edition of a poetry collection by the openly homosexual António Botto,

and a booklet by the even more stridently homosexual Raul Lėal, whose *Sodoma Divinizada* (Sodom Deified) did exactly what its title promised. Conservative Catholic students launched a campaign against the "literature of Sodom," the two books were banned, and Pessoa counterattacked, through self-published handbills that mocked the students' pretended morality and fervently defended his authors. This episode reveals another facet of Pessoa's program to shake up and educate Portuguese society and, if possible, European civilization in general, since a book like Raul Leal's would have caused public indignation through most of the continent. Though Pessoa tended to be conservative in his politics, his defense of an individual's right to free expression—even in sexual matters—was far advanced for his time.

In 1924 Pessoa founded *Athena*, whose five issues demonstrated, in exemplary fashion, how his literary self-promotion dovetailed with his concern to elevate Portuguese culture. The magazine, beginning with its title and elegant graphic presentation, was an ideal illustration of the New Renaissance presaged by Pessoa twelve years earlier and a showcase for the Great Poet—Fernando Pessoa—who was supposed to spearhead Portugal's cultural rebirth. It was in this exquisite publication—which included art reproductions, essays signed by Pessoa and by Álvaro de Campos, and translations by Pessoa of inscriptions from *The Greek Anthology*, poems of Edgar Allan Poe, and an excerpt from Walter Pater's essay on da Vinci—that Ricardo Reis and Alberto Caeiro were first revealed to the public, with a large selection of poems by each.

The neo-Greek revival that these two heteronyms were meant to foreshadow—Reis with the atmosphere of antiquity and abundant references to the gods in his odes, Caeiro with the "absolute objectivity" of his clear, direct seeing—was undergirded by "neopaganism," a philosophical and religious system embedded in their poetry and expounded on in theoretical texts signed by Reis and António Mora, a heteronym conceived as a "philosophical follower" of Caeiro.

To wonder if Pessoa believed in the pagan gods whose return he heralded and advocated for Portugal is like wondering if he "believed" in the heteronyms who embodied (especially Caeiro) or espoused (Reis and Mora) the neopagan cause. They and it were part of the same package, or rather, of the same dispersion, since what Pessoa did *not* believe in was unity. "Nature is parts without a whole" was, according to Pessoa, Caeiro's greatest, truest verse (from the forty-seventh poem of *The Keeper of Sheep*), and in a Reis ode he proposed that "as each fountain / Has its own deity, might not each man / Have a god all his own?" The phenomenon of heteronymy reflects Pessoa's conviction that even at the level of the self there is no unity, and if he championed the resurgence of paganism with its myriad gods, it is because he rejected the vision of an ultimate, otherworldly unity propounded by Christianity and other monotheistic religions. Which isn't to say that he did not *desire* unity. In the heteronymy of his fragmented self Pessoa, paradoxically, endeavored to construct a small but complete universe of interrelated parts forming a coherent whole. And his literary creations were all attempts to achieve a moment of unity, an instance of perfection, in the midst of the general chaos of existence.

Perhaps because of his nagging awareness of that chaos, Pessoa, notwithstanding his compulsion to doubt everything, believed or wanted to believe in a spiritual dimension. His religious attitude seems to be well expressed in the opening verses of a poem by Álvaro de Campos, whose later work tended to speak directly from his maker's heart:

*I don't know if the stars rule the world*
*Or if tarot or playing cards*
*Can reveal anything.*
*I don't know if the rolling of dice*
*Can lead to any conclusion.*
*But I also don't know*
*If anything is attained*
*By living the way most people do.*

5 January 1935

Though he didn't know what, if anything, is behind or beyond what we are and see, Pessoa was clearly not interested in "living the way most people do." He spent his entire life searching for the Truth, when he wasn't inventing it, and this search led him into a whole panoply of esoteric disciplines and occult practices. As far as the stars were concerned, he was an avid astrologer, having cast hundreds of horoscopes for friends, family members, historical and cultural figures, and for himself. More significantly, he read dozens of books and wrote hundreds of pages on mysticism, on hermetic traditions such as the Kabbalah, Rosicrucianism, and Freemasonry, and on theosophy, alchemy, numerology, magic, and spiritism.

This interest in the occult combined with Pessoa's patriotic bent to produce what he called "mystical nationalism," expressed in his Fifth Empire doctrine and immortalized in *Mensagem* (Message), a kind of esoteric rewriting of Camões's *The Lusiads*. The only book of Pessoa's Portuguese poetry to see print in his lifetime, in 1934, *Mensagem* was not a mere exercise in nostalgia for Portugal's glory days during the Age of Discovery. Those glory days were to be Portugal's future as well as past destiny, and that future was now, according to the book's final verse: "The Hour has come!"

When we put all the pieces together—heteronymy, the New Renaissance, the Great Poet, the Fifth Empire, mystical nationalism, and neopaganism, with Master Caeiro as its avatar—we arrive at a bizarre ultimate vision: Portugal as the hub of a cultural empire masterminded by Pessoa and radiating out to the rest of Europe, with neopaganism having replaced Catholicism, Alberto Caeiro having replaced Jesus as a new, different kind of Messiah, and perhaps Álvaro de Campos (who always dreamed of being Caesar) sitting on the emperor's throne. Pessoa, surely, did not believe in this vision in any kind of literal way. But he did believe in it poetically, metaphorically. He did stake his life and his poetic name on it. For him and in him, in his world of heteronyms, the New Renaissance, the Fifth Empire, and neopaganism existed. And according to the literary history of twentieth-century Portugal, the Great Poet (as great as, if not greater than, Camões) was indeed born in 1888.

The essence of Pessoa's nationalistic ideal, and the means for its realization, is expressed in a passage from *The Book of Disquiet* that he published in a magazine, in 1931:

> I have no social or political sentiments, and yet there is a way in which I'm highly nationalistic. My nation is the Portuguese language. It wouldn't trouble me at all if Portugal were invaded or occupied, as long as I was left in peace. But I hate with genuine hatred, with the only hatred I feel, not those who write bad Portuguese . . . , but the badly written page itself . . . .

*The Book of Disquiet* was attributed to Bernardo Soares, a fictional bookkeeper whom Pessoa considered a "semi-heteronym," since his personality was similar, though not identical, to his own. Pessoa, writing under his own name, would never have said that he had *no* political sentiments; but for him, as for Soares, the well-written page was his passion, and the well-written page in Portuguese was his nation, his nationalism. Pessoa was in fact actively engaged in the society and the politics of his day, but it was through the written word that he took his stands, which included, in the last year of his life, 1935, a direct affront to the Salazar regime, when it passed a law banning secret societies such as Freemasonry.

And Pessoa's private life? His family relations? His loves? Pessoa maintained close ties with his relatives, living as a young man with various aunts (when he wasn't living in rented rooms), and with his mother and half sister after they returned from South Africa in 1920, following the death of Pessoa's stepfather. And Pessoa was loyal to his friends, mostly literary sorts, whom he met regularly in Lisbon's cafés. But with friends as with family, Pessoa remained resolutely private. He was a good conversationalist, witty, and in his way generous, but his inner life and emotions were channeled into his writing. He had one romantic liaison, which was also largely a written matter: a series of love letters exchanged in 1920 and again in 1929. Pessoa, especially in the second phase of the relationship, played some high literary sport, signing one of his letters as Álvaro de

Campos, while in others he claimed to be going mad. The sweetheart, Ophelia Queiroz, reported when she was much older that Pessoa, whom she met in an office where they both worked, first declared his love with candle in hand and words borrowed from *Hamlet*: "O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers; I have not art to reckon my groans: but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it." Could it have been her name that induced ultraliterary, ever-playful Pessoa to woo her in the first place?

When he was a little boy, literature was Pessoa's playground, and he never really left it. Like a lot of artists, but more so, Fernando Pessoa refused to grow up. He continued to live in a world of make-believe. Or shall we call it a world of make-literature? Believing, mere believing, bored Pessoa. Like a good artist, he harnessed his fertile imagination to make richly expressive things—his stunning poems, his well-turned prose, and his heteronymic nation, which was his greatest poetic act.

To publish Pessoa involves hard decisions, and a certain betrayal of the original. I don't mean the betrayal that comes from the incapacity of one language to replicate another—a problem faced by all translations—but the betrayal deriving from decisions the editor or translator is forced to make, since Pessoa did not. The majority of Pessoa's unpublished writings (and he published relatively little) was left in an unfinished state, which means that 1) they were not fully fleshed out, or 2) they were structurally complete but dotted with blank spaces for words or phrases the author meant to fill in later but never did, or 3) they were marked up with a number of alternate phrasings—in the margins or between the lines—for a final revision that wasn't carried out. Pessoa, an incontinent writer, was too busy turning out new poems and prose pieces to dedicate a great amount of time to revising and polishing. He did revise and polish, but he had difficulty arriving at finished products that satisfied him.

The rough and fragmentary nature of Pessoa's work occurred by default; it was not an aesthetic he cultivated. He would never have published "Salutation to Walt Whitman" or *"Un Soir à Lima"* as sets of more or less connectable fragments, as they appear here. There are probably poems in this collection that Pessoa, finding them imperfect and imperfectible, would have eliminated, had he ever gotten around to preparing his work for publication. And it's impossible to know exactly how poem XXXIII in *The Keeper of Sheep* would have ended, had its author chosen from among the six versions for the concluding verse that litter the manuscript. They're not litter, of course, but only one version can appear in the body of the text; the rest

must be relegated to notes. Hesitancy and multiplicity, which marked Pessoa's psychological existence, also permeate the written universe he left to posterity.

To make matters even more interesting (or "complicated," which to Pessoa's way of thinking was a synonym for "interesting"), the handwriting on the manuscripts sometimes verges on the hieroglyphic. There are passages from "Salutation to Walt Whitman," for example, that no one has yet managed to decipher. In the first large-scale edition of Pessoa's poetry, initiated in the 1940s, misreadings of single words and entire sentences were frequent, and the "Salutation," besides suffering from faulty transcriptions, was presented as a finished poem, for which only a handful of its more than twenty pieces were stitched together to form a false whole that wasn't even logically coherent, let alone editorially honest. Other poems, such as "I want to be free and insincere" (p. 308), were missing one or more stanzas, or the stanzas were out of order.

Greatly improved editions of Pessoa's poetry have been made during the last fifteen years. Since even these have occasional errors of transcription, I have consulted all the available manuscripts of the poems contained in the present volume except for those published by the author himself. Divergent readings are accounted for in the endnotes. Where a manuscript contains more than one version of a word or phrase, I have preferred whichever seemed to me to work best; the other versions are referred to as "variants," and the most significant of these are recorded in the endnotes.

Where the original poem rhymes (generally the case of poems signed by Pessoa himself, occasionally the case of Álvaro de Campos, and almost never the case of Alberto Caeiro or Ricardo Reis), my translation sometimes follows suit, usually in a modified scheme—e.g., one rhyme per four-line stanza instead of two—and with recourse to slant rhymes. Curiously enough, Pessoa's translations of English and American poems into Portuguese scrupulously conserved the rhyme schemes of the original, but when he translated a few stanzas of Álvaro de Campos's "Opiary" into English, he dispensed with rhyme entirely. It's such a waggish poem that I feel it needs rhyme, but I

employed a simpler *abcb* scheme instead of the *abba* pattern of the original.

I have generally respected Pessoa's apparently erratic use of uppercase letters: *gods* in one poem and *Gods* in another, or *universe* and *Universe* occurring in the same poem ("Salutation"). The date of a given poem may refer to its initial composition or to a later revision, with months or sometimes years separating the two. Conjectural dates, based on manuscript and other evidence, appear in brackets, with a question mark indicating that the conjecture is dicey. Poems have been ordered chronologically, as far as possible, except in the case of *The Keeper of Sheep* and *Message*, which the author structured according to other criteria, and in the case of *Faust*, for which very few dates exist.

*Fernando Pessoa & Co.—Selected Poems*, published by Grove Press in 1998, included poems that for the most part had never before appeared in a widely circulating translation into English. There was very little crossover between that volume and the Edwin Honig / Susan Brown *Poems of Pessoa* (1986). My objective in the present *Selected* was to avoid crossover with myself. Though this contains a considerably larger number of poems, it is not an enlargement on *Fernando Pessoa & Co.* In fact only four short poems have here been reprinted (with the gracious permission of Grove Press). As in that earlier work, many of the poems offered in this volume have not heretofore been translated into English, and some have only recently come to light in Portuguese. *"Un Soir à Lima,"* Pessoa's moving and highly autobiographical swan song, remained unpublished in Portuguese until the year 2000, and the second and third of the "Uncollected Poems" of Caeiro (pp. 56–57), as well as a dozen or so of the shorter "orthonymic" poems, were first published only within the last five years.

The reader, in approaching the poems written directly in English, needs to make a slight leap. Pessoa's English, as explained in the Introduction, was fluent but bookish, and his poetic models were Shelley and other English Romantics, or, in the case of his sonnets, Shakespeare.

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This book owes much to Manuela Rocha for clarifying my understanding of certain passages in the Portuguese, and to Amanda Booth and Martin Earl, who both spent many hours reading my translations and making suggestions to improve the phrasing in English. Many other friends and acquaintances—too numerous to name—have encouraged and helped me in large and small, practical and "spiritual" ways. If you are one of them, please accept my deeply felt thanks.

R. Z.

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It is always a problem, in translating works of an analytical nature, to make the choice between leaving certain terms untranslated, leading to a somewhat artificial result, or to attempt to give terms their closest translated equivalent, often resulting in a dilution of the original intent. The problem is compounded in this case by the collective nature of the translations here and the obviously varied decisions made by each translator for each term. That said, the author and the present edition translator of this book have decided that certain terms are too particular to give them English equivalents that, in some cases, may lead to confusion with other terms that would distance them from their original meaning.

As a result, and with all due respect to the original translators—some of whom are credited here in excerpts from the notes they added to their texts to address this very issue—it was decided to leave the following terms untranslated:

VOCABULARY AND TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

*Défilement*: Often translated as "unfolding," "unspooling," or "unreeling." For Thierry Kuntzel, "*[d]éfilement* [ … ] means, in the vocabulary of cinema, 'progression, the sliding of the [film stock] through the gate of a projector'[1] and, in military art, the use of the terrain's accidents or of artificial constructions to conceal one's movements from the enemy. In the unrolling of the film, the [frames] which concern us 'pass through [*(se) défilent*],' hidden from sight: what the spectator retains is only the movement hidden within which they insert themselves [ … ]"[2] Bellour makes use of the indeterminate space between these two meanings as he does with *trame* (see below).

*Dispositif*: The word "*dispositif*" does not have a satisfactory English equivalent, insofar as one must especially avoid the confusion that too often arises when it is translated as "apparatus." The concept of the *appareil de base*, which is correctly translated as "basic apparatus," was introduced in 1970 by Jean-Louis Baudry in his text "Cinéma: effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base," in a context, inspired for the most part by Louis Althusser's work, of a critique of cinema's position as the equivalent both of the Lacanian imaginary—the "mirror stage" and its consequences—and of the subjective idealism associated with the Renaissance system of perspective, given new life by cinema. In 1975, when Baudry used *dispositif* in a cinema studies context (in his text "Le dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité"), his aim was to take into account the cinematic environment as a whole —in a Freudian perspective, without any critical partiality— an environment that fully incorporates the spectator's psyche, and that is considered an equivalent of the dream state. In *Discipline and Punish* (*Surveiller et punir*) that same year, Michel Foucault used the word, demonstrating its growing acceptance, to describe the series of machinic systems for which Bentham's Panopticon was the historical prototype. Bellour makes free use of this double meaning and its consequences to designate the cinematic environment as well as visual and audiovisual installations belonging both to the history of art and that of techniques.

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*Paluche*: "([L]iterally, a slang term for hand). Invented by Jean-Pierre Beauviala, the *paluche* is a black and white video camera about 20 cm long, often compared to a microphone or a flashlight because it is held in the hand. It is known for its sharp contrast and the minimal amount of light that it requires. Because of its size and mobility, the *paluche* becomes an extension of the hand rather than the eye: 'the most unexpected images become possible, challenging the supremacy of the look in the organization of the visible.'"[3]
*Trame*: "*Trame*" is the word used in French for what in technical English is called the "raster," the series of lines making up the image on an analog TV screen, or the grid of pixels on an LCD display. The term had its origins in the world of textiles, referring to the woof or weft of a fabric. From this usage came the connotation with which the French reader will be most familiar: what in English would be called the background, the context of a story, *la trame de l'histoire*. Bellour and Jean-Paul Fargier make use of the parallels between these two meanings in their texts on video art: "De la trame au drame"; "Les aventures de la trame." In Fargier's text, "La vidéo, contre (tout contre) la télévision," he even mentions a work by Dominique Belloir and Guy Le Quérec, "Trame nommée désir" (a play on *Un tramway nommé désir*, the French title for *A Streetcar Named Desire*), so the term lends itself to numerous contextualizations. As a result, the decision was made to maintain the usage of the French term.

About the titles: foreign films are cited using their original titles followed by their English titles if released in the English-speaking world.

About the footnotes: where applicable, the citations of the French texts from the original articles are followed in brackets by the references to the English versions used in the translated articles.

About gender: as the author of this book is a man, and as the spectator described here is primarily considered to be gradually becoming the individual that corresponds to that man, we have opted to keep the masculine personal pronoun to refer to him.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Like all his books from *Human, All Too Human* onwards, *Beyond Good and Evil* got off to a very slow start. It was written in the summer of 1885 and the winter of 1885–6, with additions during the spring of 1886, printed during June and July, and published in August under the imprint of C. G. Naumann, of Leipzig. It was the immediate successor of *Zarathustra*, the first two parts of which had been published in 1883, and the third in 1884, by Ernst Schmeitzner, Chemnitz (now Karl-Marx-Stadt); all three volumes had sold very badly, and the fourth part, which should have appeared in 1885, was spared similar embarrassment by being merely privately printed in forty copies. Nietzsche blamed Schmeitzner for this lack of success, and when *Beyond Good and Evil* was ready he decided on the experiment of becoming his own publisher: he bore the expense of printing the book and Naumann distributed it. His ambition was modest enough: he hoped to cover his costs by selling 300 copies; but by June 1887 only 114 had been sold, and this time Schmeitzner could *not* be blamed. The results were, in fact, precisely what they had been since *Human, All Too Human* appeared in 1878 and only 170 copies were sold in its first year: his books went unread. He saw no further edition of *Beyond Good and Evil*, but in the 1890s there were three editions ('91, '93, '94) and in the present century it has never been out of print. The standard edition, established by the *Gesamtausgabe in Grossoktav* (1894ff), differs from the first edition of 1886 only in the most trifling respects.

*R. J. Hollingdale*

## *Translator's Preface*

Sigmund Freud wrote an elegant, cultivated and largely unprofessorial German and so won himself a readership that extended far beyond narrow academic circles. In this respect he may be compared with Friedrich Nietzsche, who couched his ideas in a powerful, rhythmical prose that appealed to an educated public long before his academic colleagues in Germany began to take him seriously as a philosopher. The comparison is of course inexact: the two had very different styles of writing, and while Freud soon attracted an academic following, which went on increasing until and beyond his death, Nietzsche's grew more slowly and was subject to shifts in the political climate.

A translator naturally wishes to reproduce the effect that the author's text has had on readers of the original. Having previously translated novels and works on history and art history, I knew that most readers would be unfamiliar with the original language and therefore unlikely to question the accuracy of the rendering. Yet in the case of Freud's writings I knew I must never forget that they have the status of 'canonical texts'. By allowing myself the slightest licence I might well mistranslate an important term. English-speaking Freudians may know little or no German, but they can always refer to the Standard Edition and compare the use of certain terms with what they find in a new translation. If there are discrepancies, it follows that one of the translators has falsified the sense, and it will not take long to discover which of the two is guilty, for they are unlikely to conclude that the Master failed to make himself clear.

Psychoanalysis, a Viennese growth, was first described and discussed in German. However, it has for decades been practised in

English-speaking countries and written about in English, and as a result an English psychoanalytic vocabulary has been built up by anglophone practitioners and translators. It is clear that if we were now starting from scratch we might choose different renderings of a number of terms, but in most cases we have little choice left. Being an outsider, I am most concerned about Freudian uses that do violence to what I consider normal English and are apt to displease the general reader. As an example I will take the rendering of the German pair *Lust/Unlust* by 'pleasure/unpleasure'. In English we have 'pain' and 'displeasure' as antonyms of 'pleasure', but neither of these is appropriate in a Freudian context – although Freud often uses *Schmerz* ('pain') in close proximity to *Unlust*. As for 'unpleasure', the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn, 1989, XIX, p. 143) cites uses of the word by Fanny Burney and Coleridge and defines it as 'unpleasantness; (something that causes) displeasure'; the psychoanalytic usage is defined as 'the sense of inner pain, discomfort, or anxiety which results from the blocking of an instinctual impulse by the ego and is the opposite of the affect of pleasure'. Hence, 'unpleasure' seems to be rare and obsolete except in psychoanalytic parlance, where it is an awkward part-by-part rendering of the German *Unlust*. On the other hand, English has the serviceable adjectival pair 'pleasurable/unpleasurable'; I have therefore preferred to render the German pair *Lust/Unlust* by 'pleasurable experience/unpleasurable experience', or some such.

Often discussed, but to little purpose, is the rendering of the key terms *das Ich*, *das Es* and *das Über-Ich*, all of which are made up of German elements and would be translated literally as 'the I', 'the it' and 'the over-I'. Their established English equivalents are 'the ego', 'the id' and 'the super-ego'. It has been objected that, since German makes do with native words, the English translator should not resort to Latin. However, this is to ignore not only the different histories of the two languages (in forming new words, German relies much more on native resources than English does on its Anglo-Saxon heritage), but certain parallels that link them. It is worth noting that in German and English the substantivized pronouns *das Ich* and 'the ego' (as well as 'the self' – I think, for instance, that the German

*Ichgefühl* is best translated by 'sense of self') were in use long before Freud, and that in compounds the German prefix *Über-* corresponds regularly to 'super-'. The new coinages *das Es* and 'the id' fitted in well with the pre-existent phrases *das Ich* and 'the ego' at a time when most English readers had a modicum of Latin (though they may have had no German).

Freud's original title for his last major work was *Das Unglück in der Kultur* ('Unhappiness in Civilization'). He later replaced *Unglück* by *Unbehagen* ('unease, *malaise*, discomfort'), and the title he suggested to Joan Riviere, his translator, was 'Man's Discomfort in Civilization'. She, however, chose to reverse the order of the nouns, change the syntactic relation between them, and render *Unbehagen* by 'discontents', this last choice having perhaps been suggested by Freud's use of *Unzufriedenheit* ('dissatisfaction, discontent') in association with *Unbehagen* at one point in the last section of the work (*ein Unbehagen, eine Unzufriedenheit*: 'an unease, a discontent').

They concurred in using 'civilization' and 'civilized', rather than 'culture' and 'cultural', to render *Kultur* and *kulturell*. Translated into English, the relevant senses of *Kultur*, as defined in *Der Grosse Duden*, the authoritative German dictionary, are (a) 'the totality of the intellectual, artistic and creative achievements of a community as an expression of human progress' and (b) 'the totality of the characteristic intellectual, artistic and creative achievements produced by a particular community in a particular region during a particular period', for example 'Greek culture', 'monastic culture', 'the culture of the Italian Renaissance', 'working-class culture', etc.

In the *OED* (2nd edn, IV, p. 121) *culture* is defined as (a) 'the training, development, and refinement of mind, tastes, and manners; the condition of being thus trained and refined; the intellectual side of civilization' and (b) 'a particular form or type of intellectual development', also as 'the civilization, customs, artistic achievements, etc. of a people, esp. at a certain stage of its development or history'. *Civilization* is defined (III, p. 257) as 'civilized condition or state; a developed or advanced state of human society; a particular stage or a particular type of this'; its opposite being sometimes

'barbarism' or 'barbarity'. Among the collocations cited are 'Egyptian civilization', 'the civilization of Europe', 'the ancient civilizations'. It is clear, then, that the meanings of the English words overlap and that either might have been chosen as an equivalent of the German word. No doubt 'civilization' was preferred because it was the more inclusive term, involving more than mind, taste and manners.

One problem that faced English-speaking psychoanalysts was the translation of the German word *Trieb*, long established in common usage (in the sense of 'impulse') and in philosophical discourse. When Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* is sung in German, Cherubino addresses those who know *die Triebe des Herzens* ('the impulses of the heart'), and Friedrich Schiller invented the notion of the *Spieltrieb*, now known to us as the 'play drive'. From the *OED* (IV, p. 1060) we learn that in the journal *Mind* XIII, p. 165 (1888) it was stated that *Trieb* had 'no good single equivalent in English'. By 1918 the German psychological sense began to be transferred to the pre-existent English word 'drive', which corresponds etymologically almost exactly to the German word. The *OED* defines this new sense of the English word as (a) 'any internal mechanism which sets an organism moving or sustains its activity in a certain direction, or causes it to pursue a certain satisfaction; a motive principle; any tendency to persistent behaviour directed at a goal; esp. one of the recognized physiological tensions or conditions of need, such as hunger and thirst'; (b) 'any type of persistent behaviour or disposition that would lead to the attainment of a certain goal'. The German word derives from the verb *treiben* ('to drive, to impel'), and so an obvious rendering would be 'impulse', but impulses tend to be momentary, not persistent. Freudians at first translated *Trieb* by 'instinct', the relevant senses of which are defined in the *OED* (VII, pp. 1044f.) as 'innate impulse; natural or spontaneous tendency or inclination' and 'an innate propensity in organized beings (esp. in the lower animals), varying with the species, manifesting itself in acts which appear to be rational, but are performed without conscious design or intentional adaptation of means to ends'. This was obviously unsatisfactory, if only because the 'organized beings' in question were human beings, commonly credited with superior

rationality. The derivative adjective *triebhaft* was rendered, not by the established word 'instinctive', current since the seventeenth century, but by the recent derivative 'instinctual', first attested in 1924 and absent from the first edition of the *OED* (1933). At first, then, *Trieb* and *triebhaft* were paralleled by the English pair 'instinct/instinctual', whose first member was subsequently replaced by 'drive', so that now, until a derivative of 'drive' is invented, we shall have to make do with the unmatching pair 'drive/instinctual'.

Freudians will of course continue to read Freud's works either in German or in the English of the Standard Edition. I hope, however, that my versions will make these twentieth-century classics marginally more accessible to the readers of the twenty-first century.

# Translator's preface

A few words about Dostoevsky himself may help the English reader to understand his work.

Dostoevsky was the son of a doctor. His parents were very hard-working and deeply religious people, but so poor that they lived with their five children in only two rooms. The father and mother spent their evenings in reading aloud to their children, generally from books of a serious character.

Though always sickly and delicate Dostoevsky came out third in the final examination of the Petersburg school of Engineering. There he had already begun his first work, 'Poor Folk'.

The story was published by the poet Nekrassov in his review and was received with acclamations. The shy, unknown youth found himself instantly something of a celebrity. A brilliant and successful career seemed to open before him, but those hopes were soon dashed. In 1849 he was arrested.

Though neither by temperament nor conviction a revolutionist, Dostoevsky was one of a little group of young men who met together to read Fourier and Proudhon. He was accused of 'taking part in conversations against the censorship, of reading a letter from Byelinsky to Gogol, and of knowing of the intention to set up a printing press'. Under Nicholas I (that 'stern and just man', as Maurice Baring calls him) this was enough, and he was condemned to death. After eight months' imprisonment he was with twenty-one others taken out to the Semyonovsky Square to be shot. Writing to his brother Mihail, Dostoevsky says: 'They snapped words over our heads, and they made us put on the white shirts worn by persons condemned to death. Thereupon we were bound in threes to stakes, to suffer execution. Being the third in the row, I concluded I had only a few minutes of life before me. I thought of you and your dear ones and I contrived to kiss Plestcheiev and Dourov, who were next to me, and to bid them farewell. Suddenly the troops beat a tattoo, we were unbound, brought back upon the scaffold, and informed that his Majesty had spared us our lives.' The sentence was commuted to hard labour.

One of the prisoners, Grigoryev, went mad as soon as he was untied and never regained his sanity.

The intense suffering of this experience left a lasting stamp on

Dostoevsky's mind. Though his religious temper led him in the end to accept every suffering with resignation and to regard it as a blessing in his own case, he constantly recurs to the subject in his writings. He describes the awful agony of the condemned man and insists on the cruelty of inflicting such torture. Then followed four years of penal servitude, spent in the company of common criminals in Siberia, where he began the 'Dead House', and some years of service in a disciplinary battalion.

He had shown signs of some obscure nervous disease before his arrest and this now developed into violent attacks of epilepsy, from which he suffered for the rest of his life. The fits occurred three or four times a year and were more frequent in periods of great strain. In 1859 he was allowed to return to Russia. He started a journal – 'Vremya', which was forbidden by the Censorship through a misunderstanding. In 1864 he lost his first wife and his brother Mihail. He was in terrible poverty, yet he took upon himself the payment of his brother's debts. He started another journal – 'The Epoch', which within a few months was also prohibited. He was weighed down by debt, his brother's family was dependent on him, he was forced to write at heart-breaking speed, and is said never to have corrected his work. The later years of his life were much softened by the tenderness and devotion of his second wife.

In June 1880 he made his famous speech at the unveiling of the monument to Pushkin in Moscow and he was received with extraordinary demonstrations of love and honour.

A few months later Dostoevsky died. He was followed to the grave by a vast multitude of mourners, who 'gave the hapless man the funeral of a king'. He is still probably the most widely read writer in Russia.

In the words of a Russian critic, who seeks to explain the feeling inspired by Dostoevsky: 'He was one of ourselves, a man of our blood and our bone, but one who has suffered and has seen so much more deeply than we have his insight impresses us as wisdom . . . that wisdom of the heart which we seek that we may learn from it how to live. All his other gifts came to him from nature, this he won for himself and through it he became great.'

## DON QUIXOTE



This translation follows the text of the first editions (Juan de la Cuesta, Madrid, 1604–5 and 1615), as presented in the useful modern edition by Luis Andrés Murillo (Clásicos Castalia: Madrid, 1978) – except in the treatment of the narrations of the loss and of the recovery of Sancho's donkey, in Part I. These passages were omitted from the first edition, through the oversight of either Cervantes or the printers, so that the reader suddenly finds Sancho without his donkey, and later in possession of it again, without any explanations, as Cervantes makes both Sansón Carrasco and Cide Hamete Benengeli remark in part II (chapters III and XXVII). In Cuesta's second edition of Part I (1605), the loss and the recovery are inserted, in chapters XXIII and XXX respectively, but the former is the wrong place, because Sancho continues in possession of his donkey for another two chapters. So following Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch's edition (Rivadeneyra: Argamasilla de Alba, 1863), I have, like several modern editors, inserted the loss where it belongs, in chapter XXV.

There are many other less important inconsistencies in the early editions. Some chapter headings, for example, don't belong to the chapters that they precede. I have left all these, without comment, for readers to spot and ponder on for themselves. Some critics think that they could be one of the games that Cervantes enjoys playing with his readers.

The original, in common with most books of the period, has hardly any paragraphing within chapters, so this has been my own work, often coinciding with Murillo's decisions.

The 1604–5 *Don Quixote* is divided into four parts, but the 1615 text is presented as Part II. When I refer to Part II I mean the 1615 text.

This translation includes everything that appears in the first editions

and that was written by Cervantes, except the formal dedications: the first one seems not to have been his work, and the second is purely conventional.

Just before going to press, the critical edition directed by Francisco Rico (Barcelona: Instituto Cervantes, Crítica, 1998) became available, and its informative footnotes were used to make some important corrections.

*When in 2008 Barbara Wright's translation of Raymond Queneau's* Exercises in Style *was placed first on a list of "The 50 Outstanding Translations From the Last 50 Years" by The Society of Authors (London), New Directions wrote to congratulate the translator, with whom we had enjoyed a fifty-year relationship. (She also translated Queneau's* The Bark Tree, The Blue Flowers, The Flight of Icarus, *and* We Always Treat Women too Well, *as well as Alfred Jarry's* The Supermale *and* Ubu Roi.*)*

*This translation of* Exercises in Style *was first published in London by the Gaberbocchus Press under the direction of Stefan and Franciszka ("Franka") Themerson. New Directions imported copies of the Gaberbocchus edition beginning in 1958, and in 1981 released* Exercises in Style *as a paperbook with an introduction by the translator (which follows this reminiscence).*

*In her reply to our letter applauding such stellar recognition, Barbara Wright explained how she got started as a translator:*

It all goes back to Gaberbocchus and the Themersons. I had a degree in piano accompanying, I was a young mother, and occasionally was able to work as an accompanist, but I knew that I was never going to be a good enough musician, or single-minded enough to make a career out of it, I was too interested in learning about all sorts of other subjects. But I did want a career, although I didn't know in what direction I might have talents.

But Stefan Themerson knew! One day he casually asked me whether I'd like to translate *Ubu roi,* by Jarry, and I immediately realised that I'd love to try. So I did try—and between the three of us we produced a translation we were satisfied with. Then Franka used her artistic genius by inventing a technique whereby I hand-wrote the text on litho-

graphic plates, which she doodled all over before printing the text in very black ink on yellow paper. The College of 'Pataphysics (which we'd never heard of) said it had never seen such an appropriate edition of Jarry, and made us all officers of the roll of honour it had invented. This was round about the 1950s, and just about every well-known person in the avant-garde of all the arts was made a Transcendant Satrap of the College. Queneau was one—and people like Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Prévert, many of the film people, and the Marx Brothers thrown in for good measure! So my Ca-*reer* took off in style, and led to the *Exercises in Style*—and gradually on and up, if I may say so.

The one thing the Themersons were not good at was making money. They despised it—although they knew very well that you couldn't publish without it. So, at least in the first few years, everyone who worked for Gaberbocchus saw it as an honour, and the idea of money or contracts didn't arise. Well, from my point of view, they'd given me a profession; what more did I want? However, gradually, people like JL [James Laughlin, founder of New Directions] wanted to take Gab books over for America—and then we all got contracts *and* money! And for all these decades, I have been amazing people by telling them that starting from nothing, for years and years I have been receiving a healthy dollar cheque from ND every May. *Every year!*

*From a letter to New Directions President Peggy Fox (November 27, 2008). Barbara Wright died March 3, 2009 at the age of 93; her last letter to New Directions was dated January 6, 2009.*

## NOTES FOR THE 1981 AMERICAN PAPERBACK EDITION



Asked whether, to herald this new edition of the *Exercises in Style,* I might have anything to add to my 1958 preface, I was a little surprised to discover that I did indeed have quite a bit to add. By now the book is very well known in many countries and has maybe even become a classic, but literati the whole world over still have a great deal to learn from the simple, mocking, amused linguistic lesson that Queneau here conceals beneath his characteristic humor. Prophets proverbially getting more of a raw deal in their own countries than elsewhere, it is perhaps the French who have learned the least. To take a few categories at random: would anyone like to assert that French art critics, sociologists, or philosophers, have been converted to Queneau's thesis that it is rather a good

idea to write a) unpretentiously, and b) so that we, the vulgar, can understand them?

Since 1947 there have been at least six new editions of this book in France, one of them a superb luxury affair, with each variation printed in a different typographical form invented by Massin, and the whole followed by "33 parallel exercises in style, drawn, painted and sculpted by Carelman." In the introduction to that (1963) edition, Queneau explains that the idea for the *Exercises* came to him in the 1930s, after he and his friend Michel Leiris had attended a concert at the Salle Pleyel where Bach's *The Art of Fugue* had been played. What particularly struck Queneau about this piece was that, although based on a rather slight theme, its variations "proliferated almost to infinity." It would be interesting, he thought, to create a similar work of literature.

By 1942 he had produced the first 12 variations on his "slight theme." These were refused by the puzzled editor of "an extremely distinguished literary review." Undismayed, Queneau kept adding exercises over the years until by 1946 he had composed 99. "I stopped there," he wrote, "judging this quantity to be sufficient; neither too many nor too few: the Greek ideal, you might say." All the later published editions stop at 99 too, though in the most recent (unornamented) edition (1973) there are some no doubt significant expulsions and substitutions, which I'll say more about later. In spite of this self-imposed restriction to 99 for the purposes of the ideal Greek volume, Queneau later published further exercises in various reviews, and in the luxury volume I have mentioned he gives us in an appendix a list of "possible exercises in style"—no less than 124 of them!—ranging from "The Seven Deadly Sins" to a further plethora of abstruse rhetorical terms such as anacoluthon, or anadiplosis. (The conscientious reader of the present volume may well consider, however, that he has already enlarged

his rhetorical vocabulary quite sufficiently. Translating it did wonders for mine.)

The translation is based on the original 1947 French publication, and nothing has been changed from the first English edition. I was given the opportunity to make the odd discreet revision, but I decided that rather than mess about with a word here or there I would prefer to let the whole stand as it is. There are certainly a few words that I would write differently today, but I don't think they stand out too flagrantly. On a rereading, I was at first a little taken aback by, for instance, the expression "teddy boy," but I was quite reassured when I found it in your very own most recent Webster, where it is defined as : "A young British hoodlum who affects Edwardian dress." Maybe the study of what would automatically have been translated differently in 1981 would be an amusing exercise in style in itself.

A few remarks about some of the substitutions (approved by Queneau) in my version. It wouldn't have made any sense to try to reproduce *in English* the way French peasants (in the nineteenth century) spoke French. There wouldn't have been any point, either, in informing Anglo-Saxons about the way Italians tend to pronounce French. In the former case I substituted *West Indian,* and I had the greatest fun in lifting phrases and expressions wholesale from Samuel Selvon's marvelous book *The Lonely Londoners.* In substituting *Opera English* for *Italianismes* I had just as much fun, and it was also in a mild sort of way an act of revenge. I had translated three classical operas. With some reluctance, I might add, because, without *too* much exaggeration, it seemed to me that just about the whole of the libretti consisted in the protagonists declaiming—at great length—either: "Ah, how I suffer!," or: "Ah! I am in raptures!" However, I did them, and apart from superhuman efforts to make the texts singable, I also tried to make them as simple and as little

ecstatic as possible. But this made some of the singers a little uneasy. Unless the phrases were of the order of: "Ah! if to do it he continues . . .," they had the vague feeling that they weren't really poetic. I understood how this had come about when I studied some of the published—and much sung—opera translations of the time. So in *Opera English* I took great—and perhaps sneaky—satisfaction in appropriating whole phrases from these well-worn translations. To take just one example, I swear to you that "His words deep within my heart are sculptured" is stolen, *in toto,* from one of these poetic libretti.

A confession about the *Modern Style* exercise. In 1958, way before the recent revival of "art nouveau," I simply didn't know the strange fact that for this particular *genre* the French use English words—which are translated into English by French words. I refuse to take the entire responsibility for the discrepancy in style here, though, because I consulted Queneau and naively asked him what sort of English "modern style" he thought I should use. He replied that he wasn't qualified to advise me. With hindsight, I now tend to think that he was thus amusing himself hugely at my ignorance. However that may be, I solved (?) the problem by once again having fun, and shoving in all the (modern) journalistic clichés I could think of.

And now a word about Queneau's own substitutions in his 1973 edition. *Reactionary* and *Feminine,* for example, have been expunged, and replaced respectively, and perhaps mysteriously, by *Ensembliste* (which I think has something to do with "set theory"), and *Lipogramme.* A lipogram, as of course you know (although your abovementioned Webster won't help you if you don't), is "a writing from which all words are omitted which contain a particular letter." Here, Queneau has performed the staggering feat of writing a whole exercise without using the letter E—the most boringly characterless of all

letters, because the most common. For *Haiku* he has substituted *Tanka:* "An unrhymed Japanese verse form of five lines containing 5,7,5,7, and 7 syllables respectively—compare HAIKU." In his *Haiku,* Queneau, with his oh so justifiable poetic license, omitted one of the obligatory classical elements—the reference to one of the four seasons. (Naturally, I, in my pedantic way, restored it: "Summer S. . . .") Just in case you might feel cheated not to have his *Tanka,* I'll translate it for you here, for free:

The S bus arrives
A behatted dude gets in
There follows a clash
Later outside Saint-Lazare
There is talk of a button

There's still a whole lot more I'd love to have room to say. Such as that, whereas in my 1958 preface I amateurishly analyzed Queneau's exercises into "roughly 7 different groups," the sumptuous 1963 illustrated edition includes, as a bonus, a real, proper, professional analysis by Dr. Claude Leroy, a psychiatrist, who compares Queneau's "deformation of language" with that obsessionally practised by some psychiatric patients, for reasons best known to their unconscious. This essay is called: "Study on the loss of information and the variation in meaning in Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style.*" And though the doctor ends his study by describing it as "long and weighty, and, like all analyses, destructive. . . ." it is actually of the greatest fascination, and one more pointer to the fact that, however funny we may find Queneau's exercises—and even after all this time, many of them still make even me laugh aloud—there is a great deal more to them than funniness.

Which brings me back to my original preface. Just

two remarks. Firstly: *Le Chiendent,* which I there called "one of the easiest to read of all Queneau's novels," was translated some years ago under the title *The Bark Tree* and, so far as I know, is still available. And lastly: The Paris metro no longer smells of garlic. It is the cleanest, best, and most efficient system of public transport in the whole of my limited experience of the public transport systems of the world.

BARBARA WRIGHT

8

*Ladies and Gentlemen:**

From time to time people politely ask me what I am translating now.

So I say: a book by Raymond Queneau.

They usually react to that in one of 3 different ways.

Either they say: that must be difficult.

Or they say: Who's he?

Or they say: Ah.

Of those three reactions, let's take the third—as the fortune-tellers say.

People say: Ah.

By: Ah—they don't mean quite the same as the people who say: Who's he? They mean that they don't know who Queneau is, but that don't much care whether they know or not. However, since, as I said, this sort of conversation is usually polite, they often go on to enquire: What book of his are you translating?

So I say: *Exercices de Style,*

And then, all over again, they say: Ah.

At this point I usually feel it would be a good idea

* Based on a talk given in the Gaberbocchus Common Room on April 1st 1958.

to say something about this book, *Exercices de Style*, but as it's rather difficult to know where to begin, if I'm not careful I find that my would-be explanation goes rather like this:

"Oh yes, *you* know, it's the story of a chap who gets into a bus and starts a row with another chap who he thinks keeps treading on his toes on purpose, and Queneau repeats the same story 99 times in a different ways—it's terribly good . . . "

So I've come to the conclusion that it is thus my own fault when these people I have been talking about finally stop saying "Ah" and tell me that it's a pity I always do such odd things. It's not that my wooffly description is inaccurate—there are in fact 99 exercises, they all do tell the same story about a minor brawl in a bus, and they are all written in a different style. But to say that much doesn't explain anything, and the *Exercices* and the idea behind them probably do need some explanation.

In essaying an explanation, or rather, perhaps, a proper description, I have an ally in this gramophone record, which has recently been made in France, of 22 of the 99 *exercices*. It is declaimed and sung by *les Frères Jacques*—who have been likened to the English Goons. You will hear that the record is very funny. I said it was an ally, yet on the other hand it may be an enemy, because it may lead you to think that the *exercices* are just funny and nothing else. I should like to return to this point later, but first I want to say something about the author of the *Exercices*.

Raymond Queneau has written all the books you see here on the table—and others which I haven't been able to get hold of. He is a poet—not just a writer of poetry, but a poet in the wider sense. He is also a scholar and mathematician. He is a member of the

Académie Goncourt (and they have only 10 members, in comparison with the 40 of the Académie Française), and he is one of the top boys of the publishing house of Gallimard. But he is a kind of writer who tends to puzzle people in this country because of his breadth and range—you can't classify him. He is one of the most influential and esteemed people in French literature—but he can write a poem like this:

Ce soir
si j'écrivais un poème
pour la postérité?

fichtre
la belle idée

je me sens sûr de moi
j'y vas
et

à
la
postérité
j'y dis merde et remerde
et reremerde

drôlement feintée
la postérité
qui attendait son poème

ah mais

Queneau, you see, is not limited, and he doesn't take himself over-seriously. He's too wise. He doesn't limit himself to being either serious or frivolous—or

even, I might say, to being either a scientist or an artist. He's both. He uses everything that he finds in life for his poetry—and even things that he doesn't find in life, such as a mathematically disappearing dog, or a proud trojan horse who sits in a French bar and drinks gin fizzes with silly humans.* And all this is, I think, the reason why you find people in England who don't know who Queneau is. Two of his novels were published here, by John Lehmann, in English translations, about 10 years ago. They were, I think, not very successful here. Even though the critics thought they were writing favourably about them. I was looking through the reviews of one of them—*Pierrot*—the other day, and this brings me back to what I was saying about Queneau's wit and lightness of touch being possibly misleading—the book's very brilliance seemed to blind the critics to the fact that it was *about* anything. The *New Statesman* wrote: "*Pierrot* is *simply* a light-hearted little fantasy . . .", and *Time & Tide* came down to Parish Magazine style: "This novel is of the kind called 'so very french'. It is all very unassuming and amusing, and most of us enjoy this kind of fun." According to the current way of thinking (or not-thinking), it seems that if we are to enjoy anything then we must not have to think about it, and, conversely, if we are to think about anything, then we mustn't enjoy it. This is a calamitous and idiotic division of functions.

And this, I think, brings me to the *Exercices de Style*. Queneau is a linguist, and he also has a passionate interest in the French language. He has given a lot of thought to one aspect of it—the French language as *actually spoken*. *In Bâtons, Chiffres et Lettres*, he

* *The Trojan Horse & At the Edge of the Forest*. Gaberbocchus

writes: "I consider spoken French to be a different language, a very different language, from written French." And in the same book, he says: "I came to realise that modern written French must free itself from the conventions which still hem it in, (conventions of style, spelling and vocabulary) and then it will soar like a butterfly away from the silk cocoon spun by the grammarians of the 16th century and the poets of the 17th century. It also seemed to me that the first statement of this new language should be made not by describing some popular event in a novel (because people could mistake one's intentions), but, in the same way as the men of the 16th century used the modern languages instead of latin for writing their theological or philosophical treatises, to put some philosophical dissertation into spoken French."

Queneau did in fact "put some philosophical dissertation into spoken French"—Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode*. At least, he says that it was with this idea in mind that he started to write "something which later became a novel called *le Chiendent*." I won't say anything about the correspondence between it and *le Chiendent* now, but this novel, *le Chiendent*, is one of the easiest to read of all Queneau's novels, and also one of the most touching and thought-provoking. It is also almost farcically funny in parts.

This research into language is, of course, carried on in the *Exercices*. You get plenty of variations of the way different people actually speak—casual, noble, slang, feminine, etc. But you may have noticed that the exercise on p.129 starts like this:

JO UN VE UR MI RS SU DI AP RL TE

(that's in French, by the way. The English translation naturally looks quite different:

ED ON TO AY RD WA ID SM YO DA HE

Now please don't think that I'm going to try to persuade you that this is Queneau's idea of how anyone speaks French. You can't really discover 99 different ways of speaking one language. Well, perhaps you can, but you don't find them in the *Exercices*. I have analysed the 99 variations into roughly 7 different groups. The first—different types of speech. Next, different types of written prose. These include the style of a publisher's blurb, of an official letter, the "philosophic" style, and so on. Then there are 5 different poetry styles, and 8 exercises which are character sketches through language—reactionary, biased, abusive, etc. Fifthly there is a large group which experiments with different grammatical and rhetorical forms; sixthly, those which come more or less under the heading of *jargon*, and lastly, all sorts of odds and ends whose classification I'm still arguing about. This group includes the one quoted above, which is called: *permutations by groups of 2, 3, 4 and 5 letters*. Under *jargon* you get, for instance, one variation which tells the story in mathematical terms, one using as many botanical terms as possible, one using greek roots to make new words, and one in dog latin.

All this could be so clever that it could be quite ghastly and perfectly unreadable. But in fact I saw somewhere that *Exercices de Style* is Queneau's best seller among the French public. I have already intimated that however serious his purpose, Queneau is much more likely to write a farce than a pedantic treatise. His purpose here, in the *Exercices*, is, I think, a profound exploration into the possibilities of language. It is an experiment in the philosophy of language. He pushes language around in a multiplicity of directions to see what will happen. As he is a virtuoso of language and likes to amuse himself and

his readers, he pushes it a bit further than might appear necessary—he exaggerates the various styles into a reductio ad absurdum—ad lib., ad inf., and sometimes. —the final joke—ad nauseam.

I am saying a lot about what *I* think, but Queneau himself has had something to say about it. In a published conversation with Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, he says: "In *les Exercices de Style*, I started from a real incident, and in the first place I told it 12 times in different ways. Then a year later I did another 12, and finally there were 99. People have tried to see it as an attempt to demolish literature—that was not at all my intention. In any case my intention was merely to produce some exercises; the finished product may possibly act as a kind of rust-remover to literature, help to rid it of some of its scabs. If I have been able to contribute a little to this, then I am very proud, especially if I have done it without boring the reader too much."

That Queneau *has* done this without boring the reader *at all*, is perhaps the most amazing thing about his book. Imagine how boring it might have been—99 times the same story, and a story which has no point, anyway! I have spent more than a year, off and on, on the English version of the *Exercices*, but I haven't yet found any boredom attached to it. The more I go into each variation, the more I see in it. And the point about the original story having *no* point, is one of *the* points of the book. So much knowledge and comment on life is put into this pointless story. It's also important that it should be the same story all the time. Anybody can—and automatically does—describe different things in different ways. You don't speak poetically to the man in the ticket office at Victoria when you want to ask him for "two third

returns, Brighton." Nor, as Jesperson points out, do you say to him: "Would you please sell me two third-class tickets from London to Brighton and back again, and I will pay you the usual fare for such tickets." Queneau's tour-de-force lies in the fact that the simplicity and banality of the material he starts from gives birth to so much.

This brings me to the last thing I want to say, which is about the English version. Queneau told me that the *Exercices* was one of his books which he would like to be translated—(he didn't suggest by whom). At the time I thought he was crazy. I thought that the book was an experiment with the French language as such, and therefore as untranslatable as the smell of garlic in the Paris metro. But I was wrong. In the same way as the story *as such* doesn't matter, the particular language it is written in doesn't matter as such. Perhaps the book is an exercise in communication patterns, whatever their linguistic sounds. And it seems to me that Queneau's attitude of enquiry and examination can, and perhaps should?—be applied to every language, and that is what I have tried to achieve with the English version.

B. W.

# *A Note on the Translation*

(from *Collected Fictions*)

The first known English translation of a work of fiction by the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges appeared in the August 1948 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, but although seven or eight more translations appeared in "little magazines" and anthologies during the fifties, and although Borges clearly had his champions in the literary establishment, it was not until 1962, fourteen years after that first appearance, that a book-length collection of fiction appeared in English.

The two volumes of stories that appeared in that *annus mirabilis*—one from Grove Press, edited by Anthony Kerrigan, and the other from New Directions, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby—caused an impact that was immediate and overwhelming. John Updike, John Barth, Anthony Burgess, and countless other writers and critics have eloquently and emphatically attested to the unsettling yet liberating effect that Jorge Luis Borges' work had on their vision of the way literature was thenceforth to be done. Reading those stories, writers and critics encountered a disturbingly *other* writer (Borges seemed, sometimes, to come from a place even more distant than Argentina, another literary planet), transported into their ken by translations, who took the detective story and turned it into metaphysics, who took fantasy writing and made it, with its questioning and reinventing of everyday reality, central to the craft of fiction. Even as early as 1933, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, editor of the influential *Nouvelle Revue Française*, returning to France after visiting

Argentina, is famously reported to have said, *"Borges vaut le voyage"*; now, thirty years later, readers didn't have to make the long, hard (though deliciously exotic) journey into Spanish—Borges had been brought to them, and indeed he soon was being paraded through England and the United States like one of those New World indigenes taken back, captives, by Columbus or Sir Walter Raleigh, to captivate the Old World's imagination.

But while for many readers of these translations Borges was a new writer appearing as though out of nowhere, the truth was that by the time we were reading Borges for the first time in English, he had been writing for forty years or more, long enough to have become a self-conscious, self-possessed, and self-*critical* master of the craft.

The reader of the forewords to the fictions will note that Borges is forever commenting on the style of the stories or the entire volume, preparing the reader for what is to come stylistically as well as thematically. More than once he draws our attention to the "plain style" of the pieces, in contrast to his earlier "baroque". And he is right: Borges' prose style is characterized by a determined economy of resources in which every word is weighted, every word (every mark of punctuation) "tells." It is a quiet style, whose effects are achieved not with bombast or pomp, but rather with a single exploding word or phrase, dropped almost as though offhandedly into a quiet sentence: "He examined his wounds and saw, without astonishment, that they had healed." This laconic detail ("without astonishment"), coming at the very beginning of "The Circular Ruins," will probably only at the end of the story be recalled by the reader, who will, retrospectively and somewhat abashedly, see that it changes *everything* in the story; it is quintessential Borges.

Quietness, subtlety, a laconic terseness—these are the marks of Borges' style. It is a style that has often been called intellectual, and indeed it is dense with allusion—to literature, to philosophy, to religion or theology, to myth, to the culture and history of

*A Note on the Translation*

Buenos Aires and Argentina and the Southern Cone of South America, to the other contexts in which his words may have appeared. But it is also a simple style: Borges' sentences are almost invariably classical in their symmetry, in their balance. Borges likes parallelism, chiasmus, subtle repetitions-with-variations; his only indulgence in "shocking" the reader (an effect he repudiated) may be the "Miltonian displacement of adjectives" to which he alludes in his foreword to *The Maker.*

Another clear mark of Borges' prose is its employment of certain words with, or for, their etymological value. Again, this is an adjectival device, and it is perhaps the technique that is most unsettling to the reader. One of the most famous opening lines in Spanish literature is this: *Nadie lo vio desembarcar en la unánime noche.* "No one saw him slip from the boat in the unanimous night." What an odd adjective, "unanimous." It is so odd, in fact, that other translations have not allowed it. But it is just as odd in Spanish, and it clearly responds to Borges' intention, explicitly expressed in such fictions as "The Immortal," to let the Latin root govern the Spanish (and, by extension, English) usage. There is, for instance, a "splendid" woman: Her red hair glows. If the translator strives for similarity of effect in the translation (as I have), then he or she cannot, I think, avoid using this technique—which is a technique that Borges' beloved Emerson and de Quincey and Sir Thomas Browne also used with great virtuosity.

Borges himself was a translator of some note, and in addition to the translations per se that he left to Spanish culture—a number of German lyrics, Faulkner, Woolf, Whitman, Melville, Carlyle, Swedenborg, and others—he left at least three essays on the act of translation itself. Two of these, I have found, are extraordinarily liberating to the translator. In "Versions of Homer" ("Las versiones homéricas," 1932), Borges makes it unmistakably clear that every translation is a "version"—not *the* translation of Homer (or any other author) but *a* translation, one in a never-ending series, at

least an infinite *possible* series. The very idea of *the* (definitive) translation is misguided, Borges tells us; there are only drafts, approximations—*versions*, as he insists on calling them. He chides us: "The concept of 'definitive text' is appealed to only by religion, or by weariness." Borges makes the point even more emphatically in his later essay "The Translators of the 1001 Nights" ("Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*," 1935).

If my count is correct, at least seventeen translators have preceded me in translating one or more of the fictions of Jorge Luis Borges. In most translator's notes, the translator would feel obliged to justify his or her new translation of a classic, to tell the potential reader of this new *version* that the shortcomings and errors of those seventeen or so prior translations have been met and conquered, as though they were enemies. Borges has tried in his essays to teach us, however, that we should not translate "against" our predecessors; a new translation is always justified by the new voice given the old work, by the new life in a new land that the translation confers on it, by the "shock of the new" that both old and new readers will experience from this inevitably new (or renewed) work. What Borges teaches is that we should simply commend the translation to the reader, with the hope that the reader will find in it a literary experience that is rich and moving. I have listened to Borges' advice as I have listened to Borges' fictions, and I—like the translators who have preceded me—have rendered Borges in the style that I hear when I listen to him. I think that the reader of my version will hear something of the genius of his storytelling and his style. For those who wish to read Borges as Borges wrote Borges, there is always *le voyage à l'espagnol.*

The text that the Borges estate specified to be used for this new translation is the three-volume *Obras completas*, published by Emecé Editores in 1989.

In producing this translation, it has not been our intention to

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produce an annotated or scholarly edition of Borges, but rather a "reader's edition." Thus, bibliographical information (which is often confused or terribly complex even in the most reliable of cases) has not been included except in a couple of clear instances, nor have we taken variants into account in any way; the Borges Foundation is reported to be working on a fully annotated, bibliographically reasoned variorum, and scholars of course can go to the several bibliographies and many other references that now exist. I have, however, tried to provide the Anglophone reader with at least a modicum of the general knowledge of the history, literature, and culture of Argentina and the Southern Cone of South America that a Hispanophone reader of the fictions, growing up in that culture, would inevitably have. To that end, asterisks have been inserted into the text of the fictions, tied to corresponding notes at the back of the book. (The notes often cite sources where interested readers can find further information.)

One particularly thorny translation decision that had to be made involved *A Universal History of Iniquity.* This volume is purportedly a series of biographies of reprehensible evildoers, and as biography, the book might be expected to rely greatly upon "sources" of one sort or another—as indeed Borges' "Index of Sources" seems to imply. In his preface to the 1954 reprinting of the volume, however, Borges acknowledges the "fictive" nature of his stories: This is a case, he says, of "changing and distorting (sometimes without æsthetic justification) the stories of other men" to produce a work singularly his own. This sui generis use of sources, most of which were in English, presents the translator with something of a challenge: to translate Borges even while Borges is cribbing from, translating, and "changing and distorting" other writers' stories. The method I have chosen to employ is to go to the sources Borges names, to see the ground upon which those changes and distortions were wrought; where Borges is clearly translating phrases, sentences, or even larger pieces of text, I have used the English of the original source. Thus,

the New York gangsters in "Monk Eastman" speak as Asbury quotes them, not as I might have translated Borges' Spanish into English had I been translating in the usual sense of the word; back-translating Borges' translation did not seem to make much sense. But even while returning to the sources, I have made no attempt, either in the text or in my notes, to "correct" Borges; he has changed names (or their spellings), dates, numbers, locations, etc., as his literary vision led him to, but the tracing of those "deviations" is a matter which the editors and I have decided should be left to critics and scholarly publications.

More often than one would imagine, Borges' characters are murderers, knife fighters, throat slitters, liars, evil or casually violent men and women—and of course many of them "live" in a time different from our own. They sometimes use language that is strong, and that today may well be offensive—words denoting membership in ethnic and racial groups, for example. In the Hispanic culture, however, some of these expressions can be, and often are, used as terms of endearment—*negro/negra* and *chino/china* come at once to mind. (I am not claiming that Argentina is free of bigotry; Borges chronicles that, too.) All this is to explain a decision as to my translation of certain terms—specifically *rusito* (literally "little Russian," but with the force of "Jew," "sheeny"), *pardo/parda* (literally "dark mulatto," "black-skinned"), and *gringo* (meaning Italian immigrants: "wops," etc.)—that Borges uses in his fictions. I have chosen to use the word "sheeny" for *rusito* and the word "wop" for *gringo* because in the stories in which these words appear, there is an intention to be offensive—a *character's* intention, not Borges'. I have also chosen to use the word "nigger" for *pardo/parda.* This decision is taken not without considerable soul-searching, but I feel there is historical justification for it. In the May 20, 1996, edition of *The New Yorker* magazine, p. 63, the respected historian and cultural critic Jonathan Raban noted the existence of a nineteenth-century "Nigger Bob's saloon," where, out on the Western frontier, husbands would await the arrival of

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the train bringing their wives from the East. Thus, when a character in one of Borges' stories says, "I knew I could count on you, old nigger," one can almost hear the slight tenderness, or respect, in the voice, even if, at the same time, one winces. In my view, it is not the translator's place to (as Borges put it) "soften or mitigate" these words. Therefore, I have translated the epithets with the words I believe would have been used in English—in the United States, say—at the time the stories take place.

The footnotes that appear throughout the text of the stories in the *Collected Fictions* are Borges' own, even when they say "Ed."

This translation commemorates the centenary of Borges' birth in 1899; I wish it also to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first appearance of Borges in English, in 1948. It is to all translators, then, Borges included, that this translation is—unanimously—dedicated.

*Andrew Hurley*
*San Juan, Puerto Rico*
*June 1998*

Serres the polymath and Renaissance man has the European literary, artistic and philosophical traditions at his command, as he does the world of science. The full extent of his intellectual reach is displayed in *The Five Senses*. His philosophical familiars are the ancient Greeks, Descartes and Leibniz are his bedrock; the Bible, the Catholic Mass and liturgy figure prominently; Montaigne and Pascal haunt the text, Stendhal, Diderot and Verne are more substantial apparitions. What is more, mythology, fables and fairy tales are deployed with the same analytical seriousness as their more disciplined conceptual counterparts. The text references the European visual arts, architecture and music. In short, the reader is left wondering if there is anything beyond the range of Serres's erudition. In *The Five Senses* we read, for instance, about *The Lady and the Unicorn*, Bonnard's veiled figures, Cinderella and her slipper, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice . . . And at the heart of the book, in a sparkling analysis of the root meanings of sapience and sagacity, Serres conjures Don Juan, the Last Supper and Plato's *Symposium* out of the contemplation of a fine Château d'Yquem.

This mingled patchwork is isomorphic with Serres's overall philosophical project, which seeks to establish a topology, rather than a geometry, of knowledge. The manner in which, here as elsewhere in his writings, his analysis moves from the physical sciences to fable, for instance, or from philosophy to myth, stems from his belief that to operate within one field of knowledge alone is to remain landlocked. An intolerable situation for a sailor whose preferred navigational metaphor is the North-West Passage.

Serres, who was indeed a naval officer in his youth, is most easily categorized as a philosopher, although the label is one which sits ill with him,

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as the reader will discover. Nonetheless, this book presents as a philosophical text – its subtitle is *A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. It thus awakens certain expectations, such as the orderly and logical development of an argument leading towards certain clear-cut conclusions. However Serres's project is to subvert philosophical discourse through a critique of the Cartesian world view. He does this on the one hand by arguing against the dualistic tradition and propounding the importance of empiricism and the senses as a means to knowledge, and on the other through the nature of his discourse where the association of ideas rather than logical development becomes the motor of his text. Like the human body he describes in it, Serres's text is a hybrid; and its connectivity and cohesion is as much literary as philosophical.

The book's five chapters do not represent a linear progress through the senses. 'How could we see the compact capacity of the senses,' he asks, 'if we separated them?' As the book develops its argument the reader quickly understands that no such separation can be possible. The hybrid body, basted together according to circumstance, is lovingly embraced, and turned inside out.

> The skin hangs from the wall as if it were a flayed man: turn over the remains, you will touch the nerve threads and knots, a whole uprooted hanging jungle, like the inside wiring of an automaton. The five or six senses are entwined and attached, above and below the fabric that they form by weaving or splicing, plaits, balls, joins, planes, loops and bindings, slip or fixed knots.

This image of the receptive body (subtle, as he calls it – and the careful reader will seek out the etymology of that adjective in order to understand why) displays his preference for topology over geometry, confusion over analysis (two of the terms he picks over at length), for folds, tangles, pleats and knots. It further demonstrates the impossibility of treating the five senses in separate chapters – how could one do so, if they are indeed as inseparable as Serres would have us believe?

But this one image, which is emblematic of his entire philosophical project and condenses how seriously he takes the question of interdisciplinarity, also embodies his poetics. Intermingling and confusion inform his work structurally and stylistically, globally and locally. They underwrite the style of his text, in which 'technical' philosophical language alternates and blends with the poetic and the lyrical; where he constantly moves between registers; where the reader is by turns lulled, seduced and challenged. Serres's contention is that music is the substratum of all meaningful language and his text is structured musically in terms of

themes and variations, counterpoint and fugue. The reader will need to adapt to the rhythmic play of the text, which is indissociable from the conceptual moves it makes and to which, we hope, our translation has done justice.

The translation of *Les cinq sens* has been a long time coming. In the more than twenty years since its publication Serres has achieved a prominence, both in France and internationally, which he did not have in 1985. In France his appearances on television in the nineties turned him into something of an overnight media sensation. Suddenly, members of the general public were turning up to his Saturday morning seminars, asking questions and receiving the same careful, pedagogical replies they had come to expect from his on-screen persona.

We can trace the lightening of his prose style back to the same period. His early theoretical output, dense, academic and disciplined, evolved into something more lyrical and discursive. That evolution continued throughout the following decade, to the point where Serres's output today – aerated, playful, often supplemented with illustrations and clearly pitched to a more general readership – hardly seems the work of the same writer. His media presence continues also: on Sunday evenings now he presents a five-minute long radio programme on Radio France, in the form of a brief, topical excursus, often drawing on his writings and delivered in digestible, conversational style with the host Michel Polacco.

It might be said that *Les cinq sens* belongs to his middle period. Frequently lyrical and rhapsodic, it nonetheless owes much to his early work in its density and complexity. Like those earlier works, it has been waiting a very long time to be translated into English.

As it turns out, its transition to English is timely. When it was first published, Serres was criticized for his linguistic waywardness, in particular for his use of neologisms. In Chapter 2, for example, the recurring opposition between soft and hard leads Serres to contrast 'douceur logicielle et dureté matérielle'. Our now widely-accepted 'software' and 'hardware' lend themselves perfectly and unproblematically to the translation of Serres's analysis, but at the time of publication 'logiciel' ('software') was sufficiently newly- minted to raise eyebrows. Similarly (again in Chapter 2) the image of a disembodied Eurydice floating like a icon cannot but call to mind that of an icon on a computer screen, a mere representation. Serres insists that this was his original intention. Commonplace now, the metaphor must have been an opaque one in the mid eighties. These are rare and happy instances of the right interval in time allowing a translation

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to bring an element of the original to fruition, rather than introducing impediments.

The difficulties of any translation are manifold, and their enumeration often tedious. But some clarification is usually called for, if only to guide the reader through the complexities of the text at hand. Serres's use of language is highly self-conscious, sometimes displaying surgical precision, frequently bewildering in its opacity and its tendency to play fast and loose with the rules of French syntax and scholarly prose. It poses problems to the translator for various reasons: Serres plays on the Greek and Latin etymological substrata of French, weaves intertextual references into his argument, mines technical and dialectal language and, inevitably, puns.

## ETYMOLOGY AND WORD PLAY

While we do not wish to catalogue the difficulties of translating Serres's word play, a brief notice is called for in the cases of several recurring key terms. One of these is *le sensible*. Typically, *'sensible'* means 'sensitive'. It is a classic *'faux-ami'* – a cognate or 'false friend' – the bane of the language learner. However it is used here as a noun to express everything pertaining to the senses, and we have rendered it as 'the sensible', in reference to the more specialized usage of the latter in English.

Similarly with *le donné*. It derives from the verb *donner*, to give, and is used by Serres to refer to the sensory experience we receive from the world – in essence, what we are given by the world, if only we will open ourselves up to that experience. While this is an acceptable, if specialized and often awkward, usage of the term in French, it is rather harder to pull off in English, at least as a noun, because of the primary substantive sense of 'given' as an established fact. However, due to the inordinately complex set of transformations to which *'le donné'* is subjected in the text, we determined that the wisest course of action was to retain 'the given'.

For the most part, where we have been able to do so with relative concision and elegance, we have attempted parallel puns and neologisms, and have only provided footnote explanations where (a) such a solution proved impossible and (b) the pun was not gratuitous, but integral to the development of the argument. This is the case, for instance, with *'vair'*, in Chapter 1 (meaning 'fur' but a homophone for *'verre'*, meaning glass) and *'percevoir'*, at various points (a play on perception and taxation).

Serres draws upon etymology much more frequently than he resorts to puns; sometimes explicitly, but often implicitly. We are fortunate that

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English and French share so much etymological common ground. In most instances, therefore, the resonance has been preserved, and when merely implicit we have left it to the reader – as Serres himself does – to be attentive to that dimension of the text.

## INTERTEXTUALITY

Serres's text, to return to the image of the hanging skin and its exposed nerve endings, is as much embroidered as written, to the extent that hardly a paragraph could be said to be free of intertextual references, often overt, frequently more obscure, consisting of a *clin d'œil* to the educated reader. They are woven through the warp and weft of both the argument and the language, sometimes over, sometimes under. It is likely that no one reader will detect them all. In addition to references to works of philosophy, science and literature, he alludes to his own, earlier texts (most frequently to the *Hermes* series and to *Le parasite*), to nursery rhymes, to proverbs, to half-remembered paintings . . . We have taken care to translate the philosophical terms using the accepted terminology in English. In the case of the more literary texts, and specifically where there is a variety of English translations, we have sometimes used existing translations, sometimes made our own, according both to the felicitousness of the translations available and to the context. Take for example Montaigne's *branle pérenne*. Neither Florio's curious 'the world runnes on all wheeles' (1613), nor Cotton's 'the world eternally turns round' (1685–1686), nor Screech's 'the world is but a perennial see-saw' (1991) seemed to capture the nuance we were seeking and we fixed on 'eternal wobble' hoping that the aware reader would make the connection with Montaigne.

Serres's erudite text is almost entirely free from footnotes and we have considered it appropriate to preserve in the same way the free flow of the ideas and images. We have thus avoided footnoting most of the intertextual references, only providing explanations where the reference is so obscure, at least to the Anglophone reader, as to render the sense of the text difficult to determine.

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Serres's contention is that the development of human language, and subsequently of the sciences, has veiled and militated against the glories of our initial sensuous perception of the world. Conscious of the paradox

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of expressing through words this transformation in man's perceptions, the style of Serres's writing seems to be a deliberate effort to combat the limitations of language which he turns against itself in order to make his points through suggestion and free association, as well as through philosophical argument. His style is thus on occasion elliptical and ambiguous and it has been necessary in the interest of comprehension sometimes to flesh out the meaning in translation, as well as providing connectives, absent in the French. On occasion this has solidified the meaning in English, as opposed to the looser, more fluid French construction which allowed a fuller semantic play. The introduction of carefully chosen punctuation has also served to clarify the text.

However we have, as a rule, attempted to preserve the stylistic peculiarities of Serres's writing: the shifts of register from familiar and conversational to lyrical and exalted; the deliberating wandering sentences; the occasional jerkiness. All these things help to preserve the play of Serres's consciousness. The text is, after all, a highly personal one in which the writer uses his sensuous experience to inflect his style and demonstrate the importance of the senses in the construction of human knowledge.

*Les cinq sens* might be called a homunculus. 'I wager,' writes Serres in Chapter 1,

> that the small, monstrous homunculus, each part of which is proportional to the magnitude of the sensations it feels, increases in size and swells at these automorphic points, when the skin tissue folds in on itself. Skin on skin becomes conscious, as does skin on mucus membrane and mucus membrane on itself. Without this folding, without the contact of the self on itself, there would truly be no internal sense, no body properly speaking, cœnesthesia even less so, no real image of the body; we would live without consciousness; slippery smooth and on the point of fading away. Klein bottles are a model of identity. We are the bearers of skewed, not quite flat, unreplicated surfaces, deserts over which consciousness passes fleetingly, leaving no memory. Consciousness belongs to those singular moments when the body is tangential to itself.

If, as he argues, our skin is the site of a generalized, common sense, generative of identity in the places where pliability, the lack of inhibition and a willingness to leave the beaten path, bring it into contact with itself, then by extension his text is stylistically and conceptually most itself at precisely those points when seeming to practise the very arts he extols: viticulture, haute cuisine, embroidery, acrobatics – arts of confusion, contorsion and mingling, all.

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Our translation is, no doubt, less likely to draw attention to itself than the homunculus, less likely to cause offence in polite company, less flexible – less sensible. Translation inevitably flattens out the folds in the language of a text, the points of contact where its identity is formed and formulated – where it is most interesting, and most itself. But that is the price of acceptability.

The style of *Mythologies*, which strikes one at first as being highly poetic and idiosyncratic, later reveals a quasi-technical use of certain terms. This is in part due to an effort to account for the phenomena of mass culture by resorting to new models.

First and foremost among such models, as indicated in the Preface, is linguistics, whose mark is seen not so much in the use of a specialized vocabulary as in the extension to other fields of words normally reserved for speech or writing, such as *transcription*, *retort*, *reading*, *univocal* (all used in connection with wrestling), or *to decipher* (plastics or the 'good French Wine'). The author's teaching is also associated with a rediscovery of ancient rhetoric, which provides one of the connotations of the word *figure* when it is used in connection with cooking or wrestling.

*Spectacle* and *gesture* are often irreplaceable and refer to the interplay of action, representation and alienation in man and in society. Other terms belong to philosophical vocabulary, whether traditional (e.g. *substance*, which also has echoes of Bachelard and Hjelmslev), Sartrean/Marxist (e.g. a paradox, a car or a cathedral are said to be *consumed* by the public), or recent (e.g. *closure*, which heralds the combinative approach of semiology and its philosophical consequences). *Transference* connotes the discoveries of psycho-analysis on the relations between the abstract and the concrete. There is in addition a somewhat humorous plea for a reasoned use of neologism (cf. pp. 120–21) which foreshadows later reflections on the mutual support of linguistic and social conventions.

Such characteristics have been kept in the hope of retaining some of the flavour of the original.

Finally, the author's footnotes are indicated by numerals, and the translator's by asterisks.

# THE NUMBER AND THE SIREN



I have over the past few years enjoyed the privilege of translating a number of Quentin Meillassoux's philosophical writings. The principal challenge in doing so was invariably to render his prose as precise and direct in English as it is in the original French. The present book, in which this scrupulous lucidity transports the reader to the brink of delirium, posed some specific problems of its own. Given an argument that bears upon often very fine points of the French language, and a startlingly original interpretation of what is widely regarded as the most obscure of modern literary works, it is inevitable that one should meet with semantic complexes that prove stubbornly untranslatable. And there is no avoiding the fact that the delights of literary wordplay can be stifled by their laborious explanation.

To the extent that these problems cannot be circumvented, Anglophone readers will simply be obliged to exercise some patience with the fact that certain crucial

plot devices pertain to peculiarities of a language that is not their own. This patience will be repaid many times over by the exhilarating conceptual trajectory of Meillassoux's argument, fueled by the rich resources of Mallarmé's poetics. My policy as translator has been – here as elsewhere – to avoid as far as possible interrupting this momentum. It seemed especially important not to overburden with scholarly apparatus a book that belies its substantial critical and philosophical weight by reading like an expertly crafted detective story or thriller (a *Da Vinci Code* for the *Being and Event* generation?). This respect for the integrity and spirit of the book, of course, had to be weighed up against the risk of occasional awkwardness. I hope that I have made the right choices as to when to intervene and when to allow readers to piece together the clues themselves.

A few points can be remarked upon from the safety of this endnote, for the benefit of those who wish to miss nothing:

*Déchiffrement/Déchiffrage*: Meillassoux's argument, in so far as it brings together a musical motif with that of coding and decoding, plays on these two related words. 'Déchiffrement' is simply deciphering; 'Déchiffrage' refers specifically to a musician's 'deciphering' of a written musical score. This is even reflected in the original subtitle, which reads 'A *déchiffrage* [not *déchiffrement*] of Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*'. Unfortunately, although English does share

with French one of the etymological convergences that Meillassoux exploits – that of musical keys and keys that unlock – there is no English equivalent for 'déchiffrage', the equivalent term being 'sight-reading', which I have used once or twice to mark the double register.

*Charade*: Meillassoux speaks of the 'charade of the Number', referring to the figurative clues within the poem that 'spell out' the Number. In French the word 'charade' retains as its principal sense a riddle of the form: 'My first [letter] is in cat but not in dog...' – one, then, that spells out the letters of a word [or in this case, the digits of a number] through a series of clues. Although the English were once also keen on this word game, it has been overshadowed by the popular game of 'charades' in which players physically mime the title of a book, song or movie.

*Tremblé*: This becomes a key word at the point when Meillassoux unveils a 'precious fault' in the code he has discovered. He intends the word ('tremulous', 'shaky') to comprise (at least) three meanings: (1) the shaking of dice in the Master's (or Igitur's) closed fist; (2) a vacillation between possible actions, leading to a 'blurring' in which it is impossible to know which choice has been made; (3) a vibration, as of a guitar string, that produces a certain 'tonality'. Equivalent English words (shaking, trembling, and so on) tend to be firmly anchored in the physical, and what is more have a frankly comical tone

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when applied to a number (a 'shaking number' sounds like the work of a rock'n'roll tribute band). Others that describe indecision generally lack the requisite physical and musical connotations. The most satisfactory solution proved to be 'quavering', which combines a musical trill alternating between two notes, with the more general connotation of a trembling motion – and the nervousness that may accompany chronic indecision.

*La lettre voilée*: The title of the section beginning on page 166, 'The Veiled Letter', is a pun on the famous story (much beloved by Lacanians) 'The Purloined Letter' (in French, 'La Lettre volée') – and thus also a discreet homage to Mallarmé's acknowledged master, and patron saint of the detective story, Edgar Allen Poe.

During the process of translation it became, if not necessary, then certainly irresistible, to undertake in turn a new translation of the *Coup de dés* itself. Although I have drawn on many of the existing English translations of the poem, Meillassoux's reading afforded me an advantage that their authors did not have: Its complete and inexorable logic gives the translator a criterion by which he may arrive at a decision on almost every word of the *Coup de dés*. Far from welcoming the poem's enigmatic mystery as an interpretative opportunity, it makes of this mystery a crystal-clear structure around which every element of the poem demands to be reconstructed. Previous translators had

to negotiate a difficult path between applying ultimately capricious figurative interpretations so as to resolve the poem into comprehensible images and narratives, or strictly translating word for word and thereby erecting an inscrutable edifice of steely, impervious arcana. Thanks to Quentin, my job was far easier. Over the course of a few delightful hours spent together in a Paris café poring over the *Coup de dés*, he brought every detail of what was formerly a hazy, oneiric scene into sharp, sparkling focus. From there, it was a great pleasure to plunge, his book in hand, ever more deeply into this astonishing creation, to the point where it began to invade my dreams. I hope that, twinned with *The Number and the Siren*, my translation affords readers the same intimacy with Mallarmé's masterpiece. But by the same token it should be admitted, unabashedly, that it is a tendentious reading of the poem – and thus to be regarded as of a piece with my translation of Meillasoux's book. (Needless to say, I have not tried to reproduce in the English text any of the numerical properties of the 'coded' original – to have done so would have been to run the risk of the translation expanding into a numerological enterprise to rival Mallarmé's own 'demented act'.)

As well as retaining Meillassoux's references to the *Oeuvres complètes*, I have referred the reader to widely available English translations of Mallarmé's works. Of particular note, since it has been an invaluable companion

throughout the process, is the tremendous volume of Mallarmé's *Divagations* and other prose works translated by Barbara Johnson, to which I refer throughout. Johnson's ability to make Mallarmé's knotty, meticulous locutions speak with what one imagines to be their original urgency, poise and humor, have been a source of inspiration, and I would have liked very much to have been able to hand her a copy of this book.

I would like to thank Miguel Abreu and Katherine Pickard of Sequence Press for their ongoing commitment to our joint enterprise; Quentin Meillassoux for his patient assistance in progressing the translation; Ben Carver for his invaluable comments on an earlier draft; Daniel Berchenko for his meticulous copyediting; and Louise for the love that makes it possible to embark upon such lengthy and hazardous voyages across the 'foam of the page'.

Robin Mackay
Truro, March 2012

# PATAPHYSICAL ESSAYS



René Daumal (1908–1944) continues to command attention, thanks in large part to the celebrity of his unfinished novel *Mount Analogue*, a modern allegory of the spiritual quest, as well as to his voluntary non-association with (or, if you wish, rejection of) the Surrealist movement, which in the late 1920s had attempted to attract him to its ranks and create division among his comrades of the Grand Jeu group (which included Roger Gilbert-Lecomte and Roger Vailland, among others). The body of work he left behind extends significantly beyond *Mount Analogue*, however, and is as provocative today as it was in his lifetime. It was a brief lifetime, prematurely ended at the age of 36 from tuberculosis and a generally weak constitution aggravated by his youthful experiments inhaling carbon tetrachloride as an experiment "just to see," that is, to try to glimpse the threshold of death without crossing over. Obsessed by the void he intuited, his quest, at first youthfully rebellious, evolved into a more quietistic spiritual practice, and today a good half of the writing devoted to him concentrates mainly on Daumal the seeker rather than on Daumal the writer of much material of depth and richness, qualities it holds in spite of its fragmentary and often unfinished character.

However fragmentary his writing may have been, Daumal's essays, poetry (*Le Contre-ciel*), and fiction (*Mount Analogue, A Night of Serious Drinking*) were nonetheless consistent in how they emerged from, reflected upon, and illustrated his overriding, lifelong preoccupation with death and the absurd. The writings gathered in this volume lean more to Daumal's

interest in the absurd than they do to death (though the two were equally serious and interwoven topics for him). His understanding of the absurd was, from an early age, through the lens of pataphysics, the "science of imaginary solutions" first proclaimed by Alfred Jarry, and this is the same lens utilized by this collection. Less well known than Daumal the Sanskrit scholar, Daumal the Gurdjieff disciple, or Daumal the iconoclast untamed by Surrealism has been Daumal the pataphysician, and this missing perspective is all the more striking in that Daumal's pataphysics was not simply a youthful folly, but a long-term interest and way of thinking that accompanied his other "more serious" intellectual pursuits throughout his life (as the dates of composition of these essays will attest).

Daumal grew up in northern France and went to secondary school in Reims, where he made friends who became fellow travelers interested in writing and living poetry—especially poetry in the lineage of Arthur Rimbaud, another teenager whose revolt against bourgeois values was instrumental in revolutionizing the tenor of French letters. (In fact, Rimbaud was also a native of the same region.) But the group of adolescents, calling themselves "les Phrères Simplistes," also displayed the influence of the equally revolutionary literary figure of Jarry and his notion of pataphysics. (This influence is signaled in their naming themselves "Phrères" rather than "Frères," for example, which echoed Jarry's derisive spelling of words like "finances" as "phynances"—visually rooting such base concepts in their earthy grounding of "physics.") The group of "brothers" remained friends and eventually founded a literary review, *Le Grand Jeu* (The Great Game), which would quickly draw the attention of the Surrealists. The covers of the three issues that were published (as well as the fourth, which did not make it into

print) all exhibited the "gidouille": a spiral background borrowed from the belly of Jarry's eponymous main character of *Ubu Roi*, displayed on the white garment covering his round belly, and subsequently the insignia of pataphysics and the College of Pataphysics that assembled in later years. The metaphysically inclined Phrères took open inspiration from Jarry; but Jarry's pataphysics was far from metaphysical—and therein would lie the difference.

*Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician*, Jarry's primary exposition of pataphysics, nevertheless spoke volumes to a group of sensitive and intelligent young men who had lived through the absurdities of the Great War and wanted to find a way out of the spiritual impasse it had created. Jarry's extended definition can be taken as the ideological starting point for their approach to pataphysics:

> Pataphysics . . . is the science of that which is superinduced upon metaphysics, whether within or beyond the latter's limitations, extending as far beyond metaphysics as the latter extends beyond physics. Ex: an epiphenomenon being often accidental, pataphysics will be, above all, the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general. Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe which can be—and perhaps should be—envisaged in the place of the traditional one, since the laws that are supposed to have been discovered in the traditional universe are also correlations of exceptions . . . .
>
> DEFINITION. *Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments.*[1]

It is not hard to imagine the metaphysical interpretation that the Phrères were able to give Jarry's words, particularly in the notion of a "universe supplementary to this one." But though Daumal's quest for an immutable ground of being beyond the dichotomy of life and death was manifestly mystical in nature, it would be unjust and flatly untrue to characterize him as irrational. For the epigraph to his essay "Pataphysics and the Revelation of Laughter," Daumal utilized the concluding line of Jarry's *Faustroll*: "La Pataphysique est la science...." The full sentence that Jarry had left hanging would presumably be the aforementioned "Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions...," but by itself, "La Pataphysique est la science" easily lends itself to "Pataphysics *is science*," or, perhaps, "Pataphysics is *the science*." Indeed, Daumal's primary aim was to examine the metaphysical scientifically through what he termed with his Grand Jeu cohorts "experimental metaphysics." One need only cite as an attestation of his inclinations his employment as a proofreader in the mid-1930s by the *Encyclopédie Française*, a project sponsored by Léon Blum's Front Populaire, not, as might be expected, of texts on literature or Eastern religion, but on the hard sciences. Even as he attacked and satirized the West's excessive reliance on rational, empirical science as a means to explain everything and ultimately manipulate physical reality, he at no time showed signs of wishing to return to a pre-Enlightenment parochial mentality of social, political, and religious absolutes. The pre-rational, once the genie of rationalism is out of the bottle, can lead only to dystopia, as Voltaire was already demonstrating in the eighteenth century. If reason is to be transcended safely, it must be in the direction of the post- or supra-rational.

In an essay entitled "Une expérience fondamentale"[2] (A Fundamental Experiment/Experience), Daumal relates an

"experiment" in which he inhaled, around the age of sixteen or seventeen, carbon tetrachloride in order to observe—much as a scientist might observe an experiment—his consciousness approaching the threshold of asphyxiation, of death. The first words of the essay are "The experience is impossible to relate." Following the event, Daumal was convinced that a ground of being and consciousness beyond the grasp of reason, or what the post-Enlightenment West defined as reason, existed just as concretely as the reality defined by any given culture. That it exists concretely and is "real" makes it "evident"; that it cannot be expressed in any language makes it "absurd."[3]

The ensuing obsession with death and what lies beyond informed all reaches of Daumal's life and gave rise to his particular approach to poetics both as writerly practice and readerly attitude. In his 1930 essay, "Clavicles of a Great Poetic Game," Daumal notes that, in his role, "The poet evokes the image as a lasting symbol of the eternal" (EA, p. 75), and that the reader (he implies) apprehends the image in its essence, giving rise to an inner experience of anxiety due to a disquieting sense of familiarity, a kind of "déjà vu" ("already seen" because eternally present) that demands to be resolved into the "eternally seen" (EA, p. 78).

> The angst of paramnesia—the sense of "déjà vu"—is not purely and simply erased in poetic feeling; it is overcome by *a contact made by consciousness with the universal*, it becomes the feeling of a reminiscence of something that has existed for all eternity, that the poet has not created, but unveiled, and that we recognize immediately. (EA, p. 77)

The duality inherent in the relationship between particular image and eternal symbol contributes as well to the feeling of anxiety insofar as it intimates an infinite regression:

> And for any mind given even slightly to reasoning, paramnesia quickly becomes complex: "in this very same state of consciousness, I had thus also identically the illusory memory of an identical state . . .". (EA, p. 77)

To break this "vicious circle," as Daumal called it, to defuse the anxiety, we have two choices: (1) the so-called *contact made by consciousness with the universal* and (2) pataphysical laughter. It is the existence of this second choice throughout his work that is sometimes overlooked in Daumal, and it was his attempt to synthesize this duality and overcome the choice itself that identifies the conflict—the necessary conflict, even—at the root of his writings on pataphysics.

To address this conflict, Daumal composed his seminal pataphysical essay, "Pataphysics and the Revelation of Laughter," around the same time he composed "Clavicles." In this text, included in this volume, he expresses his solidarity with Jarry as a precursor and begins to elaborate his own distinct take on pataphysics. In the essay, he cites Jarry's definitions of pataphysics as formulated in *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician*, but he adds the following significant points: "It is the knowledge of the particular and the irreducible, therefore the reverse of physics"; and further, expanding on Jarry's "supplementary universe," he states that it "is the inside-out world where the dead and the dreamers go, according to primitive beliefs; it's the hollow mold of this world; put this world in its mold, and nothing's left, nothing hollow, nothing extruded, just one unified whole." Admitting that "it can be glimpsed that Pataphysics cloaks a mystery whose perspectives it discovers in a concrete form," he provides a formula for pataphysics that at first glance seems

a mere derision of orthodox science, but in fact goes much deeper: "Getting this idea into your head will help you get a firm hold on Pataphysics. To know x = to know (Everything – x)." With this simple formula, Daumal gives us at once the key to his poetics and a method of perception that could be qualified as mystical. It amounts to a pre-verbal apprehension of an object and gives a more concrete clue to the meaning of the "contact made by consciousness with the universal." If you wish to know the universal, take x—the particular—out of its habitual context and realize the void it leaves behind: this is x without a name, the essential, unmediated x. Put x back, and you have uniform nothingness—or wholeness, according to your perspective or predisposition. The particular, the obverse of orthodox science's object of study (that is, general laws, the universal), is absurd, nameless: "In summary: the irreducible is absurd; therefore let us reduce to absurdity in order to prove what is evident."

Daumal's pataphysics posits a conceptual void as a basis for clear perception, and the contradictory notion of a concrete perception of a conceptual void becomes the motor to these essays. The mind condemns itself to the torture of contradictory realizations: My mind can conceive of boundlessness, but I know I am a finite individual. Laughter becomes the one means by which I can continue to live when I feel myself immersed in an absurd universe:

> Pataphysical laughter is the keen awareness of a duality both absurd and undeniable. In this sense it is the one human expression of the identity of opposites (and, what is remarkable, in a universal language). Or rather, it signifies the subject's headlong rush toward its opposite object and at the same time the submission of that act of love to

> an inconceivable and cruelly felt law which prevents me from achieving total and immediate self-realization—the submission, that is, to that law of becoming according to which laughter is begotten in its dialectical forward march:
>
> I am Universal, I burst;
> I am Particular, I contract;
> I *become* the Universal, I *laugh*.

For Daumal, then, pataphysics is what enables the individual to attain the Universal: it leads from the concrete particularities of physics to the universality of metaphysics, and thus lies between them. This was an evident difference from Jarry's claim that pataphysics extended as far beyond metaphysics as metaphysics extended beyond physics; what for Jarry had been the ultimate endpoint of pataphysics and the ultimate expression of the failure of metaphysical solutions, for Daumal was but a starting point toward a new brand of metaphysical solution. It was specifically for this reason that Daumal's friend, Julien Torma, berated him: "Putting metaphysics behind 'Pataphysics is like making a belief into a mere façade," he wrote him. "When in fact the real nature of 'Pat. is to be a façade which is only a façade, with nothing behind it."[4]

Daumal followed up this exposition with what may well be his most bizarre and elusive text: the posthumously assembled and published "Treatise on Patagrams," which originally appeared as one piece in the *Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique* in 1954. Daumal wrote the *Treatise* in 1932 at the age of 24 and sent it in installments as letters to his friend and cohort, the photographer Artür Harfaux, a contributor to the *Grand Jeu*. Harfaux's drawings had been appearing in the journal (alongside those of other group members Sima and Maurice Henry), but it was the third issue in 1930 that contained one of his photograms, of particular interest

in connection to this Treatise, especially its first part, "Treatise on Pataphotograms." Harfaux had devoted himself to this photographic procedure (a photograph obtained without a camera through the placement of objects directly on photosensitive paper exposed to light), and Daumal also took great interest in the method and experimented with it himself. Although Man Ray's earlier work with photograms (which he named "Rayographs") is better known in the history of photography, Harfaux's contributions to the medium were not negligible, and the fact that the photogram is a negative shadow image, which is very much in keeping with the "Everything – x" theme Daumal had introduced in his earlier pataphysical essay, acts as a visual illustration of how he conceived the general notion of a pataphysical supplementary universe (the negative, "inside-out world"). The opening "Treatise on Pataphotograms," then, could be read as something of a photography handbook through a pataphysical lens. As a whole, however, Daumal's five-part "Treatise" makes for a dizzying journey for the reader: weaving together passages from Plutarch, Rabelais, and the Zohar with scientific vocabulary, occult photography, autobiography, and lycanthropy, all of it coded in some rather obscure wordplay and private references, "Treatise on Patagrams" ultimately escapes any simple explanation or interpretation.

A couple of years later, Daumal undertook a series of eleven columns published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1934 and 1935, and then from 1938 to 1940, in "L'air du mois," a monthly section of the review. The first carried the title "A Pataphysical Invention"; the rest were then all titled "Pataphysics This Month." Subsequently unavailable for a number of decades even in French, the articles were surveys of the scientific achievements and pratfalls of the day, a tongue-in-cheek tapestry of truth-is-stranger-than-fiction reports that eventually included interviews with

Dr. Faustroll himself. Through his work for the *Encyclopédie Française*, Daumal had obviously been keeping abreast of the latest developments in scientific research; as a pataphysician, he had also been paying close attention to the more marginal (and not-so-marginal) phenomena that could easily be taken as fictional research (background to Daumal's actual references has been supplied in the endnotes). Reading almost like an unknown breed of prose poetry, these columns eschew the generalized outcomes of scientific endeavors to focus instead on the particularities on which those endeavors rely, and in doing so, present science as something of the "new mythology" he ironically announces in one of the columns. If Jarry had proclaimed pataphysics to be *the* science, Daumal in these columns makes an interesting attempt to demonstrate that the science of his time was already striving to be pataphysical.

In his late essay on the pataphysics of ghosts that concludes this collection, Daumal returns to the subject of intuitive absence and produces a discourse on ghosts that can take a rightful place beside Jarry's own celebrated calculation of the surface area of God at the conclusion of *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician*. In openly addressing the occult—the ultimate in anathema to the scientific field—by means of scientific reasoning, Daumal's "ghostly science" thumbs its nose at both. His new formulation of Everything – x (with the absence of x taking on the more familiar name of "ghost") also brings us back, along a distinctly absurd path, to the question of death.

It was through his fear of and obsession with death and the void it represented that Daumal began his lifelong effort at the age of 16 to truly think (and by any means necessary). Dr. Faustroll had some observations on the subject from his own unique perspective. In his telepathic letter to Lord Kelvin toward the end of *Doctor Faustroll*, he observed:

> Death is only for common people. It is a fact, nevertheless, that I am no longer on Earth. [...] Imagine the perplexity of a man outside time and space, who has lost his watch, and his measuring rod, and his tuning fork. I believe, Sir, it is indeed this state which constitutes death.[5]

What follows, then, contains Daumal's watch, his measuring rod, and his tuning fork—along with a few other measuring tools that should prove to be of interest.

naps can constitute a decent Kippenberger.



# PICTURE A MOON, SHINING IN THE SKY

## Translator's note

Before this interview, I thought Ariane Müller was difficult to translate. Martin Kippenberger, in comparison, is pretty much impossible. He has his own made-up language, deeply imbedded in German and German culture, which uses German words and parts of words to rework their original meaning and produce – by association and recombination – a second layer of images, moods, nostalgias and evaluations. Once or twice these word-creations were left in German, as they might be better comprehended by the original sound than through an English equivalent. "Name dripping" was one of the few that made its way into English. Most of them are lost. I can only hope that some of the original "aura" Kippenberger mentions in the interview is able to survive its rather painful extraction from the mother tongue.

THE *Popol Vuh*, or Sacred Book of the ancient Quiché Maya, as it has been happily subtitled, is, beyond any shadow of doubt, the most distinguished example of native American literature that has survived the passing centuries.

The original redaction of this most precious fragment of ancient American learning is now lost; however, it seems first to have been reduced to writing (in characters of the Latin script), in the middle of the sixteenth century, from oral traditions then current among the Quiché, by some unknown but highly educated, not to say literary, member of that race.

This now lost original was again copied in the Quiché language, again in characters of the Latin script, at the end of the seventeenth century, by Father Francisco Ximénez, then parish priest of the village of Santo Tomás Chichicastenango in the highlands of Guatemala, directly from the original sixteenth-century manuscript, which he had borrowed for the purpose from one of his Indian parishioners.

The *Popol Vuh* is, indeed, the Sacred Book of the Quiché Indians, a branch of the ancient Maya race, and contains an account of the cosmogony, mythology, traditions, and history of this native American people, who were the most powerful nation of the Guatemala highlands in pre-Conquest times. It is written in an exalted and elegant style, and is an epic of the most distinguished literary quality.

Indeed, the chance preservation of this manuscript only serves to emphasize the magnitude of the loss which the world has suffered in the almost total destruction of aboriginal American literature.

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## v. *The Translations of the Popol Vuh*

In a convincing argument in favor of the authenticity of the *Popol Vuh*, Lewis Spence declares:

> The very fact that it was composed in the Quiché tongue is almost sufficient proof of its genuine American character. The scholarship of the nineteenth century was unequal to the adequate translation of the *Popol Vuh;* the twentieth century has as yet shown no signs of being able to accomplish the task. It is therefore not difficult to credit that if modern scholarship is unable to properly translate the work, that of the eighteenth century was unable to create it.[74]

[74] *The Popol Vuh. The Mythic and Heroic Sagas of the Kichés of Central America*, 33.

## POPOL VUH

Despite his undeniable and profound knowledge of the Quiché language, Father Francisco Ximénez by himself alone would not have been able to compose the Manuscript of Chichicastenango, the most notable literary expression of native American genius. On the other hand, this distinguished historian and linguist does not claim other than the title of discoverer of the Indian document. Defects, unfortunately, appear in his two versions of this work which have come down to us; these defects reveal that sometimes Ximénez was not able to perceive the meaning of the text, showing that the thought and phraseology of the ancient Quiché frequently escape comprehension even by those Europeans best qualified to interpret it.

The two principal translations which have been made, both in Spanish and in French, of the Quiché document are well known. The first, as has been said, is the work of Father Ximénez, who translated, verbatim, the histories of the Indians into the Spanish language from the Quiché, in which they had been written from the time of the Conquest. This first is a literal translation, closely following the phraseology of the original text. In it the translator not only wanted to give the meaning of the words, but many times tried to preserve the Quiché syntax, dropping the Spanish syntax and thus confusing the very meaning which he was trying to interpret. From the beginning of Ximénez' translation, one finds the passive form of the verbs preceding the possessive, which imitates the morphology of the original Quiché language, but which lacks meaning in Spanish. When Ximénez translates "his being declared and manifested," "his being related," and "his being said," or "his being formed," he reveals the peculiar forms of the Quiché construction, but he makes it impossible to understand the document, until the reader familiarizes himself with those forms and converts them into the corresponding substantives; "the declaration," "the manifestation," "the relation." "the formation," and so on.[75]

[75] The English language has similar forms, and in it, Quiché passive forms may be translated as "its being declared," "its being told," "its being formed," etc., which are equivalent expressions. Nevertheless, the English reader, like the Spanish, would probably prefer the substantive forms which correspond.

It must be noted here that these passive forms gradually disappear in the course of the translation and the style becomes easier and more natural.

In other places the translator, in an exaggerated effort to be faithful to the original, retains the metaphorical expressions of the Quiché text without giving the Spanish equivalents. For example when Hun-Ahpú and Xbalanqué decide to get rid of their envious brothers, Hun Batz and Hun Chouén, the translator has them say, "We will only change their stomachs into other things," using a metaphor which could be interpreted by saying that they would change only their figure, as in effect they did, transforming them into monkeys. In this same passage the sense is very obscure, because Ximénez limits himself to translating, word for word, the extremely abbreviated sentences of the original Quiché without developing them more extensively, as they require in Spanish. These examples are cited in order to give an idea of the difficulties which, in general, the reader of the first version of the *Popol Vuh* will find.

Ximénez' translation with all its defects represents a work of infinite patience, which must have taken a long time, years perhaps, of the life of the translator. The first version may be read in the right column of the manuscript of the *Historias de los Indios*, and is the same which Carl Scherzer published in Vienna in 1857, with numerous errata. The copyist who made the transcript which the editor used did not know how to interpret some of the abbreviations which Ximénez employed; he read parts of the manuscript wrong, omitted words and even whole sentences, and confused many of the proper names and common Quiché words. Some of these errors are undoubtedly those of the Guatemalan copyist; but he is not altogether to blame, and it must be supposed that the Vienna printer made some of the errors which are found in that edition, which, however, in general is a very good one.

The first translation appears to have been made during the time in which Ximénez administered the parish of Santo Tomás. On the title page of the *Historias de los Indios* one reads that the translator was the priest who taught the Christian doctrine by royal appointment in the town of Santo Tomás Chuilá, today

Santo Tomás Chichicastenango. Years later, on undertaking his longer work, the *Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala,* Ximénez revised his first translation of the Indian document, deleting many repetitions which are peculiar to the Quiché language, divided the account into chapters, and made it in general easier to read, although less true to the original text. In this condensed translation some of the redundancies of the first draft have disappeared, but some of the concepts and words and, at times, even entire paragraphs have been omitted. It must be taken into account, however, that this second version is known only through the transcription made by Señor Gavarrete, a transcription which served for the edition of the work printed in Guatemala in 1929. It is to be hoped that the authentic text of this second version of Ximénez will be published as it is found in the original manuscript which is preserved in Guatemala. The numerous errors and omissions, the defective spelling, and other faults which, unfortunately, fill the 1929 edition, must be attributed to its successive transcriptions, since Gavarrete himself said, as early as 1872, that his was not a direct copy of the original, but of another copy made carelessly and with many imperfections. This copy must have been very old, because the errors and omissions which it contains are also observed in the chapters which Ordóñez y Aguiar inserted at the end of the eighteenth century in his *Historia de la Creación del Cielo y de la Tierra.*

Luckily, the manuscript of the first version having been preserved together with the original copy of the Quiché, it is still possible to appreciate the translation in its primitive form, without the errors which mar the two printings of 1857 and 1929 respectively.

Despite its defects, this translation is a work of great merit and inestimable value. Our linguistically-minded friar knew the Quiché language of the sixteenth century better than any other of the modern translators and commentators, and at the same time he knew the mentality of the Indians of that race. For this reason the Spanish translator almost always kept his text at the same intellectual level as that of the Quiché narrator, without elevating himself to spheres foreign to pre-Columbian American culture,

and without letting himself be carried away by fantasy, as has occurred in the case of the first French translator.

The Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg says that Father Ximénez lacked a critical sense and previous knowledge of the general history of the Indians, and that for this reason, he could not make more than a rough translation into Spanish, in which he almost always gives a literal word for word version, which at times does not make sense; and he sometimes omits four or five sentences of the original.[76] Brasseur de Bourbourg goes on to criticize the Ximénez translation, accusing Ximénez of not having been sufficiently informed about American antiquities or in the writings of Sahagún and Torquemada; and he adds that the Spanish translator did not know how to get the real essence of the material which he had in his hands, and that in translating it he let himself be dominated by the prejudices of the Church at that time. In supporting these charges, Brasseur de Bourbourg cites the interpretation which Ximénez gives to the passages relating to the empire of Xibalba, "which is changed under his pen to the mansion of the damned, the inferno, and their princes, into demons."[77]

The charge that Ximénez did not know American antiquities is notoriously unjust, and confirms the opinion that I have already expressed concerning the lack of knowledge that Brasseur de Bourbourg himself had of the *Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala*, of which he makes mention in various places in his works, but which he evidently had never read. He had in his possession the copy which Gavarrette made of the first thirty-six chapters of Book I of the *Historia de la Provincia*, but he appears to have paid no attention to it. In this part of his work, Father Ximénez mentions and comments on the opinions of Torquemada and reproduces, at length, the principal chapters of the *Repúblicas de Indias* by Father Jerónimo Román, which latter work contains ample information about the customs, laws, and beliefs of the Indians of Guatemala and Mexico. As has already been said, the chapters of Román which deal with these

[76] *Histoire des Nations Civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique Centrale*, Vol. I, pp. xxv, xxvi.

[77] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. lxxx.

matters are copied almost word by word from the *Apologética Historia* of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, who claims to have written all these reports in accordance with the testimony of the Franciscan and Dominican friars who learned the languages, and who had a thorough knowledge of the good and bad customs of those people.[78]

At the same time, Ximénez refers to the prophecies of the Maya Indians of Yucatán and mentions those places in the history of Father Cogolludo where he deals with them; he speaks of the chronicles of Herrera and Remesal and shows that he was well versed in what a cultivated man of his time might have known about Americana.

As to the prejudices which the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg attributes to Father Ximénez, there may be cited the example which he gives about the empire of Xibalba, which Ximénez identifies with the inferno. This is a very debatable matter, and, as will be shown later, it cannot be denied that the legend of Xibalba refers to the lower regions, inhabited by evil spirits who are tormentors of men. The Quiché conception of the underworld of Xibalba is similar to that of Mictlan of the Mexican Indians and to the Hades of the Greeks. Ximénez does not stray entirely afield in recognizing it as a place of punishment, the *infierno* of the Spaniards.

One might also attribute to prejudice the fact that Ximénez translates the word *Cabauil* (god) by *idol*, in the passages of the *Popol Vuh* relating to the gods which the tribes worshiped on their migration into the mountains in the interior of Guatemala. But apart from these minutiae of interpretation, it must be recognized that Ximénez translated the Quiché manuscript with impartiality and with care designed to give his readers a faithful version of the traditions and beliefs of these people, although according to his judgment they held great errors and superstitions,

[78] *Apologética Historia de las Indias*, Vol. I, Chap. CCXIX, p. 574. Sr. Serrano y Sanz justly compares the work of the first translator of the *Popol Vuh* with the work of Father Sahagún when he writes: "Father Jiménez brought to the common heritage his very precious Indian traditions (the *Historias del origen de los indios*, etc.), doing what P. Sahagún had done earlier in Mexico."—*Relaciones Históricas y Geográficas de América Central*, Introduction.

as he says in his notes and comments. With all its imperfections, the translation of the *Popol Vuh* by Ximénez is the basis for our interpretation of the most notable manuscript of ancient American literature. It was already so when Brasseur de Bourbourg began his interpretation of this document; and in spite of his objections to it, he declared that the translation by Father Ximénez had been very useful to him and that he had "preserved it entirely in almost all of its parts, not having done more than clarify its obscurities and fill in the gaps."[79]

In 1855 the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg found in Guatemala the manuscript of the *Historias de los Indios* which contained the original transcription of the Quiché text and the first Spanish translation of it made by Father Ximénez. Sent to the parish of Rabinal by Archbishop García Peláez, who, according to Brasseur de Bourbourg, wanted to further his archaelogical investigations and his studies of the Indian languages, the famous French traveler moved to that Quiché center, learned how to read and write the language of the people, and prepared himself sufficiently to undertake the translation of the Quiché book, according to what he says in the foreword to his *Histoire des Nations Civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique Centrale.*

In this way Brasseur de Bourbourg had the opportunity to learn the dialect spoken at Rabinal and to consult the Indians of that town on the difficult passages of the *Popol Vuh.* Furthermore, during his trips to Central America, he acquired a valuable collection of grammars and old vocabularies of the Indian languages which were most useful to him in his interpretation of the Guatemalan documents. The Quiché *Vocabulario* of Fray Domingo Basseta which is in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris is full of Brasseur de Bourbourg's annotations, which show the constant use which he made of it in his work of translation.

In 1861 the *Popol Vuh, Le Livre Sacré,* which contains the Quiché text of the Manuscript of Chichicastenango was published in Paris, divided into chapters and phoneticized according to Brasseur de Bourbourg's ideas, in order to facilitate its reading by

[79] *Histoire des Nations Civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique Centrale,* Vol. I, p. xxvi.

the people of his country. According to these ideas, the Abbé introduced the letter "k" which does not exist in the original, and substituted it for the "c" and the 'q" which Ximénez used in transcribing the Quiché manuscript. On the other hand, he kept the "v" which was used in the Colonial Period to represent the sound of "u" as in the words *varal, vinac*, etc.

The Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg's version of the *Popol Vuh* is a notable work in which he tried to interpret, with the precision and elegance of the French language, the ancient and simple thought of the Quiché race. As he himself says, this translation is based on the Spanish of Ximénez and supplemented with the parts which the Dominican friar omitted.[80] In general, the Abbé interpreted the Quiché manuscript correctly, although there are many errors which he committed in his translation, despite the evident care that he took. His version, however, shows one major defect. Despite having lived some time among the American Indians, the Abbé never succeeded in understanding their primitive mentality, and he attributed to them ideas and thoughts as elevated as those of the peoples of the Old World, the heirs of a classical culture of many centuries.

The German writer Noah Elieser Pohorilles published a version of the *Popol Vuh* in Leipzig in 1913 under the title of *Das Popol Wuh. Die mytische Geschichte des Kicé-Volkes von Guatemala nach dem Original-Texte übersetz und bearbeitet.* In general, the German translator follows Brasseur de Bourbourg in interpreting the Quiché document, despite the fact that in the title of his work he says that it is a translation from the original text. In a study on the "Significance of the Myths of the Popol Vuh," Eduard Seler indicates that he does not consider that the

[80] "Brasseur de Bourbourg's unfavorable criticism [of the translation of Father Ximénez] is entirely unjust. Furthermore, the French Abbé has used the Spanish text by Ximénez much more than he confesses. Not only did he translate [the latter] literally, but he accepted without any discussion many of Ximénez' errors. Besides, in his translation [the Abbé] has obviously misinterpreted the Ximénez text. Finally, it is certain that Father Ximénez, despite all the defects of his translation, better understood the way in which the Indians told their 'stories' than did Brasseur."—Schuller, "*Das Popol Vuh und das Ballspiel der K'icé Indianer von Guatemala, Mittelamerika,*" *Intern. Achiv für Ethnogr.*, Vol. 33, p. 107, n. 5.

Pohorilles translation had improved that of Brasseur de Bourbourg, rather the contrary.[81]

Professor Georges Raynaud of the Sorbonne spent many years studying the Indian manuscripts of the Americas, and in Paris in 1925, he published a new version of the *Popol Vuh*, under the title of *Les dieux, les héros et les hommes de l'ancien Guatémala d'après le Livre du Conseil.* A Spanish translation of this work was published in 1927.

Professor Raynaud's translation is, according to my judgment, the best and most accurate of the modern interpretations of the Quiché document. This translator had the advantage of being able to consult the vocabularies of the languages of Guatemala which the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris possesses, in order to clarify many expressions contained in the versions of Ximénez and Brasseur de Bourbourg, upon which, generally speaking, all modern translations of this work are based. Raynaud's translation is more precise than those made before it and as a whole is the most acceptable.

The defects of Raynaud's translation are due principally to the fact that the Sorbonne professor did not have the original manuscript before him and had to follow the transcription of Brasseur de Bourbourg, which, as has been noted, was not always faithful. Furthermore Raynaud did not know Guatemala, and it was not possible for him to understand the mentality of the Indians of that country or to inform himself accurately about their character and customs.

Finally there should be mentioned the version of Licenciado J. Antonio Villacorta and Don Flavio Rodas N. contained in a volume entitled *Manuscrito de Chichicastenango (Popol Buj). Estudio sobre las antiguas tradiciones del Pueblo Quiché. Texto indígena fonetizado y traducido al Castellano. Notas etimológicas, etc.* (Guatemala, 1927). This is the first modern translation to be published in Guatemala. In the preface of the work one reads that the authors undertook the translation because a faithful version of the Manuscript had not yet been made. Señor Rodas, well

[81] "*Der Bedeutungswandel in den Mythen des Popol Vuh. Eine Kritik*," *Anthropos*, Vol. VIII (1913), 388.

versed in the modern Quiché language, took the text transcribed by Brasseur de Bourbourg and phoneticized it according to Spanish spelling "in order that the Indians and other people who speak the language could read it." The Quiché text appears in this form accompanied by a Spanish translation. Studies on the Quiché, the Maya, and the Tolteca, the calendar, and the pre-Columbian manuscripts precede the translation, and at the end there are several pages of notes and etymology.

The work of phonetization is useful for the reader who speaks Spanish, for whom it was evidently made. It is noticeable, however, that certain Quiché names have been changed, such as Hunahpú to Junajup, and that Vucub Hunahpú, who was only one person and brother of the former, is presented as a group of seven Ajups in various passages of this translation.

The work of Villacorta and Rodas suffers from a number of defects, some of which have been pointed out by foreign critics.[82] Many careless errors and inaccuracies are noted in the translation, even in passages which do not offer great difficulty. Furthermore, the authors appear to have lacked the aid of the old vocabularies, which must be consulted in order to understand the significance of many terms no longer used by the modern Quiché Indians.

In his introduction to *Märchen der Azteken und Inkaperuaner, Maya and Muisca* (in which he also included the legends of the Quiché book), Walter Krickeberg mentions the linguistic course which Eduard Seler gave in the University of Berlin, in which this Americanist explained some chapters of the *Popol Vuh* and the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* of Sololá. Lewis Spence studies the *Popol Vuh* extensively in his work *The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico* and declares that Seler, a short time before his death, was working upon a translation of the Quiché book, directly from the original, but that he did not get to publish it. His vast knowledge of the mentality, history, and languages of the Ameri-

[82] Schuller, "*Der Verfasser des Popol Vuh*," *Anthropos*, Vol. XXVI, Nos. 5–6 (September-December, 1931); *ibid.*, "*Das Popol Vuh und das Ballspiel der K'icé Indianer von Guatemala, Mittelamerika*," *Intern. Achiv für Ethnogr.*, Vol. 33, pp. 105–16; Imbelloni, "*El Génesis de los pueblos proto-históricos de América*," *Boletín de la Academia Argentina de Letras*, Vol. VIII, No. 32 (October-December, 1940,), 539–628.

can Indians gave Seler complete authority to interpret these documents, as he has demonstrated in the criticism he made of the works of Pohorilles and other studies on the myths of the Quiché and Cakchiquel of Guatemala, which he published in scientific magazines in his own country. In the foreword to Volume V of his *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur amerikanischen Sprach-und Altertumskunde*, his widow, Caecilie Seler, said in 1923 that she had not entirely given up the hope of publishing Volume VI of his assembled works, which would contain his translations of Sahagún and the *Popol Vuh*, whose value for the understanding of ancient America appear to be so important that they must not be left in obscurity. Seler's translation of Sahagún appeared in 1927, but that of the *Popol Vuh* still remains unpublished.

A well-known Austrian investigator, Rudolph Schuller, left an English translation of the Quiché book, according to Dr. Samuel K. Lothrop's report in his archaelogical study on the region of Lake Atitlán (Carnegie Institution of Washington, September, 1933). Lothrop adds that he himself also has prepared a translation of the same document.

In his book *An introduction to Mythology*, Lewis Spence says:

> There is an abridgment in English by the present writer. An English translation of the whole appeared in an American magazine entitled *The Word* during 1906 and 1907, from the pen of Dr. Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, but whether from the Spanish, or original Kiche, I do not know. It is, moreover, couched in Scriptural language, and such treatment assists the vulgar error that the *Popol Vuh* is merely a native travesty of portions of the Old Testament.[83]

Dr. Guthrie states that his translation was made independently, "but some felicitous terms have been added" from another translation from the first book of the *Popol Vuh* by James Pryse, which appeared in *Lucifer* in 1894–95.

A new German translation by Leonhard Schultze Jena was published in Stuttgart in 1944, together with the original text as transcribed by Ximénez, under the title of *Popol Vuh. Das heiliges Buch der Quiché Indianer von Guatemala.*

[83] Page 270.

The Ayer Collection in the Newberry Library of Chicago has an unpublished English translation of the *Popol Vuh* made by Colonel Beebe. It is a manuscript of 264 pages, apparently based on the French translation of Brasseur de Bourbourg.

The legends of the *Popol Vuh* have been used by some modern writers in the composition of stories and narratives for children, as one can see in the collection of Krickeberg and in the *Tales from Silver Lands* by Charles Finger. Isolated passages of the *Popol Vuh* have been dramatized many times. And the German writer, Oswald Claassen, using the same episodes, composed a long poem, entitled *Die Ahnen des Mondes*, and *Das Gefass des Schicksals*, inspired by the translation of Pohorilles.

In this way modern authors have justified the opinion, somewhat ironical, that Ximénez expressed when he wrote, "I well know that all these histories are children's stories," although this opinion certainly did not deter the austere friar from dedicating much of the time which his ecclesiastical duties left free, to transcribing and translating them into Spanish and commenting upon them.

In his study on the Indian authors and their works (*Aboriginal American Authors and Their Productions*), Brinton comments on the narrative of the mythology and traditional history of the Quiché, and the translations of Ximénez and Brasseur de Bourbourg, and declares that neither of these translations is satisfactory. According to Brinton, Ximénez wrote with all the prejudices of a Spanish monk, and Brasseur de Bourbourg was an euhemerist of the most advanced type, who saw in every myth the expression of a historical fact. And adds "there is need for a re-translation of all the work, with critical linguistic notes attached." Other critics have seconded this eminent Americanist in his observation. Since the time he wrote, new translations have been published which have clarified some of the obscure parts of the Quiché book, but the field is very wide and the subject is always new and attractive. The present translation and the philological and historical study which accompanies it have been born of this attraction which the old Indian document exerts; and although it does not pretend to answer the particular need indicated by Brinton, it is hoped that it will at least contribute to reawakening interest in these ancient American things.

# THE POOR MOUTH



THIS CELEBRATED satirical work, *An Béal Bocht*, first published In 1941, is here translated for the first time under the title of *The Poor Mouth*. In Gaelic and in Anglo-Irish dialect, 'putting on the poor mouth' means making a pretence of being poor or in bad circumstances in order to gain advantage for oneself from creditors or prospective creditors. It may also mean simply 'grumbling' according to the lexicographer Dr Patrick Dinneen, a scholar who received scant respect from Myles na Gopaleen.

The author, Brian O'Nolan, who writes under his *nom de plume*, Myles na Gopaleen, was an accomplished Gaelic scholar and handles Gaelic in this work in a masterly but also in a rather idiosyncratic manner which makes translation at times a rather exacting task.

The third edition, which contains many interpolations and emendations, is the text translated here. Wherever this particular edition presented difficulties or ambiguities, the earlier editions have been consulted. In this text the author included some humorous 'translations' of single words which he added to the ends of the pages as footnotes. They occur only in the first chapter of the third edition and have been included here in notes at the back of the book.

In *The Poor Mouth* Myles comments mercilessly on Irish life and not only on the Gaeltacht. Words such as 'hard times', 'poverty', 'drunkenness', 'spirits' and 'potatoes' recur in the text with almost monotonous regularity. The atmosphere reeks of the rain and the downpour and with relentless insistence he speaks of people who are 'facing for eternity' and the like. The key-words in this work are surely 'downpour', 'eternity' and 'potatoes' set against a background of squalor and poverty.

The principal difficulty attending the translation of this work has been due to Myles's parodying the style of certain Gaelic authors such as Máire (Séamas Ó Grianna) from the Rosses in County Donegal and Tomás Ó Criomhthainn from the Great

Blasket Island in County Kerry. This daunting task must always face the translator who wishes to reproduce in another language the subtle nuances and flavour of the original.

For too long *An Béal Bocht* has been inaccessible to those who were ignorant of Gaelic or whose knowledge of the old language of Ireland was inadequate for a proper understanding of Myles's satirical work. It is time that this book, which should have acted as a cauterization of the wounds inflicted on Gaelic Ireland by its official friends, might do its work in the second official language of Ireland. That it may do so, is the translator's wish and hope.

*Patrick C. Power M.A., Ph.D.*

> "Come not thus with your gunnes & swords, to invade as foes. . . .
>
> "What will it availe you to take that perforce you may quietly have with love, or to destroy them that provide your food? . . .
>
> "Lie well, & sleepe quietly with my women & children, laugh, & I will be merrie with you. . . ."
>
> —*Powhatan, to Capt. John Smith*

1.

The awkwardness of presenting translations from American Indian poetry in the year 1971 is that it has become fashionable today to deny the possibility of crossing the boundaries that separate people of different races & cultures: to insist instead that black is the concern of black, red of red, & white of white. Yet the idea of translation has always been that such boundary crossing is not only possible but desirable. By its very nature, translation asserts or at least implies a concept of psychic & biological unity, weird as such assertion may seem in a time of growing dis-integration. Each poem, being made present & translated, flies in the face of divisive ideology. The question for the translator is not whether but how far we can translate one another. Like the poet who is his brother, he attempts to restore what has been torn apart. Any arrogance on his part would not only lead to paternalism or "colonialism" (LeRoi Jones's term for it from a few years back), it would deny the very order of translation. Only if he allows himself to be directed by the other will a common way emerge, true to both positions.

To submit through translation is to begin to accept the "truths" of an other's language. At the same time it's a way of growing wary of the lies in one's own, a point of vigilance that translators & poets

should be particularly keyed to. I learned, for example, that the Senecas with whom I lived call the whites "younger brothers" & themselves "*real* people." To understand the Seneca experience (including where I stand with relation to them) I have to submit to terms like these & to get to a truth about them which includes the Seneca truth. As I do, it becomes clear to me that the very nature of "Indian" & "white" (words basic to the process I'm describing) is itself a question of language & translation.

If the term "younger brother" would later be neutralized or come to suggest contempt, what relationship did it originally express in a culture that didn't practice primogeniture & individual ownership of land—in which forests & clearings (the men were hunters, the women gardeners) were a common ground for brothers as children of one mother & members of one clan? Whether by birth or adoption didn't matter either: descended from a single mother (ultimately the Earth), "older" & "younger" was for them a matter of precedence in time & place, their relative experience of the shared environment. Thus the Senecas as older brothers recognized the rights of both to start with, but the whites (children also of the "old world" patriarchy) came to the land prepared for dispossession & fratricide. In the overthrow of the older—refusing adoption to the real-personhood of the Indian way, while asserting their own great-white-fatherhood—they triggered a disruption of the natural (ecological) order that's now making all of us its victims.

A "real" person in these terms is one who hasn't forgotten what & where things are in relation to the Earth. Earth-rooted, he is royal too, not by precedence of birth, but insofar as he has & shares a knowledge of the realm. He has only to maintain a true eye for his surroundings & a contact with the Earth, to recognize himself as the inheritor of reality, of a more real way of life. At any rate that seems to be the claim implicit in the language & confirmed by the events that have followed its denial.

The issue, writes David Antin, is reality. The *real* person (reality-person, in fact) lives, like the "primitive" philosopher described by Radin, "in a blaze of reality" through which he can experience "reality at white heat." This is a part of the tribal inheritance (not Indian

only but world-wide) that we all lose at our peril—younger & older alike. Remember too how many elements are active in that situation, where we would concentrate on the words as being particularly the "poem" (many Indian poems in fact dispense entirely with words): elements, I mean, like music, non-verbal phonetic sounds, dance, gesture & event, game, dream, etc., along with all those unstated ideas & images the participants pick up from the poem's context. Each moment is charged: each is a point at which meaning is coming to surface, where nothing's incidental but everything matters terribly.

Now, put all of that together & you have the makings of a high poetry & art, which only a colonialist ideology could have blinded us into labeling "primitive" or "savage." You have also the great hidden accomplishment of our older brothers in America, made clear in the poetry & yet of concern not only to poets but to all (red, white & black) who want to carry the possibilities of reality & personhood into any new worlds to come. The yearning to rediscover the Red Man is part of this. It acknowledges not only the cruelty of what's happened in this place (a negative matter of genocide & guilt) but leads as well to the realization that "we" in a larger sense will never be whole without a recovery of the "red power" that's been here from the beginning. The true integration must begin & end with a recognition of all such powers. That means a process of translation & of mutual completion. Not a brotherhood of lies this time but an affiliation based on what the older had known from the start: that we're doomed without his tribal & matrilocal wisdom, which can be shared only among equals who have recognized a common lineage from the Earth.

2.

The question, then, was how to deliver the poetry of the first discoverers of America & civilizers of themselves. I had previously been retranslating (I wasn't unique in this among American poets) & anthologizing Indian & other tribal &/or "primitive" poetries mostly from the abundant volumes of myths & texts gathered over the previous hundred or so years by scores of Boasian anthropologists & others. That work had resulted in a worldwide anthology called *Tech-*

*nicians of the Sacred* (subtitle: *A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, & Oceania*), which included, in addition to my own contributions, workings by such poets as Pound, Williams, Tzara, Waley, Merwin, Sanders, Kelly, & R. Owens, plus very solid translations by anthropologists, etc. like Densmore, Berndt, Quain, Matthews, Bleek & Lloyd, McAllester, Beier, & many others. Not to mention all the workers (some better known than these) whose gatherings from around-the-world served as sources for the poems that emerged in English.

There are a couple of points from *Technicians* that I want to reiterate here. First it seemed clear to me that the range-&-depth of the materials previously collected was astonishing, & that the levels of the poetry were in no obvious relationship to the economic or industrial development of the cultures from which they derived (or if they were, that the powers of the poetry declined as those of technology & the political state increased)—clear, I mean, in spite of considerable mistranslation in even the "literal" & interlinear texts, & the fact that many of the translated poems were practically unreadable as first presented. Second, the range of the tribal poets was even more impressive if one avoided a closed, European definition of "poem" & worked empirically or by analogy to contemporary, limit-smashing experiments (as with concrete poetry, sound poetry, intermedia, happenings, etc.). Since tribal poetry was almost always part of a larger situation (i.e. was truly intermedia), there was no more reason to present the words alone as independent structures than the ritual-events, say, or the pictographs arising from the same source. Where possible, in fact, one might present or translate *all* elements connected with the total "poem"—a concern that continues into the present book.

From 1968 on, I followed a number of such concerns into a concentration on Indian tribal poetry, which seemed for obvious reasons most relevant to where-we-all-are in U.S.A. As poet I was able to experiment with more direct approaches to translation: (1) in collaboration with Seneca songmen, who acted at the very least as intermediary translators, & from whom I could get a clearer picture of how the poetry (songs, prayers, orations, visions, dreams,

etc.) fitted into the life; & (2) through working with ethnomusicologist David McAllester on cooperative translation from Navajo of *The 17 Horse-Songs of Frank Mitchell.* With McAllester & on my own, I became interested in the possibility of "total translation"—a term I use for translation (of oral poetry in particular) that takes into account any or all elements of the original beyond the words. All of which (plus a growing sense of the grandeur & significance of Indian poetry & thought whether partially or totally translated) led me to the idea of a book that would offer a new look at all that in the light of the possibilities of poetry opening to us in this very time & place.

Unlike *Technicians* this gathering is almost completely a poet's book, & that in itself is an important step toward the larger work of translation & recovery I'd been hoping to develop. Several included herein had already been working in this area: Bill Merwin for at least the previous decade but with more recent emphasis on Plains Indian texts out of Lowie; Edward Field going the length of a book of adaptations from Rasmussen's Eskimo collections; Carl Cary working from anthropological texts & also from his earlier Skagit contacts; & James Koller naturalizing works from Tlingit & Sioux toward an immediate grasp of some of the levels of vision they represent. Some others responded directly to my request for help—Schwerner, Berg & Hollo with greatest energy; Tarn equally so, but bringing to it also a considerable personal acquaintance with the contemporary Mayans of Guatemala—working from earlier translations into French, Spanish & German, or from English versions that had failed to match the life of their sources. But new works by anthropologists were important too, especially where they disclosed actual structural possibilities or ways of showing those in translation: Dennis Tedlock's total translations of Zuni narratives, say, which forever did away with the idea that "prose" could be the medium of a spoken narrative, or Munro Edmonson's verse reconstruction of the *Popol Vuh.* To say nothing of McAllester's Navajo horse-songs, which were the solid basis for whatever workings I was then able to perform.

In each case the translator's voice is very different—which is the

way it should be. For the translator—if he's to match the interest of the original—must extend its meanings into his own language & by means of his own voice. (This assumes a poet's voice to begin with.) He needn't lose his personhood but may extend that too & make it real—in translation as well as in any of his other workings. This has always been the way of the great poet-translators—Catullus or Chaucer or Marpa or Pound—& its beginnings here may hopefully mark the real emergence of Indian poetry into the consciousness of the non-Indian world.

Hopefully too it may coincide with Indian efforts to hold, expand or (for many) to return to the sources of their own power—even to understand that power as not only particular to its immediate place-of-origin, but as part of an historically proven & worldwide manifestation of such poetic & trans-poetic powers.

3.

As an arrangement of "classical" American poetry (i.e. of poetry in the first languages of America & representing modes or models for tribes present & to come), this anthology isn't more than a beginning. It tries above all to show the range of such poetries in the Americas north of Panama, but shies away from a division by region & tribe or from representing the major tribes & nations in anything like just proportions. (The reader who wants to see how the book breaks down along such lines can check the tribal index on page 402.) Even so, I hope the gathering is a true reflection of Indian poetry (at least of some of its faces) that would be of use to those alive & growing in the 1970s.

With a sense too that the best minds in our own culture & counter-culture will be freely rearranging any such collection, I've deliberately avoided an organization into very tight compartments. Certain works (particularly those that involve new approaches to translation or act as mini-anthologies of specialized kinds) I've isolated under separate headings; otherwise the poetry appears in four miscellaneous sections or services ("service" in the sense of a religious ritual), with each one

corresponding to an evening's public reading under those circumstances in which we commonly share poetry with one another. Any other organizing principles are either self-evident or dealt with in the "commentaries" section, in which I also try to establish contexts for the poems where possible or useful, & to carry forward discussions of Indian & tribal poetry, philosophy or history as lightly touched on in this introduction. Unlike the parallel section in *Technicians*, I've here chosen not to make much of the considerable analogies between the native American classics & the work of our contemporary poets. (I do, on the other hand, say more about the poetry's relation to our own social & environmental dilemmas.) This is partly because *Technicians* already exists as a guide to all that, but mostly from a sense that these levels of poetry are so fundamental & deep-seated in human consciousness that they need no justification by resemblance to anything else in this world. Not once the old definitions have been laid to rest.

After which, it only remains to acknowledge the help I've gotten along the way & to stress again the cooperative nature of most of what's going on here. The suggestion for a pan-Indian book came from Ann London, who had hoped to do it as the first issue of a poetry magazine she was starting in Buffalo, & many of the pieces I'm printing here were originally gathered for that effort. My own experiments with oral translation were helped by a grant-in-aid from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, which followed in turn from Stanley Diamond's suggestion that I try an in-the-field translation project. I'm grateful to him for that, but also for the conscience & intelligence he's brought to bear both on anthropology & poetry—& the same holds true for David McAllester, without whose generosity the most experimental of these pieces would never have happened. Then, too, I owe great thanks to Richard Johnny John & Avery Jimerson (both for what they gave & what they withheld), as I do to all the poets & translators who are included in these pages & to many (but particularly Gary Snyder, Simon Ortiz & Larry Bird) who aren't. Anne Freedgood, Mary Dick & Janet Kafka were my editors

at Doubleday; Fran Gazze was my designer; Lennie Neufeld & Kathy Acker read the script with me; Loren Shakely & Dan Dyer typed it; Matthew helped me sing the songs; & Diane shared her empathy & knowledge.

But the deepest gratitude I have is for those sacred poets, named & unnamed in this book, who first saw the visions & who spoke & sang the words.

Jerome Rothenberg
1969/1971

The Underwood machine at which Georges Perec did his typing was old but a survivor, and it can't often have been at rest during the twenty-odd years of his writing life. For Perec was productive: by the time of his early death in 1982, he was the author of one large book, half a dozen short, or very short, books, and a whole catalogue of sundries: radio plays, film and television scripts, book and art reviews, essays, articles and two gatherings of crossword puzzles. The large book was his vastly entertaining novel, *Life a User's Manual*, a multi-story masterpiece that launched Perec among Anglophones with an auspicious éclat when it appeared in English translation in 1987. Since then most of the short or very short books – *Things*, *A Man Asleep*, *W or The Memory of Childhood*, *A Void*, and the unfinished '*53 Days*' – have also been translated. All of these either are fiction or else contain fiction, even if there has to be something of Perec himself in the anomic anti-hero of *A Man Asleep* and rather more of him in the all-but-autobiographical *W or The Memory of Childhood.*

What has previously gone untranslated for the most part is the scatter of Perec's non-fictional and occasional writings. A selection made from what I believe to be the brightest and/or most endearing of these fills the pages which follow. It begins with the whole of a small book that he published in 1974 called *Espèces d'espaces* (Species of Spaces), which is a thoroughly Perecquian title for a thoroughly Perecquian work. He was originally contracted to write it by a friend and collaborator trained in architecture, hence the subject of the book, which is urban and domestic space and how, these days, we are made to occupy it. This is pure topography: plain to the point of obviousness at times, yet forever veering off into jolly idiosyncrasies of the kind that make Perec so entertaining to read.

After *Species of Spaces* come the Other Pieces of this volume's

title – I hope and believe Perec would have liked the homophonetics of that sequence. These represent him at the length he was happiest with, of an orderly few pages at a time, written as often as not to a commission or at the prompting of others. Some of these essays and articles can safely be read as autobiographical, like the account he gives of what it was like for him to leap into the void from an aeroplane during his time as a parachutist in the French Army (p. 109), or that of an experience of psychoanalysis which he underwent at a time of depression in his mid-thirties (p. 161). Other pieces are turned at least partly away from himself and on to the material world around him, as in the impassive descriptions of the objects he can see in front of him on his work-table (p. 140), or of the changes observable over a period of time in the unhappy Rue Vilin in Paris (p. 208). Other pieces still have little or nothing to do directly with Perec, and in these he is often at his funniest: as in the splendid spoof itemizing the scientific collaboration between Léon Burp and Marcel Gotlib (p. 265). Finally, the volume also contains a delightful short story, *The Winter Journey*, the ingenious idea at the heart of which the great Borges would have been happy to find (p. 273); and a small sample – necessarily small given how hard it is to translate anything like this without ruining it – of the word games that Perec practised so attractively and with such prodigious skill.

No other recent (or not so recent) French writer can have been translated into English on quite the comprehensive scale that Perec has now achieved; and that one Perec volume should so quickly have followed another into British publication in the last few years is proof that he is being not simply translated but bought, and enjoyed, since publishers, we know, are by nature nervous about translations, looking on them as worthy ventures but all-too-likely money-losers. If Perec in English is, on the contrary, a money-maker, that is heartening. It is all the more heartening so far as I am concerned for being also a little unexpected. I remember well how I warmed to Perec the moment I first read him years ago, as an amiable and a clever writer in quite a familiar French

vein; but I would not then have had him down as a writer ever likely to be taken up much abroad. He seemed the wrong sort of French writer for that.

I mean by this the sort of French writer who has things too much under control, is cool to a fault and too taken up with the formalities of writing. *Life a User's Manual* is not the sort of novel we're used to admiring in this country, for example, transparently artificial as it is, starved of 'real' people and filled with pointers to the elaborate way in which it has been organized by the novelist. It's a tremendously thought-out book, whose high popularity was not to be expected. And the same goes for what I have called the all-but-autobiographical *W or The Memory of Childhood*, inasmuch as this is an unnaturally poised attempt to come to terms with the tragic aspects of Perec's early life. These are fine, memorable books, but they go about things in ways we are normally not so friendly towards.

Georges Perec is not, then, the writer to turn to if it's the warm, uninhibited airing of serious feelings that you want. It is characteristic of him that when he writes here – in 'The Scene of a Stratagem' – about his time in psychoanalysis, he lets us know that it was in the end effective in relieving him of some intimate angst or misery, but without letting us know just what form this angst or misery took. The essay is a tease, drawing us on to feel for its author as someone we know must have been unhappy in order to become a patient in the first place, only finally to withhold the secret we have been brought to want to share. Reticence is the mark of everything Perec wrote in which the subject comes close to home.

And to reticence he may add humour, which is the most convivial way of all for a writer to keep in with his readers without letting too much of himself show. Almost all of Perec's writing has the benign, underrated quality of *lightness*, which was one of the qualities that his friend, the incomparably light Italian writer Italo Calvino (to whom one of the items here is dedicated), said belonged among the prime literary virtues. In Perec lightness and humour are all the more sociable for masking as they do a pessimistic view of his own and the human condition. The French

writer he most reminds one of indeed is Raymond Queneau, who influenced the young Perec a great deal when he was starting out to write (and whose own beautifully light books have never had the popularity they deserve in English translation). Queneau, too, was a depressive man who wrote comical novels, while letting us see that the comedy was a cover, that life wasn't so very amusing once you stopped to think about it.

Like Queneau, Perec took refuge in language, as an absorbing medium with rules of its own by dalliance with which you can play consoling tricks on reality. And again like Queneau, he is a great believer in all that is most ordinary in human affairs: an unassuming laureate of the everyday, never obscure in what he writes and never in any danger of being pretentious. Perec was a Parisian and an intellectual in many of his tastes, but too nervous and too sincerely democratic ever to have wanted to start pronouncing on this and that in the megaphone role of a Paris intellectual. Jean-Paul Sartre and others were famous in their day for sitting in Left Bank cafés and laying down the ideological law; Perec, too, went to Left Bank cafés, not in his case to lay down any law (or even to sit), but rather to play the pinball machines – to the point where he used to get blistered fingers from the knobs. Which is a more human way than most of coping with *ennui*.

Behind the lightness and escapism of his writing there lay real trauma. Georges Perec was born in 1936, in Paris, the child of Polish Jews who had moved to France towards the end of the 1920s. The father did a number of very different jobs, the mother kept a hairdressing salon in Belleville, a working class quarter in the north-east of the city (see 'The Rue Vilin', a description of the street he had lived in as a very small boy, made haunting by its refusal of any explicit sentiment or nostalgia). When the war broke out in September 1939, Perec's father joined up and, because he was still a Polish citizen, was posted to the Foreign Legion; in June of the following year he was fatally wounded by shrapnel, six days before the armistice was signed with the victorious Germans. For the next eighteen months Perec lived in occupied Paris

with his mother. At the end of 1941, by when the threat to French Jews was becoming more immediate, he was sent south into the Unoccupied Zone, to the village of Villard de Lans near Grenoble, to join an aunt and uncle. His mother remained behind. Early in 1943, she was rounded up along with other Jews and sent to Germany. She was never seen again, and is presumed to have died in Auschwitz. Georges Perec was subsequently brought up in Paris by the same aunt and uncle to whose care he had been entrusted in the south.

These are terrible facts of his childhood that anyone reading Perec is better off for knowing, since not knowing them will make some at least of his writings seem much less affecting than they actually are. For example, there is the 'short story' here called 'The Scene of a Flight', which has an eleven-year-old boy playing truant from home and school. The story is simply, concretely, yet quite artfully told, or told not quite straight, since Perec has shuffled the chronology of the day's events around. In the end we can't be altogether sure whether it is *his* story or not, even though the 'he' of the earlier pages is withdrawn finally in favour of a nakedly authorial 'I'.

This is Perec all over, present in detail on the page while at the same time displaying his author's licence to deceive. At the age of eleven, in 1947, he was indeed living in the quarter of western Paris where his story starts and ends – a much more prosperous quarter than the Rue Vilin, since his uncle dealt in pearls and lived well – and his life with his surrogate parents wasn't a smooth one, so an episode of truancy is highly plausible. We have no reason to doubt that there *was* such a day in the boy Georges's life, some reason to doubt that it happened *exactly* as it is told here. What the story leaves behind is the bleak sense in a young boy of alienation, of belonging neither at home nor anywhere else, of his deep need to experience hospitality. That bleak sense is something that Georges Perec seems to have lived with all his life.

'I was born in France, I am French, I bear a French first name, Georges, and a French surname, or almost, Perec.' In that throwaway 'almost' there lay a painful and incurable awareness

of difference for Perec. His surname didn't have quite the written form it should have done; had it been a truly French name it would have been written Pérec, with an acute accent, or possibly Perrec, with a double *r* to ensure that the first *e* was given the right value. The faintly foreign form that it in fact took was for him the tell-tale mark of his difference. His was the uncertainty of the assimilated but still identifiable Jew. To the French he was different for being by birth Jewish; to other, unassimilated Jews, including members of his own family, he was different because he was French, steeped in a Gentile culture (this is a theme of 'Ellis Island').

The terrible fate suffered by his mother, and by others of his Polish relatives, is to be borne in mind when reading what is inevitably the most sombre of the pieces I have included here, which is a review that Perec wrote in his mid-twenties of a book by Robert Antelme describing his wartime imprisonment in a Nazi camp (p. 249). The review is quite impersonal: it nowhere so much as hints that the life of the man writing it had itself been profoundly affected by the evil institution Antelme is concerned with. It's as if Perec were relieved to be able to remain in the role of reporter, rather than having to declare himself emotively as another victim of the concentration camp system.

This is very much a *willed* objectivity on his part, poignant to us because we know it was hard-won. It might be used also to explain his commitment to the 'infra-ordinary', or the belief he had that we none of us give enough attention to what is truly daily in our daily lives, to the banal habits, settings and events of which these lives almost entirely consist. The infra-ordinary is what goes, literally, without saying. Perec however, the modest, watchful student of the everyday, will take on the job of saying it, as he does in *Species of Spaces* and in other pieces translated here.

At one stage of Perec's life, this unusually concrete mode of literary sociology had a political point to it. It's not hard indeed to see it as deriving from Marxian notions of the use- and labour-value attaching to even the most nondescript products of human making.

But Perec's left-wing political allegiance was shallow and it didn't last; it is detectable here only when he draws hopeful lessons from the camp experience of Robert Antelme and tries to superimpose them on the class structure of postwar France. But if politics are otherwise out of sight in this volume, that only serves to make Perec's unregenerate materialism the more effective, since it is no longer at the distracting service of an ideology.

It was a materialism that extended also to writing and to language. Materialists of language are distinctive for taking full advantage of the fact that language's constituents, words, are so many objects existing materially, in the form either of a graphic inscription or acoustically, as a sound made in the mouth and received by the ear. All materialists do is to exploit the possibilities inherent in words as things, or signifiers, rather than doing what most of us do most of the time, which is to overlook the materiality or thingness of words and pass directly on to their meaning, or the signified. Perec was a writer waiting, you might say, for Structuralism to happen and to bring to the fore this suggestive division of language into its material and its semantic aspects. It is a division rich in possibilities for anyone who has decided, as he already had, that language is a raw material to be enjoyed and worked on.

He wasn't alone in this, because there were other writers in France who felt the same way. A key moment in Perec's life came with his co-opting in 1967 by the OuLiPo, a literary association of the like-minded that has by this time acquired a certain celebrity but which was then more or less unknown. There is a nice pedantry to the acronym, with its upper- and lower-case letters, apt because it is the acronym of a body as fond of pedantry as it is of word-play. The Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle or 'Workshop for Potential Literature' was formed in 1960 by a subset of writers and mathematicians who were all interested in the possible connections between the practice of mathematics and the various formal constraints that have to be satisfied in the writing of poetry. Perec was no sort of mathematician, but the interests, and above all the advanced experiments in constraint that the members of the OuLiPo went in for, were right up his street. He became a key and resourceful

member of the group, proving himself capable of OuLiPian feats of transcendent skill.

The most celebrated was the novel he wrote in the form of a lipogram, a lipogram being a text from which a certain letter (or letters) of the alphabet has been banned. Most lipograms are short; this one of Perec's was not. *La Disparition*, which was published in 1969, ran to more than 300 pages, and is riotous, a wonderfully inventive virtuoso display of how much can be done without once using the letter *e*, the hardest letter to do without in French as it is in English (Gilbert Adair's English version of this *e*-less extravaganza, published as *A Void* in 1994, is a brilliant verbal exercise in its own right). Almost as astonishing as his lipogram is Perec's Great Palindrome, a less than meaningful but still stunningly ingenious reversible construction containing more than 5,000 characters. (When I was a schoolboy, the paltry nineteen characters of the Napoleonic 'Able was I ere I saw Elba' were held to be quite something.) These and other, lesser games were at once a test for Perec and a solace; they were demonstrations of verbal expertise freed from the need to be expressive.

Perec's life was not a long one – he died four days before his forty-sixth birthday, of lung cancer, brought on by a disastrous liking for nicotine. He had decided he wanted to be a writer while he was still at school, and a writer he there and then became, unpublishable to begin with but determined. His formal education did not go well, either at school or during the two years he spent failing to finish a history degree at the Sorbonne. But though he was set on becoming a writer, and even after he began to get published, he seems not to have had sufficient confidence in his success to become a writer pure and simple: he remained nearly all his life in what was – nominally – a full-time job as archivist in a science laboratory, giving it up only four years before his death. He was by every account an unusually thoughtful bibliographer, alert to ways of improving on old methods of classification. So the job was never the chore it may sound, or would have been for someone less temperamentally attuned to it. Perec positively enjoyed classification, in practice and in theory – for the evidence

of that you have only to read what he has to say about its charms and oddities in 'Think/Classify'.

At the time of his death, Georges Perec had a small but select following in his own country and none at all to speak of outside it. The first book that he succeeded in getting published (in 1965), *Things*, won the Prix Renaudot, which is one of the literary prizes that actually count for something in France; and *Life a User's Manual* won the equally worthwhile Prix Médecis when it appeared in 1978, having been shortlisted for the Prix Goncourt. This wasn't great fame, but fame enough for a discreet writer like Perec, whose *oeuvre* was so various and so undemanding, and who away from his writings was too mild and shy a man ever to go in for self-promotion. Outside France, he was hardly known when he died and it was some years before any publisher was brave enough to bring out *Life a User's Manual* in English. Since then, we have had not only all the translations I listed earlier, but a large, not to say exhaustive biography of Perec by his most dedicated English-language translator, David Bellos (a book I was grateful to be able to draw on in the writing of this Introduction). With the addition of this *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* Perec is now with us in full, and I know of no more pleasurable literary company.

I have added footnotes to my translations where they seem likely to be of help in explaining Perec's allusions; these are marked by asterisks and daggers. All the numbered footnotes are Perec's own. I needed help myself, needless to say, in pursuing some of the more arcane details and allusions, and I here record my thanks to Harry Mathews, Georges Perec's old friend and fellow-OuLiPian, and to Marie-José Minassian. In making a number of small changes to both the Introduction and the text of the new edition of *Species of Spaces*, I am most grateful for the suggestions of Mme Ela Bienenfeld, Georges Perec's cousin and literary executor.

*John Sturrock*, 1999

# TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE
# THE STRUCTURE OF BEHAVIOR



*Il ne me souvient pas qu'une mort ait consterné davantage. Dans l'instant, nous avons perçu qu'une dimension de la vérité nous était retirée, qu'une expression du vrai, longuement attendue, ne serait jamais dite.*

Alphonse De Waelhens
*Les Temps Modernes*, 1961

The premature death (May 1961) of the author of this book undoubtedly came as a grave shock to the whole of the philosophical and intellectual world. That the English translation of his first published work—which undertaking he so graciously placed in my hands, and the progress of which he followed with such interest, encouragement and warmth—did not appear in his lifetime is a matter of very deep regret to me. This completed task, then—with all its defects—is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Professor Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Few philosophers have outlined as rich a philosophy of language as did the author of this book, nor consequently have understood so well the difficulties—perhaps even the impossibility—of truly faithful translation. Awareness of this constituted both a support and a burden in completing this work: the first, because it provided some consolation for the inadequacy; the second, because it emphasized the problems at hand. Among the many particular decisions involved in the attempt to translate a difficult and nuanced philosophical text, there is one guiding choice which must be made: that between a wholly literal rendition of the original at the expense of style in the second language, and a free rendition which bows completely to the literary demands of the latter. The present translation does not pretend in the least to have achieved the proper balance between these two poles. But, while some concessions to the requirement of readability were obviously necessary, the primary goal has been to communicate the subtle thought of the author as accurately as possible;

hence the option for the more literal and less elegant rendering has been taken when this seemed necessary to preserve the idea.

In this connection, the use of certain technical terms should be given some preliminary clarification. Throughout the book, when the author refers to "critical thought" (*la pensée criticiste*), problems and solutions in the "critical" tradition, etc., the term "critical" has reference to the philosophical tradition initiated by Kant (but not necessarily to all of Kant's own thought; cf. p. 248, n. 41) and represented, especially in this book, by the idealism of a philosopher such as Brunschvicg. As exemplified in the introduction, the author's use of the terms: "realistic," "realism," "realistic analyses or thinking," and frequently the word "real" itself, refers for the most part to a reductive realism typical of certain trends in modern (not necessarily contemporary) scientific thought and characterized by partitive analysis and the tendency to consider the resulting scientific constructs and scientific view of the world as representative or even descriptive of the ontologically real. "Realism" also occasionally refers to the naive realism of common sense or of science; only in the last chapter do the expressions have specific reference to any of the classical forms of philosophical realism—and then it is usually a question of the realism of the late scholasticism to which Descartes reacted. Likewise, the expression "causal thinking" is most frequently taken in the sense of a mechanistic action of a part on a part—although the meaning is again somewhat enlarged in the last part of the book.

As is well known, the French term *"conscience"* has many shades of meaning—from simple awareness to explicit consciousness, the all-embracing sphere of the mental, and finally simply the mind itself. With few exceptions the word "consciousness" has been retained in English in order to preserve some of the flexibility and continuity of the French expression; the context usually provides ample clarification of the particular shade of meaning in question. The term *"l'esprit"* has been consistently translated as "mind," as well as the term *"l'intelligence." "Spirituelle"* and its derivatives have been translated as "mental" or "rational," depending on the context; *"psychique"* has been translated as "mental" or "psychological," again depending on the context. Reference to the order of life or to vital activity—preserved in the English—has a restricted meaning in this work, referring to the biological or vegetative sphere. When several English equivalents exist for technical terms, the more neutral

expression, the one less closely associated with a particular theoretical frame of reference, was usually chosen. Finally, in the original, certain portions of the text appear in reduced type; these sections are not quotations but by and large represent concise presentations and summarizations of the findings of science which are relevant to the author's discussion but do not form an integral part of the main line of philosophical reasoning. For this reason the present translation (based on the Second French Edition which was revised and amplified by the author) has retained this format. With these few indications, it is hoped that the general context itself will allow the reader to follow the author's precise meaning in any given case.

It is with pleasure and genuine appreciation that certain obligations are acknowledged. First and foremost, this work could not have been completed without the generous and unfailing assistance of my wife, whose efforts extend from the most thankless mechanical details to a careful critical reading of the final draft, and whose help was invaluable at all levels; to her, I am most grateful. I am also indebted to many friends and colleagues at Saint Louis University and the University of Louvain for advice and encouragement; among these persons, I am particularly grateful to the Reverend H. L. Van Breda, O.F.M., and Alphonse De Waelhens for their assistance in the initial stages of the project, and to James Collins and John Higgins for their valuable assistance with certain technical problems. Nevertheless, the usual disclaimer that all the mistakes and inadequacies of this work are completely and solely the responsibility of the translator must apply with special force in this instance.

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# SWANN'S WAY: IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME VOL.1



Many moments in Marcel Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* are by now so well known that they occupy a permanent place in our literary culture. Scenes and episodes are familiar even if one has not actually read the book: say 'Proust' and one will think 'madeleine' and 'tea' as often as 'cork-lined room'. Yet we find, when at last we confront it, not only that its fame is justly deserved, but that our experience of it is entirely individual. We will have our own way of visualizing the narrator's bedtime scene with his mother; his visits to his hypochondriac aunt; his teasing of the old servant Françoise; his embrace of the hawthorns; his vision of the three steeples and his first piece of serious writing. We will have our own associations with Swann's agonizing love affair with Odette and the narrator's youthful infatuation with Swann's daughter Gilberte. And we will have our own unexpected memories that enable us to identify with the narrator in the most famous scene of all, in which the taste of a tea-soaked madeleine suddenly triggers his full recollection of his childhood in the village of Combray and, from this, leads to the unfolding of all the subsequent action in the 3,000-page novel.

We will find, too, that the better acquainted we become with this book the more it yields. Given its richness and resilience, Proust's work may be enjoyed on every level and in every form – as quotation, as excerpt, as compendium, even as movie and comic book – but in the end it is best appreciated in the way it was meant to be experienced, in the full, slow reading and rereading of every word, in utter submission to Proust's subtle psychological analyses, his precise portraits, his compassionate humour, his richly coloured and lyrical landscapes, his extended digressions, his architectonic sentences, his symphonic structures, his perfect formal designs.

*The Way by Swann's* opens with the early bedtime of the narrator as a grown man: he describes how he used to spend the sleepless portions of his nights remembering events from his early life and finally evokes the episode of the madeleine. A much longer section follows, containing the memories of his childhood at Combray that were summoned by the taste of the madeleine and that came flooding back to him in unprecedentedly minute and sensuous detail. This first part of the book, 'Combray', having opened at bedtime, closes ? itself like a long sleepless night ? at dawn.

The second part of the book, 'A Love of Swann's', which jumps back many years, consists of the self-contained story of Swann's miserable, jealousy-racked love for the shallow and fickle Odette who will one day be his wife; the narrator with whom we began the book scarcely appears at all. The third and last part, 'Place-names: the Name', much shorter than the rest of the volume, includes the story of the narrator's infatuation, as a boy, with Swann's daughter Gilberte over weeks of playing together on the chilly lawns of the Champs Elysées and ends with a sort of coda: on a late November day in the Bois de Boulogne, the narrator muses on the contrast between the beauties of the days of his childhood and the banality of his present, and on the nature of time.

The story is told in the first person. Proust scholars have identified a handful of slightly different Is in *In Search of Lost Time*, but the two main Is are those of the narrator as he tells the story and the narrator as a child and young man. The first person, though, is freely abandoned from time to time in favour of what seems to be an omniscient narrator, as when, in 'Combray', we witness conversations between his Aunt Léonie and the servant Françoise which the boy could not have heard; and most remarkably during nearly the whole of 'A Love of Swann's'.

The story is told in the first person, the protagonist is referred to as 'Marcel', and the book is filled with events and characters closely resembling those of Proust's own life, yet this novel is not autobiography wearing a thin disguise of fiction but, rather, the opposite – fiction in the guise of autobiography. For although Proust's own life experience is the material out of which he forms his novel, as is the case for any writer of fiction, it has been altered, recombined, shaped to create a coherent and meaningful fictional artefact, and this very crucial alchemy – art's transformation of life – is itself one of Proust's preoccupations and a principal subject and theme of the book. The episode of the madeleine, for instance, is apparently based on an experience of Proust's own, but what Proust actually dipped in his tea was a rusk of dry toast, and what he remembered was his morning visits to his grandfather. The scene of the goodnight kiss, for instance, is set, not in a single actual home of Proust's childhood, but in a melding of two – one in Auteuil, the suburb of Paris where he was born, and the other in Illiers, a town outside Paris where he spent many summers. Similarly, the characters in the novel are composites, more perfectly realized ideals or extremes, of characters in his own life.

What is introduced in this inaugural volume of *In Search of Lost Time*? As Samuel Beckett remarks in his slim study *Proust*,

> The whole of Proust's world comes out of a teacup, and not merely Combray and his childhood. For Combray brings us to the two 'ways' and to Swann, and to Swann may be related every element of the Proustian experience and consequently its climax in revelation… Swann is the corner-stone of the entire structure, and the central figure of the narrator's

> childhood, a childhood that involuntary memory, stimulated or charmed by the long-forgotten taste of a madeleine steeped in an infusion of tea, conjures in all the relief and colour of its essential significance from the shallow well of a cup's inscrutable banality.

Through Charles Swann, the faithful friend and constant dinner-guest of the narrator's family, we are led, either directly or indirectly, to all the most important characters of *In Search of Lost Time*. Nearly all, in fact, are introduced in The Way by Swann's: the young protagonist, his parents and his grandmother; Swann, his daughter Gilberte, and Odette, the mysterious 'lady in pink'; Françoise, the family servant; the narrator's boyhood friend the bookish Bloch; and the aristocrat Mme de Villeparisis. Stories are told about them that will be echoed later by parallel stories, just as the story of the young protagonist's longing for his mother is echoed within this volume by the story of Swann's longing for Odette and the narrator's, when he was a boy, for Gilberte. Stories are begun that will be continued, hints are dropped that will be picked up, and questions are asked that will be answered in later volumes. Places are described that will reappear in greater detail, just as each of the major themes in the book – love, betrayal, homosexuality, manners, taste, snobbery, etc. – is introduced in *The Way by Swann's* and elaborated more completely in subsequent volumes.

In the narrator's recovery of his early memories through the tasting of the tea-soaked madeleine, for instance, we learn of the power of involuntary memory, and the madeleine is only the first of a series of inanimate objects that appear in the course of *In Search of Lost Time*, each providing a sensuous experience which will in turn provoke an involuntary memory (the uneven cobblestones in a court-

yard, for instance, or the touch of a stiffly starched napkin on the lips). The incident of the madeleine will itself be taken up again and revealed in a new light in the final volume.

In the narrator's early passion for his mother and Swann's for Odette we are introduced to the power of love for an elusive object, the perversity with which one's passion is intensified by the danger of losing one's beloved. The narrator's infatuation with Gilberte in the present volume will be echoed by his more fully developed passion, as an adult, for Albertine in a subsequent volume. In the very first pages of *The Way By Swann's*, the notion of escape from time is alluded to, and the description of the magic lantern which follows soon after hints at how time will be transcended through art. The closing coda in the Bois de Boulogne, contrasting the beauties of the remembered past with the banality of the present, introduces the theme of the receding, in time, and the disappearance, of beloved places and people, and their resurrection in our imagination, our memory and finally our art.

And that, above all, is the notion introduced in the present volume: that only in recollection does an experience become fully significant, as we arrange it in a meaningful pattern. Thus the crucial role of our intellect, our imagination, in our perception of the world and our recreation of it to suit our desires, and the importance of the role of the artist in transforming reality according to a particular inner vision: the artist escapes the tyranny of time through art.In one early scene, for example, the young protagonist sees the object of his devotion, the Duchesse de Guermantes, in the village church. He has never seen her before; what he has loved has been his own image of her, which he has created from her name and family history, her country estate, her position and reputation. In the flesh, she is disappointing. But immediately his imagination goes to work again, and

soon he has managed to change what he sees before him into an object once again worthy of his love. Similarly, later in the novel Swann finds that his love of Odette is wonderfully strengthened, even transformed, the moment he realizes how closely she resembles a favourite painting of his: he now sees the painting, as well, when he looks at her. The power of the intellect, and the imagination, have come to transform the inadequacy or tediousness of the real.

Proust began writing *Du côté de chez Swann* when he was in his late thirties, sometime between the summer of 1908 and the summer of 1909, as nearly as we can make out from references in his letters and conversations. His mother had died several years before, and following a stay of some months in a sanatorium he had gone to live in an apartment at Versailles while friends searched for a suitable place for him to settle. When at last he moved, it was to an apartment at 102, boulevard Haussmann which was already familiar to him: his uncle had died there and his mother had often visited it. The building is now owned by a bank, but one can still view the high-ceilinged room in which Proust spent most of his life from then on – slept, rested, ate, received visitors, read and wrote. It was here that he wrote most of *A la recherche du temps perdu.*

In a sense, the book had already been in preparation for several years before it began to take the form of a novel. It was never destined to be composed in a neatly chronological manner in any case, and elements of it had been emerging piecemeal in various guises: paragraphs, passages, scenes were written and even published in earlier versions, then later reworked and incorporated into the novel. The famous description of the steeples of Martinville, for example, had an earlier incarnation as an article on road travel; and versions of many scenes had appeared in Proust's first, unfinished and

unpublished novel, *Jean Santeuil*, which juxtaposed the two childhood homes that Proust would later combine to form the setting of the drama of the goodnight kiss.

Proust had been projecting a number of shorter works, most of them essays. At a certain point he realized they could all be brought together in a single form, a novel. What became its start had, immediately before, begun as an essay contesting the ideas of the literary critic Sainte-Beuve, a work which he conceived as having a fictional opening: the mother of the main character would come to his bedside in the morning and the two of them would begin a conversation about Sainte-Beuve. The first drafts of this essay evolved into the novel, and at last, by mid-summer of 1909, Proust was actually referring to his work-in-progress as a novel. Thereafter the work continued to develop somewhat chaotically, as Proust wrote many different parts of the book at the same time, cutting, expanding, and revising endlessly. Even as he wrote the opening, however, he foresaw the conclusion, and in fact the end of the book was completed before the middle began to grow.

A version of the present first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann*, was in existence by January 1912, and extracts including 'A ray of sun on the balcony' and 'Village Church' were published that year in the *Figaro*.

Although the publisher Fasquelle had announced that in his opinion 'nothing must interfere with the action', Proust nevertheless submitted to him a manuscript of the book in October 1912. At this point, Proust, who admitted that his novel was very long but felt it was 'very concise', proposed a book in two volumes, one called *Le Temps perdu* ('Time Lost') and the other *Le Temps retrouvé* ('Finding Time Again'), under the general title *Les Intermittences du coeur* ('The Intermittences of the Heart'). (He had not yet found the title *Du côté de chez Swann*.)

He received no answer from Fasquelle and, in November 1912, wrote to another publisher, Gaston Gallimard. Now he was considering three volumes. He also sent an extract of forty-eight pages to *La Nouvelle Revue Française.*

In December 1912, Gallimard and Fasquelle both returned their copies of the manuscript. Fasquelle did not want to risk publishing something 'so different from what the public is used to reading'. *The Nouvelle Revue Française* also rejected the extract. André Gide later admitted to Proust: 'The rejection of this book will remain the most serious mistake ever made by the N.R.F. – and (since to my shame I was largely responsible for it) one of the sorrows, one of the most bitter regrets of my life.'

At the end of December 1912, Proust approached another publisher, Ollendorff. He offered not only to pay the costs but also to share with the publisher any profits that might derive from it. Ollendorff's rejection came in February and included the comment: 'I don't see why a man should take thirty pages to describe how he turns over in his bed before he goes to sleep.'

At last Proust submitted the manuscript to Bernard Grasset, offering to pay the expenses of publishing the book and publicizing it, and Grasset accepted. By April 1913, Proust was beginning to work on proofs. He said in a letter to a friend: 'My corrections so far (I hope this won't continue) are not corrections. There remains not a single line out of 20 of the original text... It is crossed out, corrected in every blank part I can find, and I am pasting papers at the top, at the bottom, to the right, to the left, etc....' He said that although the resulting text was actually a bit shorter, it was a 'hopelessly tangled mess'.

During this time, he made final decisions about titles. Ideally, he would have preferred simply the general

title, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, followed by 'Volume I' and 'Volume II' with no individual titles for the two volumes. However, his publisher wanted individual titles for commercial reasons. Proust decided the first volume would be called *Du côté de chez Swann* and the second probably *Le Côté de Guermantes*. He explained several times what these titles meant, that in the country around Combray there were two directions in which to take a walk, that one asked, for example: 'Shall we go in the direction of M. Rostand's house?' (His friend Maurice Rostand had in fact suggested the title of the first volume.)

But the title also had a metaphorical meaning. *'Chez Swann'* means not only 'Swann's home, Swann's place,' but also 'on the part of Swann', 'about Swann', i.e. the title refers not just to where Swann lives but to the person Swann is, to Swann's mind, opinions, character, nature. And by extension the first volume concerns not just Swann's manner of living, thinking, but also Swann's world, the worldly and artistic domain, while *Le Côté de Guermantes* concerns the ancient family of the Guermantes and their world, the domain of the aristocracy. And it is true that the character of Swann gives the volume its unity.

Proust's friend Louis de Robert did not like the title, and Proust mentioned a few others – rather idly, as it turns out, since he was not really going to change his mind: 'Charles Swann', 'Gardens in a Cup of Tea' and 'The Age of Names'. He said he had also thought of 'Springtime'. But he argued: 'I still don't understand why the name of that Combray path which was known as "the way by Swann's" with its earthy reality, its local truthfulness, does not have just as much poetry in it as those abstract or flowery titles.'

The work of the printer was finished by November 1913 – an edition of 1,750 was printed – and the book was in

the bookshops on 14 November. Reviews appeared by Lucien Daudet and Jean Cocteau, among others. Not all the reviews were positive. The publisher submitted the book for the Prix Goncourt, but the prize was won, instead, by a book called *Le Peuple de la mer* ('The People of the Sea'), by Marc Elder.

A later edition was published in 1919 by Gallimard with some small changes. A corrected edition was published by Gallimard in its Bibliothèque de la Pléiade series in 1954 and another, with further corrections and additions, in 1987.

Many contemporaries of Proust's insisted that he wrote the way he spoke, although when *Du côté de chez Swann* appeared in print, they were startled by what they saw as the severity of the page. Where were the pauses, the inflections? There were not enough empty spaces, not enough punctuation marks. To them, the sentences did not seem as long when they were spoken, in his extraordinary hoarse voice, as when they were read on the page: his voice punctuated them.

The style in which Proust wrote was essentially natural and unaffected, free from preciosity, archaism and self-conscious elegance, and far plainer than one might guess from existing English versions. Yet at the same time, he used a wealth of metaphorical imagery, layer upon layer of comparisons, and had a tendency to fill a sentence to its utmost capacity. This, according to some, also reflected the way he spoke when he was with his friends. One of them, perhaps exaggerating, reported that Proust would arrive late in the evening, waking him up, begin talking, and deliver one long sentence that did not come to an end until the middle of the night. The sentence would be full of asides, parentheses, illuminations, reconsiderations, revisions, addenda, corrections, augmentations, digressions, qualifications, erasures, deletions and marginal notes. It would, in other words, attempt to be exhaustive, to capture every nuance of a piece of

reality, to reflect Proust's entire thought. To be exhaustive is, of course, an infinite task. More can always be inserted: more event, and more nuance; more commentary on the event, and more nuance within the commentary.

Proust felt that a long sentence contained a whole, complex thought. The shape of the sentence was the shape of the thought, and every word was necessary to the thought: 'I really have to weave these long silks as I spin them,' he said. 'If I shortened my sentences, it would make little pieces of sentences, not sentences.' And yet great length was not desirable in itself. He categorically rejected sentences that were artificially amplified, or that were overly abstract, or that groped, arriving at a thought by a succession of approximations. He despised empty flourishes; when he described Odette as having a sourire sour-noise, or 'sly smile', the alliteration was there for a purpose, to tie the two related elements together in one's mind. As he proceeded from draft to draft, he not only added material but also condensed. 'I prefer concentration,' he said, 'even in length.' And *The Way by Swann's*, in any case, contains a nice balance: very long sentences – of ten lines or more – occupy only one quarter of the book.

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The first English translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*, C. K. Scott Moncrieff's *Swann's Way*, was done in Proust's lifetime and published in 1922. Sixty years later, a revision of Moncrieff's translation by Terence Kilmartin, based on a corrected edition of the French, brought the translation closer to the original, cutting gratuitous additions and embellishments and correcting Moncrieff's own misreadings, though it also introduced the occasional grammatical mistake and mixed metaphor, and employed a style of writing in English percep-

tibly less mellifluous than Moncrieff's. In 1992, after Kilmartin's death and after the publication of the still more definitive 1987 Pléiade edition, the translation was further revised by D. J. Enright. The two revisions of Moncrieff's translation retain so much of his original work that they cannot be called new translations. Thus, there exists only one other translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*, and that is *Swann's Way* by James Grieve (Canberra, 1982). Grieve's approach was not to follow the original French as closely as possible word by word, but to analyse a sentence for its meaning and then reshape that meaning into a syntax which might have been that of an author writing in English. In his translation each sentence is often substantially reworked. My approach has been closer to Moncrieff's, though the resulting translations are only in rare short sentences or phrases identical.

My aim in the present translation was to stay as close as possible to Proust's original in every way, even to match his style as nearly as I could. To follow the original closely is both harder and easier than allowing oneself more freedom. Harder because the confines are so tight, but easier for the same reason – one does not have as many options. I wanted to reproduce as nearly as possible Proust's word choice, word order, syntax, repetition of words, punctuation – even, when possible, his handling of sounds, the rhythms of a sentence and the alliteration and assonance within it.

For Proust is often lavish in his aural effects – witness the alliteration of this phrase: faisait refluer ses reflets; or the ABBA structure of vowel sounds in this one: *lâcheté qui nous détourne de toute tâche*; or the cooing of the dove at the end of this paragraph: *Et son faîte etait toujours couronné du roucoulement d'une colombe.* Often, especially at the close of a paragraph or a long sentence, Proust will string together, say, three adjectives beginning with the letter p; if the translation can do

the same, it amounts to a sort of translation bonus.

My intention was to reproduce the French without adding or subtracting material, or substituting an interpretation for what was on the original page; to be faithful to the beauty of some passages, the awkwardness or strangeness of others; to retain parallel structure when it was there, and the lack of parallel structure when it was missing; wherever possible, to begin a sentence or paragraph with the same word or words as in the original; and to end a sentence or paragraph the same way. Preferably the very last word of a sentence should be the same – and this becomes especially important in those long, complexly structured sentences, since so often they are designed from the beginning to lead up to a particular climactic word. It almost goes without saying, although readers still ask translators to break them up, that the long sentences must be kept intact and must retain as many elements of their complexity as possible, above all the intricate architecture of syntax into which Proust inserts his parenthetical remarks and digressions, delaying the outcome for so long.

One may suppose that a new translation will have a more contemporary tone or diction than an older one, that it will be more in the idiom of its time. Yet in the case of Proust, if one sets out to compose a very close translation, one finds that the very complexity of the syntax requires a certain formality, so that the diction, with its slightly old-fashioned quality, is somewhat predetermined. Within this formality, of course, there is a range, though a fairly narrow one, of choices of more and less formal, and more and less modern vocabulary.

Often, in fact, the closest, most accurate, and even most euphonious equivalent may be a word more commonly used decades ago than it is now: for instance, the French *chercher* means both 'to look for' and 'to try', so its perfect equivalent in English is our 'seek'. Or, for the French *corsage*,

the part of a woman's dress extending from the neck to the hips, also known as the 'waist' or 'body' of a woman's dress, the perfect equivalent is 'bodice', which in fact means the same thing. And so these choices, too, may give the translation the tone of an earlier time. Other wonderfully identical English equivalents have simply receded too far into the past by now and will be too obscure to be understood: Proust's *solitude*, which in French can mean 'a lonely spot', has that meaning in English too, but will no longer be understood in that sense. A couple of centuries ago, we would refer, in English, to a 'piece of water' just as Proust does to *une pièce d'eau* and mean, like him, an ornamental pool or pond.

Of course, translation always involves compromise, and most of the time not every feature of the Proustian sentence can be retained in English: sometimes word order has to be sacrificed, sometimes punctuation, sometimes rhythm, alliteration, etc. The word in translation will be a shade off in meaning from the original, but part of a nice pattern of alliteration; or the passive voice is used when the active would have been better so that the images will appear in the same order; or, whereas Proust's sentence ends with a comma followed by a single climactic word, the English version must end with a comma followed by two or three words so that the same rhythmic resolution will be achieved. The only thing that is never knowingly compromised is the meaning of the original, though perhaps meaning, too, is lost or diminished when other features of Proust's sentence are altered.

The present translation has tended to be plainer and more direct than Moncrieff's, in part because his individual word choices are so often 'dressier'. For instance, each time Proust uses the word *disait*, I have translated it simply as 'said', whereas Moncrieff often introduces a variety not in the original by choosing instead: 'remarked', 'began', 'murmured', 'as-

sured them', etc. In many other cases, too, his tendency is to replace a more neutral word by a more expressive or loaded one: *regardait*, 'looked', becomes 'peered' or 'peeped'; *tenu*, 'held', becomes 'squeezed'; 'little' becomes 'tiny'; 'interest' becomes 'fascination'; 'emptied' becomes 'purged'. Introduced consistently throughout the book, these choices of Moncrieff's result in a generally more highly coloured text. Similarly, where Proust uses a plain word like *bon*, 'good', twice in the same paragraph, Moncrieff instead introduces variation through the use of a synonym such as 'pleasant' or 'agreeable'. Proust's eloquence is sometimes achieved through plainness and bluntness, from which Moncrieff often shies away.

Moncrieff adds elements not in the original French. For instance, for the difficult word *oubli*, meaning 'forgetting', 'forgetfulness', or 'oblivion', Moncrieff offers 'waters of Lethe' – a mythological reference not in the original (and one which Kilmartin, in his work of revision, did not remove). For the sake of the rhythm, Moncrieff also adds words which sometimes redouble the sense (as in 'strange and haunting') or attenuate it (as with 'rather' or 'perhaps'), making the book verbose or redundant where it was not in the original. A brief and simple phrase like 'for me so painful' becomes, in Moncrieff's version, 'so exquisitely painful to myself'. Occasionally, he carries this wordiness to an extreme: a description of chrysanthemums that is most directly translated as 'these ephemeral stars which light up on grey days' becomes in his version (unchanged by Kilmartin) 'these ephemeral stars, which kindle their cold fires in the murky atmosphere of winter afternoons'.

Moncrieff tends, finally, to be cautious where Proust was bold, not only deploying an occasional Victorian sort of modesty, but also adopting a more generally conservative approach to his handling of metaphor. Odette's 'body', in Proust,

becomes her 'physical charms' in Moncrieff; and whereas in the French original a balcony floats in the air in front of a house, in Moncrieff's version it merely 'seems' to float.

Much as one may argue with the specifics of Moncrieff's decisions, however, his monumental work remains the standard by which all succeeding translations of Proust will be judged. Within the limitations of his approach, which was in part conditioned by his time and cultural milieu, Moncrieff's ambition, to remain faithful to the shape of the Proustian sentence and the order in which it unfolded, and to create a rhythmic, coherent, eloquent text in English, was impressively fulfilled in *Swann's Way*. His ear was for the most part sensitive, his handling of the language adroit, his mistakes in interpretation relatively few, given the sheer numbers of pages he translated.

Attempting to follow Proust's sometimes unconventional punctuation was the final, and most exciting, exercise in the present translation. Proust's tendency to underuse the comma is not particularly noticeable at first; once one becomes aware of it, it is remarkable – again and again, long strings of phrases which would more conventionally be separated by commas are not. Occasionally, on the other hand, a sentence will sometimes occur in which there seems to be an excessive number of commas – the reader is halted every few words.

Matching Proust comma for comma in translation, however, is possible far more often than one would have imagined given the differences in syntax between French and English. And attempting faithfulness on the level of the comma is not an empty exercise, for Proust's punctuation does not seem to be as casual as some have argued it is. The punctuation is light for the same reason the sentences are long: so as to contain a whole thought without fragmenting it. The

punctuation in part determines the pace and the breath-span of the prose. If a succession of short phrases separated by commas halts the flow of the sentence, so that the prose gasps for air, the opposite, the very long sentence relatively unimpeded by stops, gives the impression of a headlong rush to expel the thought in one exhalation.

One pressing translation problem that persisted until the very end was the title of this volume. A recurring option, of course, was simply to retain Moncrieff's: *Swann's Way* has become embedded in the literary consciousness of generations, and it has a good solid ring to it. And yet, it is not as close to the French as it could be, and it is confusing to readers who do not already know the book.

As Proust explained, the primary or literal signification of the book's title is geographical. '*Du côté de chez Swann*' answers the question 'Which way shall we go for our walk today?' 'Swann's Way' does not really answer it as the French does. It would most literally be answered by 'In the Direction of Swann's', 'Towards Swann's', 'By Swann's', etc. But Moncrieff's title is also ambivalent. When Proust himself first heard it, in 1922, not long before his death, he did not like it, believing it to mean exclusively 'Swann's manner'. When he understood that it could also be interpreted to mean 'the walk by Swann's house', he said it would be all right with the addition of 'To' in front of it – 'To Swann's Way'. Although this title would not work in English, Proust's desire for greater clarity is worth noting.

The clearer or more explicit translations of the French title, 'Towards Swann's' and 'By Swann's', sound rather abrupt; like 'Swann's Way' they are much briefer than the six-syllable French title and have none of its rocking or walking motion; as important, they omit the word *côté*, 'direction' or 'way', which figures so prominently for pages and pages of

the book where the two ways or walks are contrasted. One working title which satisfied many requirements was *By Way of Swann's*: it began with a preposition, answered the question about the walk and had a graceful rhythm. However, there was an oddness to it, as a title, that in the end disqualified it in favour of its close sibling, taken from the body of the novel itself: *The Way by Swann's*.

Lydia Davis

## Primitive Means Complex

That there are no primitive languages is an axiom of contemporary linguistics where it turns its attention to the remote languages of the world. There are no half-formed languages, no underdeveloped or inferior languages. Everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity. People who have failed to achieve the wheel will not have failed to invent & develop a highly wrought grammar. Hunters & gatherers innocent of all agriculture will have vocabularies that distinguish the things of their world down to the finest details. The language of snow among the Eskimos is awesome. The aspect system of Hopi verbs can, by a flick of the tongue, make the most subtle kinds of distinction between different types of motion.

What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual-systems of which so much poetry is a part. It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence ( = imagination) have been given. No people today is newly born. No people has sat in sloth for the thousands of years of its history. Measure everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio, & the world is full of primitive peoples. But once change the unit of value to the poem or the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artifactual situations) & it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands.

Poetry, wherever you find it among the "primitives"* (literally *everywhere*), involves an extremely complicated sense of

* The word "primitive" is used with misgivings & put in quotes, but no way around it seems workable. "Non-technological" & "non-literate," which have often been suggested as alternatives, are too emphatic in pointing to supposed "lacks" &, though they feel precise to start with, are themselves open to question. Are the Eskimo snow-workers, e.g., really "non"- or "pre-technological"? And how does the widespread use

materials & structures. Everywhere it involves the manipulation (fine or gross) of multiple elements. If this isn't always apparent, it's because the carry-over (by translation or interpretation) necessarily distorts where it chooses some part of the whole that it can meaningfully deal with. The work is foreign & its complexity is often elusive, a question of gestalt or configuration, of the angle from which the work is seen. If you expect a primitive work to be simple or naïve, you will probably end up seeing a simple or naïve work; & this will be abetted by the fact that translation can, in general, only present as a single work, a part of what is actually there. The problem is fundamental for as long as we approach these works from the outside—& we're likely fated to be doing that forever.

It's very hard in fact to decide what precisely are the boundaries of "primitive" poetry or of a "primitive" poem, since there's often no activity differentiated as such, but the words or vocables are part of a larger total "work" that may go on for hours, even days, at a stretch. What we would separate as music & dance & myth & painting is also part of that work, & the need for separation is a question of "our" interest & preconceptions, not of "theirs." Thus the picture is immediately complicated by the nature of the work & the media that comprise it. And it becomes clear that the "collective" nature of primitive poetry (upon which so much stress has been placed despite the existence of individualized poems & clearly identified poets) is to a great degree inseparable from the amount of materials a single work may handle.

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of pictographs & pictosymbols, which can be "read" by later generations, affect their users' non-literate status? A major point throughout this book is that these peoples (& they're likely too diverse to be covered by a single name) are precisely "technicians" where it most concerns them—specifically in their relation to the "sacred" as something they can actively create or capture. That's the only way in fact that I'd hope to define "primitive": as a situation in which such conditions flourish & in which the "poets" are (in Eliade's phrase) the principal "technicians of the sacred."

Now all of this is, if so stated, a question of technology as well as inspiration; & we may as well take it as axiomatic for what follows that where poetry is concerned, "primitive" means complex.

## What Is a "Primitive" Poem?

Poems are carried by the voice & are sung or chanted in specific situations. Under such circumstances, runs the easy answer, the "poem" would simply be the words-of-the-song. But a little later on the question arises: what *are* the words & where do they begin & end? The translation, as printed, may show the "meaningful" element only, often no more than a single, isolated "line"; thus

*A splinter of stone which is white* (Bushman)
*Semen white like the mist* (Australian)
*My-shining-horns* (Chippewa: single word)
etc.

but in practice the one "line" will likely be repeated until its burden has been exhausted. (Is it "single" then?) It may be altered phonetically & the words distorted from their "normal" forms. Vocables with no fixed meanings may be intercalated. All of these devices will be creating a greater & greater gap between the "meaningful" residue in the translation & what-was-actually-there. We will have a different "poem" depending where we catch the movement, & we may start to ask: Is something within this work the "poem," or is everything?

Again, the work will probably not end with the "single" line & its various configurations—will more likely be preceded & followed by other lines. Are all of these "lines" (each of considerable duration) separate poems, or are they the component parts of a single, larger poem moving toward some specific (ceremonial) end? Is it enough, then, if the lines happen in succession

& aren't otherwise tied? Will some further connection be needed? Is the group of lines a poem if "we" can make the connection? Is it a poem where no connection is apparent to "us"? If the lines come in sequence on a single occasion does the unity of the occasion connect them into a single poem? Can many poems be a single poem as well? (They often are.)

What's a sequence anyway?
What's unity?

## The Unity of "Primitive" Thought & Its Shattering

The anthology shows some ways in which the unity is achieved—in general by the imposition of some constant or "key" against which all disparate materials can be measured. A sound, a rhythm, a name, an image, a dream, a gesture, a picture, an action, a silence: any or all of these can function as "keys." Beyond that there's no need for consistency, for fixed or discrete meanings. An object is whatever it becomes under the impulse of the situation at hand. Forms are often open. Causality is often set aside. The poet (who may also be dancer, singer, magician, whatever the event demands of him) masters a series of techniques that can fuse the most seemingly contradictory propositions.

But above all there's a sense-of-unity that surrounds the poem, a reality concept that acts as a cement, a unification of perspective linking

poet & man
man & world
world & image
image & word
word & music
music & dance
dance & dancer
dancer & man
man & world
etc.

all of which has been put in many different ways—by Cassirer notably as a feeling for "the solidarity of all life" leading toward a "law of metamorphosis" in thought & word.

Within this undifferentiated & unified frame with its open images & mixed media, there are rarely "poems" as we know them—but we come in with our analytical minds & shatter the unity. It has in fact been shattered already by workers before us.

## Primitive & Modern: Intersections & Analogies

Like any collector, my approach to delimiting & recognizing what's a poem has been by analogy: in this case (beyond the obvious definition of poems as words-of-songs) to the work of modern poets. Since much of this work has been revolutionary & limit-smashing, the analogy in turn expands the range of what "we" can see as primitive poetry. It also shows some of the ways in which primitive poetry & thought are close to an impulse toward unity in our own time, of which the poets are forerunners. The important intersections (analogies) are:

(1) the poem carried by the voice: a "pre"-literate situation of poetry composed to be spoken, chanted or, more accurately, sung; compare this to the "post-literate" situation, in McLuhan's good phrase, or where-we-are-today;

written poem as score
public readings

poets' theaters
jazz poetry

1960s folk-rock etc

(2) a highly developed process of image-thinking: concrete or non-causal thought in contrast to the simplifications of Aristotelian logic, etc., with its "objective categories" & rules of non-contradiction; a "logic" of polarities; creation thru dream, etc.; modern poetry (having had & outlived the experience of rationalism) enters a post-logical phase;

Blake's multi-images
symbolisme
surrealism

deep-image

random poetry
composition by field etc

(3) a "minimal" art of maximal involvement; compound elements, each clearly articulated, & with plenty of room for fill-in (gaps in sequence, etc.): the "spectator" as (ritual) participant who pulls it all together;

concrete poetry

picture poems

prose poems

(4) an "intermedia" situation, as further denial of the categories: the poet's techniques aren't limited to verbal maneuvers but operate also through song, non-verbal sound, visual signs, & the varied activities of the ritual event: here the "poem" = the work of the "poet" in whatever medium, or (where we're able to grasp it) the totality of the work;

happenings

total theater

poets as film-makers etc

(5) the animal-body-rootedness of "primitive" poetry: recognition of a "physical" basis for the poem within a man's body—or as an act of body & mind together, breath &/or spirit; in many cases too the direct & open handling of sexual imagery & (in the "events") of sexual activities as key factors in creation of the sacred;

dada

lautgedichte (sound poems)

beast language

line & breath

projective verse etc

sexual revolution etc

(6) the poet as shaman, or primitive shaman as poet & seer thru control of the means just stated: an open "visionary" situation prior to all system-making ("priesthood") in which the man creates thru dream (image) & word (song), "that Reason may have ideas to build on" (W. Blake).

Rimbaud's voyant

Rilke's angel

Lorca's duende

beat poetry

psychedelic see-in's, he-in's, etc

individual neo-shamanisms, etc

works directly influenced by the "other" poetry or by analogies to "primitive art": ideas of negritude, tribalism, wilderness, etc.

What's more, the translations themselves may create new forms & shapes-of-poems with their own energies & interest—another intersection that can't be overlooked.

In all this the ties feel very close—not that "we" & "they" are identical, but that the systems of thought & the poetry they've achieved are, like what we're after, distinct from something in the "west," & we can now see & value them because of it. What's missing are the in-context factors that define them more closely group-by-group: the sense of the poems as part of an integrated social & religious complex; the presence in each instance of specific myths & locales; the fullness of the living culture. Here the going is rougher with no easy shortcuts through translation: no simple carry-overs. If our world is open to multiple influences & data, theirs is largely self-contained. If we're committed to a search for the "new," most of them are tradition-bound. (The degree to which "they" are can be greatly exaggerated.) If the poet's purpose among us is "to spread doubt [& create illusion]" (N. Calas), among them it's to overcome it.

That they've done so *without denying the reality* is also worth remembering.

## The Background & Structure of This Book

The present collection grew directly out of a pair of 1964 readings of "primitive & archaic* poetry" at The Poet's Hardware Theater & The Cafe Metro in New York. Working with me on those were the poets David Antin, Jackson Mac Low, & Rochelle Owens. The material, which I'd been assembling or translating over the previous several years, was arranged topically rather

*Throughout the book I use "archaic" to mean (1) the early phases of the so-called "higher" civilizations, where poetry & voice still hadn't separated or where the new writing was used for setting down what the voice had already made; (2) contemporary "remnant" cultures in which acculturation has significantly disrupted the "primitive modes"; & (3) a cover-all term for "primitive," "early high," & "remnant." The word is useful because of the generalization it permits (the variety of cultures is actually immense) & because it encompasses certain "mixed" cultural situations. My interest is in whether the poetry works, not in the "purity" of the culture from which it comes. I doubt, in fact, if there can be "pure" cultures.

than geographically—an order preserved here in the first three sections of texts. The idea for a "book of events" came from a discussion with Dick Higgins about what he was calling "near-poetry" & from my own sense of the closeness of primitive rituals (when stripped-down to the bare line of the activities) to the "happenings" & "events" he was presenting as publisher of *Something Else Press*. The last four sections roughly correspond to some kind of geographical reality—not that there aren't problems of overlap, etc., in a grouping by continents but simply that it provides an alternate way of bringing the materials together. (The reader may think of some others as well.) Certain omissions are also fairly obvious—notably that I haven't included any European works. Here the remnants were abundant enough, but, because of their absorption into precisely the stream-of-thought the anthology was countering, the distinctions were far from clear.

While the final gathering is several times its 1964 size, I don't see it in any sense as more than a beginning. My intention from the start was to find translations that would "translate," i.e., bring-the-work-across or be a living work in English, & that's a very different thing from (in the first place) looking for representative "masterpieces" & including them whatever the nature of the translations. I also have (no question about it) my own sense of what's worth it in poetry, & I've tried to work from that rather than against it. I haven't gone for "pretty" or "innocent" or "noble" poems so much as strong ones. Throughout I've kept the possibilities wide open: looking for new forms & media; hoping that what I finally assembled could be read as "contemporary," since so much of it is that in fact, still being created & used in a world we share. Where there was a choice of showing poems separately or in series (as described above), I've leaned toward the in-series presentation. Since I feel that the complexity & tough-mindedness of primitive poetry have never really been shown (& since I happen to like such qualities in poems), I've decided to stress them. I've kept in general within the domain of the book's title, though sometimes I did

include poems for no other reason than that they sounded good to me or moved me.

The poems are first given without any comments or footnotes, & the reader who likes it like that doesn't have to go any further. (*He* won't, no matter what I say.) Taking poems straight in that sense is like the Australian aborigines who (wrote W. E. Roth) would borrow whole poems *verbatim* "in a language absolutely remote from (their) own, & not one word of which the audience or performers can understand the meaning of": an extreme case of out-of-context reading but (where the culture's alive to its own needs) completely legitimate. Even so I've provided a section of "commentaries," which try in each instance to fill-in the scene or to indicate a little of what the original poets would have expected their hearers to know—in other words, to sketch some of the elements for an in-context reading. These "commentaries," which the reader can approach from any direction he chooses, also show what the poems mean to me or to other poets in this century who have approached them out-of-context. In that sense they can be read (particularly those for the first three sections) as a running series of essays dealing with the questions about primitive poetry lightly touched-on in this introduction, or even as an approach to poetry in general. Where it seemed worthwhile I've also printed contemporary American & European poems as analogues to the "primitive" work, sometimes without further comment. As with modern & primitive art, these either show the direct influence of the other poetry or, much more frequently, a coincidence of forms arising from an analogous impulse.

I've tried to make the book usable for anyone who wants it. Likely there are places where I've explained too much (here the reader whose special knowledge exceeds my own will simply have to forgive me), & I've often included materials more from the point of descriptive interest (i.e., for the story) than of "scientific" accuracy. For the reader who wants to follow-up on what's given here, I've been as straightforward as possible

about the sources, providing a running bibliography & cross-referencing where I could. Translations range from the very literal to the very free (there's no one method that insures a decent result in English), & the commentaries often point out how far (or not) the translator has gone. But the limits of any translation, in terms of the "information" it carries, are also obvious. Such "information" concerns the language itself as a medium, & the language of the translator can hardly be a guide, since it should (where he's giving a poem for a poem) be working from its own imperatives. Enough to say that the original poetries presented here range from those that lean heavily on an archaic or specialized vocabulary & syntax to those that turn the common language toward the purposes of song—& that the same is true of the verse, which includes everything from the very open to the very closed.

Distinctions of this kind are obviously important, but it's only been possible for me to show some of the more striking examples. In one of the appendices I've reproduced in detail a single poem-series from Australia that the translator (R. M. Berndt) reconstructs through presentation of the original text, literal translation, free working, & interpretive & stylistic notes. While it's a remarkable piece of work, the method is much too specialized & space-consuming to provide a workable carry-over in all instances. The second appendix presents a series of statements about poetics from a number of "primitive" poets & song-men, & other such statements are scattered throughout the commentaries. I've hoped by doing this to get-across the sense of these poets as individualized & functioning human beings. To this end also I've tried where possible to name the original poets—either those who delivered the poems or the ancient figures to whom the poems were attributed. The third appendix gives my own notes for the Seneca Indian Eagle Dance (a loosely structured intermedia event) & the scenario of a performance piece (*Gift Event III, for Poets, Musicians & Dancers*) derived from its general ordering of activities.

Beyond that, it's up to the individual reader who may, like his "primitive" counterpart, enjoy finishing the work on-his-own, i.e., by filling-in what's missing.

THANKS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, ETC.

The problem is to remember all who were helpful, & even so there's not enough space to state the ways they were. Here are the names, anyway, with thanks & in the hope they'll understand: Jerry Bloedow, David Antin, Jackson Mac Low, Rochelle Owens, Harry Smith, James Laughlin, Sara Blackburn, Anne Freedgood, Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams, Gary Snyder, Jonathan Greene, David Wang, Stanley Diamond, Flicker Hammond, Michael McClure, Marcia Evans, Martha Neufeld, David P. McAllester, & various friends at the Coldspring Longhouse (Steamburg, N.Y.) who showed me what the sacred was.

There are also collections before this one, which were of value to me & will be I'm sure to others. The best worldwide anthology I know of—a remarkable book though much heavier on archaic & classical works than this one, & relatively lighter on the "primitive"—is the very full *Trésor de la poésie universelle,* edited by Roger Caillois & Jean-Clarence Lambert & published by Gallimard. C. M. Bowra's *Primitive Song*—though he restricts himself to a selected number of hunting-&-gathering groups, & though I disagree with him on *x* number of points—contains enough examples (& good ones) to be considered an anthology in itself. Among the very good regional collections, I particularly want to mention Margot Astrov's *The Winged Serpent* for the American Indians (but also George W. Cronyn's long-out-of-print *The Path on the Rainbow;* A. Grove Day's *The Sky Clears;* Angel M. Garibay K.'s great collections of archaic Mexican poetry; & the fantastic outpouring of myths & texts published—mostly early in this century—by the Bureau of American Ethnology & other museums, institutions, etc.). For Africa there are two good recent collections, Leonard W. Doob's

*Ants Will Not Eat Your Fingers* & Ulli Beier's *African Poetry: Anthology of Traditional African Poems;* both editors were kind enough to let me see their work in advance & in both cases I've tried not to duplicate what they've given. I haven't been into anything from other regions as good or as contemporary-feeling as some of these—except for the scattered & hard-to-find collections from tribal India by Verrier Elwin & by W. G. Archer. But there are, of course, specific books on specific peoples (see the commentaries that follow) & other collections where the matter is rich but the language (for me at least) is out of earshot.

Behind the book also are a woman & a child, & I'm reminded again how central the-woman & the-child are to the "oldest" cultures that we know. The dedication of this book is therefore rightly theirs—in whose presence I've sometimes touched that oldest & darkest love.

*Jerome Rothenberg*

*New York City*
*March 15, 1967*

# Introduction

## THE VOICE OF THINGS



To see the world
  in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower:
Hold infinity in the palm
  of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

WILLIAM BLAKE

### I

*Caveat Lector*

By way of preface, this is a warning to the reader who expects prose to be prosaic. To such I would say, "*Stay away!*" For this is elusive, misleading, perplexing stuff. The very appearance of Ponge's pages is disorienting. Written in prose, the orderly lines, grouped familiarly on the page in everyday paragraphs, suggest immediate communication. Even the language, at first glance, seems to be the language of everyday. And what could be more

everyday than the subjects: an orange, a potato, a cigarette, a goat?

A clue to the surreptitious nature of this writing can be found in the Renaissance view of poetry as something so wonderful it must be concealed from the common gaze. Like Holy Scripture, it reveals its mystery to the wise, but should not be exposed to "the irreverent that they cheapen [it] not by too common familiarity."[1] Myths, fables, allegories were therefore used to communicate with the learned reader who knew how to find the meaning beneath the surface of gods, heroes and animals. "The poet who associates his hero with Hercules or Achilles shows him . . . in a preexisting heroic form. At the same time, the poet puts an important part of his meaning in code [which] will only be understood by a reader familiar with mythology and with the further truths it conceals."[2]

In the prose poetry of Francis Ponge, coming as he does in an un-heroic age fashioned more by scientific than by classical studies, the direction is down rather than up, smaller rather than larger. The subjects of his allegories or fables belong to a lower world than that of the gods and heroes of antiquity, and are treated zoomorphically, as opposed to the anthropomorphism of an Aesop or a La Fontaine. However, like his Renaissance antecedents, he too is creating a new humanism. He states his purpose to be "a description-definition-literary art work" which, avoiding the drabness of the dictionary and the inadequacy of poetic description, will lead to a cosmogony, that is, an account– through the successive

1. Boccaccio, *De Genealogia Deorum*, trans. Charles G. Osgood, in *Boccaccio on Poetry*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1930, p. 53.

2. Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1962, p. 50.

and cumulative stages of linguistic development—of the totality of man's view of the universe and his relationship to it.

Disclaiming any taste or talent for ideas, which disgust him because of their pretension to absolute truth, he abandons ideas and opts for things. In a short piece dating from 1930 entitled "Plus-que-raisons," which would appear to be a phenomenological manifesto, he says:

> It is less a matter of truth than the integrity of the mind, and less the integrity of the mind than that of the whole man. No possible compromise between taking the side of ideas or things to be described, and taking the side of words. Given the singular power of words, the absolute power of the established order, only one attitude is possible: taking the side of things all the way.[3]

Ideas then, at least in any conventional philosophic form, are not for him. Since the truth they lay claim to can be invalidated by contradictory ideas, since there is no acquired capital, no solid ground to step on or over, ideas remain in a state of flux, like the sea, and provoke in him a feeling of nausea. This aversion to ideas is discussed at length in a later essay, "My Creative Method,"[4] whose vocabulary (*écoeurement, vague à l'âme, pénible inconsistance, nausée*) irresistibly recalls Sartre's *La Nausée.*

It is of little importance to determine here who influenced whom. The chronology would seem to indicate, if anything, a curious interplay. Some of Ponge's early theorizing dates back to 1922 and 1930 in such essays as "Fragments Métatechniques" and "Plus-que-raisons"; the texts composing *Le Parti Pris des Choses* were written over a period of two decades prior to their publication in 1942; *La Nausée* appeared in 1938; and "My

3. In *Nouveau Recueil,* Paris, Gallimard, 1967, p. 32.
4. Translated in full in this volume.

Creative Method" in 1947. What is interesting is that a line from *La Nausée* such as

> The truth is that I can't let go of my pen: I think I'm going to be sick [*avoir la nausée*] and have the impression of holding it back by writing. And I write whatever comes to mind.[5]

is echoed, after innumerable repetitions of "ideas provoke in me a kind of nausea," by

> I never said anything except what came into my head at the moment I said it, on the subject of perfectly ordinary things, chosen completely at random.[6]

Sartre's protagonist Roquentin, after laboring for years on an insignificant biography, and experiencing the disgust and despair of humanistic clichés—the empty commonplaces of philosophy, politics, religion, history, that pass themselves off as unalterable truths—rediscovers the little jazz melody "Some of these days," and through it seems to discover the validity of the work of art.

> *It* [the melody; *elle* in French] does not exist. It is beyond, always beyond something, the voice, the note of the violin. Through the many thicknesses of existence, it reveals itself, thin and strong, and when one wants to take hold of it, one only comes upon existents, one stumbles on existents empty of meaning. It does not exist, because there is nothing too much in it: it is everything else that is too much in relation to it. It *is*.[7]

Ponge also discovers the validity of the work of art; and for him too it has an inner life that goes beyond existence:

5. Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée*, Paris, Gallimard, 1938, p. 216.
6. "My Creative Method," in LE GRAND RECUEIL, vol. II, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, p. 38.
7. *La Nausée*, p. 218.

And yet, if one observes carefully, *she* [*The Goat;* also *elle,* and also underlined by the author] lives, *she* moves a bit. If one approaches, she pulls on her rope and tries to flee.

There is nothing to count on, no truth to explain the why's and how's of our existence. But there is the melody, the work of art, and that at least *is.* "So one can justify one's existence?" Roquentin asks, thinking of the poor slob suffering his own anguish on the 20th floor of some New York apartment house as he writes "Some of these days":

Couldn't I try . . . Evidently not a piece of music . . . but in some other way? It would have to be a book: I don't know how to do anything else. But not a history. History talks about what has existed—an existent can never justify the existence of another existent. Another kind of book, I don't know which—one would have to guess, behind the printed words, behind the pages, at something that would not exist but would be above existence.[8]

In "My Creative Method," Ponge writes: "If I must exist . . . it can only be through some creation on my part," and goes on to explain what kind of creation he envisions. For Sartre it is the novel, a multiplicity of words. For Ponge, it is the word, in the singular, which reveals a life beyond its functional existence; a literary creation, yes, but a new form, a poetic encyclopedia that accounts for man's universe, and justifies the creator, through the many thicknesses of the word's existence, "borrowing the brevity and infallibility of the dictionary definition and the sensory aspect of the literary description."

However, it is not to be a hermetic form that exists for its own sake. Ponge is no partisan of art for art. "Of course, the work of art immortally leads its own life,

8. La Nausée, pp. 221–222.

animated by the inner multiplication of references, and the mysterious induction of the soul within the proportions chosen. But wherever there is soul, there is still man."[9] And the artist can proceed by many means to achieve his aim. But the end product, the art work, must be less concerned with mere narration or description of the object, be it a man, an event or a thing, than with the secrets it holds, the multiple notions behind it: "It is less the object that must be painted than an idea of that object."[10] It is 1922 and he still uses the word "idea" ingenuously. Warding off the anticipated accusation of "Romanticism!—it is nature we need instead of ideas, nature and her eternal traits," he replies:

> Where do you see them except in yourself, where can I see them except in myself? Nature exists—in us. Beauty exists—in us.[11]

The artist-creator, using nature as God used clay to fashion Adam, fleshes his bare creation with his ideas; clothes it in an artistic form, the chosen genre; uses his style to give expression to the face. This is where language, for the form chosen by Ponge, becomes all important. "One can make fun of Littré, but one has to use his dictionary. Besides current usage, he provides the most convenient source of etymology. What science is more necessary to the poet?"[12] Words are the raw material of poetry, containing in themselves a beauty which the poet can release, just as particular blocks of marble are both material and inspiration for the sculptor, the cut or grain of the piece suggesting its ultimate form.

9. "Fragments Métatechniques," in *Nouveau Recueil*, p. 16.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

In *Le Parti Pris des Choses*,[13] which is the entrance gate to Ponge's domain, one sees these blocks of marble in miniature. The orange, the oyster, the snail, the pebble, are not merely described; they emerge as do figures from stone, characters from the novel. "It is less a matter of observing the pebble than installing oneself in its heart and seeing the world with its eyes, like the novelist who, in order to portray his heroes, lets himself sink into their consciousness and describes things and people as they appear to them. This position allows one to understand why Ponge calls his work a cosmogony rather than a cosmology. Because it is not a matter of *describing*."[14]

"The Oyster" (p. 37 of this volume) provides a fair sample of the Ponge method, which, alas, no translation can render fully. For Ponge is really using the *French* language, with all its particular characteristics—visual, vernacular, grammatical, etymological, phonetic, etc. The raw material here is the noun *huître*, whose circumflex followed by the letters *t, r, e* determine the choice of descriptive adjectives: *blanchâtre* (whitish), *opiniâtre* (stubborn), *verdâtre* (greenish), *noirâtre* (blackish). Now endowed with size, color, character and even vulnerability ("it is a world stubbornly closed, but it can be opened")—its intrinsic characteristics—Ponge goes on to its broader aspects, its external significance. Its "stubbornly closed world" is expanded into "a whole world to eat and drink." In its literal twofold meaning, it is both the specific liquid-solid delicacy immediately available to the palate, and the representative of the

13. Translated here in full under the title of *Taking the Side of Things*.

14. Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'Homme et les choses," in *Situations I*, Paris, Gallimard, 1947.

liquid-solid universe which in a larger time-scheme provides us with nourishment. In its figurative meaning, also twofold, it becomes the perfect subject-object. And the duality of the subject-object, the description-art work, is expressed by the twin shell, the "skies above and the skies below," the "*firmament*" (a reference to an ancient notion of a solid covering over the earth) and "the puddle," shimmering "nacre" and "a viscous greenish blob." It is both a thing of beauty in itself—the animal, its objective description, and an artistic creation—the pearl, the thing created by the oyster; the poem, the thing created by the poet. Yet some may see it merely as a blotch on the page, edged with the "blackish lace" of printed letters. In a final remove, the poet views his creation as also having a life of its own "that ebbs and flows on sight" —objective observation of the reader, "and smell"— subjective response to the poem; then views himself as showing off his stylistic gifts at the expense of the authentic thing, snatching the pearl to adorn himself. The small form, the globule produced by the oyster (in French the pun is more evident: *formule* is a small form as well as a formula), has become the little work formed by the poet.

The very title of the collection, *Le Parti Pris des Choses*, contains all the linguistic, semantic and ideological ambiguities of Ponge's entire oeuvre, and deserves some of the same exegesis as the texts. "Taking the side of things," though the commonly accepted translation, is inadequate because it neglects the basic ambiguity of the title: *parti pris des choses* can be the "parti pris" *for* things, but it can also be the "parti pris" *of* things. *Parti pris*, in its primary meaning, is an inflexible decision, a consequence of will and intellect. In common usage, it has come to mean an arbitrary choice of one thing over another, a partiality, a bias. Ponge uses the expres-

sion in both aspects of its primary meaning: 1) the poet's option for things over ideas, and 2) the will expressed by the things themselves. The first is elucidated at considerable length in his methodological writings (two of which, "My Creative Method" and "The Silent World Is Our Only Homeland," appear here; others, such as *La Rage de l'Expression, Pour un Malherbe, Le Savon,* which are whole volumes, combine method and poetic practice).

The second primary meaning has to be gleaned from the more strictly poetical writings. Snails, trees, flowers, pebbles, the sea, all express an indomitable will, a striving for self-perfection, a single-minded purpose, that assumes heroic proportions combining the excesses and self-mastery characteristic of the noblest of mythological heroes. The wrathful fury of a Hercules or an Ajax is echoed by the tree's rage for expression as it floods the world with more and more leaves, the snail's proud drivel that remains stamped on everything, the rose's excessive petals, the shrimp's persistent return to the same places. Yet in their weakness, their extravagant expressions of self, lie the makings of their greatness, as Hercules' domination of his anger and other heroes' control of their mortal fear lead to god-like valor. Conquering the apparent futility of their acts, their vulnerability, their mortality, by continuing their efforts, they brave destiny by becoming more of what they are. "They are heroes," Ponge says in "The Snail," "beings whose existence is itself a work of art."

Beyond the connotation of option and will lies a more concealed and more complex implication in the arbitrary, partial quality of the expression as it is commonly used. Man, arbitrarily placed in the world, makes an arbitrary choice allowing him to survive in it, before being arbitrarily removed from it, like the crate, used

only once and then tossed on the trash heap. The poet, having chosen literature to make his life meaningful, uses words which can only partially convey his meaning, as his art, or the work of any man, can only partially express the man—or man the cosmos.

## II

Where "The Oyster" offered us a succinct example of Ponge's art, the universe in a shell so to speak, "The Goat" provides us with a vast panorama of man in the universe and of Ponge's artistry. Here we see the magnifying process of Ponge's lens.

The poem begins with a seemingly unpretentious description of the goat, a pathetic beast dragging a swollen udder, a patch of dark hair across her rump, grazing on the sparse though aromatic grasses that grow between the barren rocks, her little bell clanging as she moves.

In that short opening, Ponge has stated all his themes. The goat is at once revealed as a metaphor for the poet, and in a broader sense for man—and everything she is, wears and does relates to a totality of man's view of himself. In the first line we are still looking *at* the goat, commiserating with *her* plight. But in the fourth line, a single word, "*la pauvresse*" (the poor thing), determines our real optic. We, looking *through* the goat, are moved because we see ourselves as the poet in a harsh world, carrying around the milk of human thought—reason, artistic creation—nurtured by the meager aliment of words, those "nibblings." Insignificant? That is what most people would say. But these tenacious trifles—words, thoughts, poems—are what last after all. The

goat, as a work of art, lives on; "*she* lives, *she* moves."

And she really does move. Beginning with the never ceasing bell, she leads us rapidly into the world behind us. The bell, like a call to prayer, and the goat's belief in the grace surrounding her offspring, evoke Mary and her divine infant, and even more broadly, man's belief that he is made in the image of God. Like the kid, he is always reaching higher than his condition, and capricious (a pun that works in English; from *capra*, goat), headstrong, ready to affront anything with his minuscule means—the kid, his horns; man, his mind.

"Untiring wet-nurses, remote princesses, like the galaxies" leads us even farther back, to Greek mythology. Hera, eternal milk-giver, was duped by Zeus into nursing Hercules to make him immortal. When she suddenly withdrew in pain, her milk splattered across the sky and became the Milky Way.[15] This allusion, sandwiched between Christian references, is not the artistic *non sequitur* it would seem to be. For Hercules and Jesus became fused in Renaissance thinking, and for reasons apparent to anyone familiar with the Herculean myth.

Zeus begat Hercules to have a son powerful enough to protect the gods and men from destruction. Alcmene, a mortal like Mary, was carefully selected for her genealogy as well as her virtues to bear him. Hercules, though immortalized by Hera's milk, had to achieve his godhood through his labors which freed the world of monsters and tyrants. The notion of the world's redemption through the divine hero's suffering (The Labors, The Passion) and self-mastery (Hercules' anger, Jesus'

15. Another detail in the myth that curiously relates to the poem is Hera's epithet of "goat-eating," coming perhaps from Hercules' sacrifice of goats when raising a temple to her at Sparta. (Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1955, vol. II, p. 186).

temptation in the desert) provides a striking link between these two god-begotten figures. And linked to them is man, who through his gift of intellect and his mortal anguish also seeks some manner of redemption. Hercules' victories were seen in the Renaissance as the triumph of the mind over vice, and his slaying of the Nemean lion was interpreted as the domination of anger. The lion skin, which he continued to wear as invulnerable armor, came to symbolize reason, man's unique armor. "Perfect yourself morally, and you will produce beautiful verses. First know yourself. In keeping with your lines."—is the lesson Ponge seriocomically draws from the snail. The goat's rug that passes for a shawl evokes the lion skin, but on the downtrodden goat-man, it is a pathetic tatter, a remnant of past glory, perhaps a reminder to continue striving.

Although Ponge preaches phenomenology and accepts the label of "materialist"—which some of his admirers use to distinguish his work from the politically tainted literature of bourgeois humanism—he himself recognizes his debt to Rimbaud and Mallarmé who come out of an idealist tradition. And since the "thingliness" he practices does not function in a vacuum, he further recognizes that "everything written moralizes." It is in this connection that the allegorical nature of his poems appears. In so far as these works utilize animals and things to point to a veiled meaning, they are fables. But they are not conventional fables, in that their *purpose* is not to moralize. They neither condemn immorality nor advocate virtue—except perhaps in the sense of existentialist virtue, or the *virtus* of antiquity, both of which are self-achieved and self-discovered. They are perhaps more in the nature of a modern fairy tale, like Orwell's *Animal Farm*, which moves the reader precisely through its dispassionate tone, its absence of direct appeal. On

the level of the fairy tale, Ponge is offering us a view of life transcribed into mute symbols, whose function is to "express (the object's) mute character, its lesson, in almost moral terms." However, unlike Orwell, he is not portraying man's incorrigible nature. Quite the contrary. He is showing us that the condition of life is mortality, but in death there is life: from the corpse of one culture another is born, carrying with it, through words, the chromosomes and genes of the past. The pebble, final offspring of a race of giants, is of the same stone as its enormous forebears. And if life offers no faith, no truth, it nonetheless offers possibilities. For trees there may be no way out of their treehood "by the means of trees"—leaves wither and fall—but they do not give up, they go on leafing season after season. They are not resigned. This is the first "lesson," the heroic vision, and the first weapon against mortality. The second is the creative urge, the "will to formation" and the perfection of whatever means are unique to the individual: the tree has leaves, the snail its silver wake, man his words. He also possesses all the "virtues" of the world he lives in: the fearful fearlessness of the shrimp, the stubbornness of the oyster, the determination of water, the cigarette's ability to create its own environment and its own destruction. The ultimate weapon is the work of art, the sublime regenerative possibility, which man carries within himself like the oyster its pearl, the orange its pip. These are not "morals" in any strict didactic sense, but they are lessons, of the kind that the Renaissance learned from antiquity—models of exemplary virtue to follow.

Returning to "The Goat," the poem continues its Christian metaphor with the key words that follow. "Kneeling," "decrucifying their stiff limbs"—the goat now plural, hence all men—"starry-eyed" with a memory of paradise and the hope of redemption, "they do

not forget their duty" for there is no repose any longer. They have tasted of Beelzebub ("hairy as beasts," "Beelzebumptious") and know the torment of mortality, now bound to their human condition like the goat to its tether, "rope at the end of its rope, a rope whip"—the Flagellation—cast out "to haunt rocky places."

The milk, once of immortality, now of knowledge, tastes of "flint," the brimstone of hell, Satan's touch. Yet it is still life-giving in its dual generative qualities of milk-milt, intellect and semen; "readily convulsive in his deep sacks"—the milky lobes of the brain, the semen-laden glands, also dual. Burdened with consciousness and desire, man is both Goat-Satyr and Goat-Satan. Like Satan, man was cast out and seeks to regain his lofty place by reaching ever higher, *ad astra per aspera,* but like the goat, powerless, sacrificial victim, he cannot go beyond the topmost crags of his futile climb to immortality—"no triumphal soaring." "Brought closer and closer by [his] researches," he discovers it leads nowhere he can go, and he has "to back down to the first bush"—like Sisyphus, to begin all over again. This is yet another reason why we are so moved by the sight of the goat, this "miserable accident, sordid adaptation to sordid contingencies, and in the end nothing but shreds"—the history of human achievement, from Pericles to potsherds, Deuteronomy to Dachau.

So that we can hardly take pride in this milk of our reason, or the progeny of our seed, though it is for us to use—and all we have—as a means of "some obscure regeneration, by way of the kid and the goat": our successive creations.

"The Goat" is a prime example of Ponge's semantic genius. Every word is a signpost pointing in all directions, and every word construction a vast game—like children's board games that lead one around a circuit

of pitfalls and repeated beginnings to some marvelous finish line—an endlessly fascinating game, like the game of life itself, with the reward just beyond reach. The tools of his game are the dictionary, an inexhaustible memory for historical, literary and pictorial references, archaisms, neologisms, even barbarisms when necessary—and countless puns, which make translating Ponge something of a sport: hunting, to be precise. Since Latin is a parent common to both languages, it is sometimes possible to come away with a genuine trophy. At other times, one has to make do with an approximation —antlers bought from a taxidermist.

Not an occasion is lost. He starts from the very first sentence: ". . . because between her frail legs she carries . . ." The French reads: *pource qu'elle comporte*, *pource* being the fusing of *bourse* (bag, sack) with *pour ce que* (for the reason that); *comporte* means "carries with" but it also means "connotes." There are innumerable puns on the "goatliness" of the subject: variations on *cornes*, horns—*cornemuse*, bagpipe; *corniaud*, "knucklehead" coming closest to the idea of an antlered fool; *têtu*, headstrong; *il fait front*, he affronts anything, from *front*, forehead, *faire front*, face squarely up to something; *entre deux coups de boutoir*, between two sallies, from *bouter*, to push or drive out, and *buter*, come up against (an obstacle), *boutoir*, a sharp retort, a witticism ("sally" in English carries a similar double meaning of a sudden forward thrust and a witty remark), and finally *buté*, the adjective derived from *buter*, obstinate—all of which summons the image of relentless butting.

The short passage in which both sound and meaning are joined in a brilliant goatly cadenza deserves to be quoted in the original (translation on p. 136 of this volume):

18] **The Voice of Things**

> Ces belles aux longs yeux, poilues commes des bêtes, belles à la fois et butées—ou, pour mieux dire, belzébuthées—quand elles bêlent, de quoi se plaignent-elles? de quel tourment, quel tracas?

Not only are all the characteristics of the goat as animal and symbol utilized; Ponge even finds inspiration in the spelling of the noun, *chèvre*. Its grave accent marks the goat's seriousness and low-pitched bleat, and serves as a humorous criticism of his own "psalmodizing." And its last syllable, that suspended consonant with its mute "e" hanging in mid-air, furnishes him with an invented pun, *la muette*, from the feminine for *muet*, mute, and *la mouette*, the gull or mew. The goat has been examined in all its aspects: goat-hero, goat-Satan, goat-satyr, tragic goat-man, and even comic goat-man, the paper- and tobacco-loving old bachelor.

Despite its shortcomings, its shabbiness—another pun: *loque fautive*, faulty tatter; *fautif* suggests both defectiveness and guilt—its pitifulness and uselessness, it is still a marvelous thing because it functions, it produces, it *is*. Man, this "magnificent knucklehead," weighed down by his grandiose ideas, knows that deep within him are love and reason. He is free to become—beast or hero, derelict or artist. Reason remains, so does the work of art, and with it perhaps "some obscure regeneration."

## III

Since it is impossible to analyze all of Ponge's works, and meaningless to indulge in generalities without textual examples, I have selected "The Oyster," "The

Goat" and "The Prairie" as significant samples of Ponge's art. There are, of course, others and in particular two which do not appear in this volume, "L'Araignée" ("The Spider"), already admirably translated by Mark Temmer,[16] and "Le Soleil Placé en Abîme," which runs to thirty-eight pages and is consequently too long to be included here.

"The Prairie" ("Le Pré"), in that it incorporates all of Ponge's ideas, techniques, sensibility and eccentricity, seems to me his magnum opus to date. First published in 1967 in *Nouveau Recueil* (the last volume of his collected works to appear in the Gallimard edition), it has recently been reprinted in a handsome Skira edition, along with the journal Ponge kept during the four years of its composition and which provides the title, "La Fabrique du Pré" ("The Making of the Prairie"). It is a fascinating, albeit tedious, account of the poem's genesis and the poet's thought process.

Ponge's approbation, and appropriation, of nature; his awareness of himself as spectator and participant in an exterior world; his equally keen awareness of the reality of the verbal world of language, as valid and as external as the physical world, all reach their apogee in this poem. We see here concretized and poeticized the dual genealogies that run parallel throughout Ponge's work: the course of human, vegetable or mineral evolution, and its counterpart in the semantic history of words, the evolution of meaning.

The ultimate achievement for Ponge would be for each word composing a text to be taken in each of its successive connotations throughout history. This, were it possible, would be not just the tracing of language in a historical, philological sense, but the consecration of a

16. In *Prairie Schooner*, 1966.

birth to death rite which goes beyond the word to creation itself.

The creative urge, like the reproductive urge, is a movement toward death, in the sense of the self expended, and with the same goal: the birth of a new entity. The need to bridge the silence of mortality is the desire to fulfill one's function.

The relationship between Eros and Thanatos is evident, and death in this sense is part of life. I have often insisted on the fact that it is necessary in some way to die in order to give birth to something, or someone, and I am not the first to have seen that the birth of a text can only occur through the death of the author. The sex act, the act of reproduction, also requires the presence of another. The two must die, more or less, for the third person, in this case the text, to be born. The second person for me is the thing, the object that provoked the desire and that also dies in the process of giving birth to the text. There is thus, at the same time, the death of the author and the death of the object of the desire—the thing, the pre-text.[17]

In "Le Pré" the process is vividly metaphorized. "J'ai d'abord eu, une fois . . . une émotion me venant d'un pré, au sens de prairie," Ponge explains. Beginning then with the emotion produced by the physical object, the prairie, he seeks to fix it, eternalize it, by writing it, for fear of losing it. His concern, at first, is merely to express it, render it, as would a landscape painter, using words in place of paint. The word *pré* itself, however, soon becomes obsessive. It recurs everywhere, in every form; a simple phoneme whose implications far exceed its nominative function. Consulting the dictionary, Ponge discovers that "in fact, it is one of the most important roots existing in French."[18] "Why?" he goes on, "because *pré, le pré, la prairie,* come from the Latin

17. *Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers,* Paris, Gallimard/Seuil, 1970, p. 171.
18. *Ibid.,* pp. 172–173.

*pratum*, which Latin etymologists consider a crasis, a contraction of *paratum—that which has been prepared.*"

*Pré*, then, as what has been made ready, has occurred before, implies a past-ness that gives the noun *pré-prairie* the significance of something previously prepared by nature—for food, for rest, for life—in all its organic spectrum; a perpetual rebirth of plant, animal and man; a continuity of the life cycle; man lives on animals that live on grass that lives on their remains. However, *paratum-pré*, the anterior preparation, or what Ponge calls "le participe passé par excellence," does not remain fixed in the past since it becomes *pré-prairie*, which exists in the present. Even the prefix,[19] implying what comes before, also indicates something to follow: precede, predict, preface, all point to some future quality or event. The simple phoneme, whether noun or prefix, consequently embodies the whole spectrum of time as well—past, present, future.

The *pré*, be it field, meadow or prairie, is both the prelude to life as a place of nourishment, and a presage of death as a place of encounter. *Pré-aux-clercs*, the clerics' or scholars' field, meeting-place for medieval preceptors and students, the place of discussion and disputation, became the place of decision, the field of action, the dueling ground. Two vertical figures meet on a grassy field, cross swords in oblique thrusts, until one

19. *Pre*, an equally important prefix in English, and *prairie*, which exists identically in both languages, and which Ponge uses repeatedly as a synonym for the noun *pré*), allow for a translation that does not alter the multiple meanings of the original. *Meadow* might be more precise a translation of *pré* but its Middle English derivation and completely unrelated sound would render the very germ of the poem unintelligible. The prefix, though also resulting from a crasis, derives in fact from *prae*, but that does not invalidate Ponge's homonymic use of it. What Ponge means by "participe passé" is the spelling of the word *pré*, whose accented "e" is the ending of the past participle in first conjugation verbs.

or both fall horizontally on the ground, first lying on top of the grassy surface, then buried beneath it. This scene, appearing in four lines in the poem, is also symbolic of the creative process, the duel between the author and the object of the creative urge, both ending in the creation, *Le Pré,* which remains in an eternal present.

A certain graphic quality, arising perhaps from Ponge's initial impetus to render the prairie as landscape, is maintained throughout the poem, all the while moving out of nature into the works of man. Green is spread on a page, a small quadrangle, the words surging up from a brown page as grass rises out of the earth; a horizontal fragment of limited space, barely larger than a handkerchief, pelted by vertical storms and adverse signs, as the page, about the size of a handkerchief, is struck by vertical, horizontal and oblique signs of type. The earth regains the surface through the trampled grass, as the physical object, prairie, reappears through words: man's greening, regenerative faculty. The long procession of strollers in their Sunday finery recalls Seurat's *Grande Jatte,* where on the stippled green of the canvas banks they cannot soil their shoes.

The mysterious interjection, "Why then from the start does it prohibit us?" and the lines that follow (p. 180 of this volume), seem also to refer to painting. Seurat's *Grande Jatte* and Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* can reproduce through color, light and form, the mood and the scene of those green expanses. But the poet, having only words, is held back, inhibited by his scruples, prohibited from the celebration. (In French, the interjection quoted above reads "pourquoi nous tient-il interdits": *interdire* implies bewilderment, but also restriction in the Catholic sense of a prohibition against performing certain rites—"Could we then already be at the naos,"

that part of the Greek temple where only priests were permitted.) "That sacred place for a repast of reasons" ("lieu sacré d'un petit déjeuné de raisons")[20] evokes Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, in which the food scattered among the folds of the crumpled cloth suggests that the repast is over, and the nude young woman, contrasting with the reasoning gesture of one of her male companions, suggests the discussion will also soon be over. "Here we are then, at the heart of pleonasms" —verbal redundancies, the poet's only logical possibility. The sanctity of the place is guaranteed by nature and the poet; no need for "prosternating" to any higher power, for such a horizontal movement would conflict with the "verticalities of the place," the upright sufficiency of grass, trees, hedges, and the words of the poem.

And "did the original storm," the creative urge which rivals the divine, "not thunder" within the poet so that he would leave behind all fear and formality, and produce a truth commensurate with the objective reality, a "verdant verity" in which he could revel, having fulfilled his nature? "The bird flying over it in the opposite direction to writing" reminds him of the concrete reality which his poem only approximates, and of the contradiction inherent in the word *pré* with its multiple levels of meaning and time. And from the pleasurable image of a blue sky seen overhead while reclining on the grassy surface, he turns to the final rest beneath the same surface. Coming to an abrupt end, as does life itself, he places himself beneath the poem,

20. Ponge's use of the rarer "déjeuné" for "déjeuner" seems to indicate an intent to give adjective and noun their full value of "little lunch" or light repast, rather than the locution "petit déjeuner" meaning breakfast. "Déjeuner sur l'herbe" would be translated today as "picnic."

through which his name will flower like the herbs above his grave.

## IV

There would seem to be no way out of ambiguity. Man cannot escape the ambiguity of his immortal spirit in a mortal condition, nor the poet the ambiguities of language by means of words, and the critic is enmeshed in them when talking about a writer like Ponge. Even his chosen métier is ambiguous. He steadfastly refuses to consider himself a poet, or his writing poetry; at most he grants it the name of "prôemes." Yet these short pieces, even the ones on art, are undeniably poetic. He admits he "uses poetic magma" but hastily adds, "only to get rid of it." Just as he insists that "ideas are not my forte," yet ideas spring out of each page in dizzying profusion. And everything points to man—his formidable capacity for renewal, the glory of his mind and soul, albeit in a non-religious yet strongly metaphysical context. "The veneration of matter: what can be worthier of the spirit? Whereas the spirit venerating spirit . . ."

And so, he is a would-be encyclopedist compiling poetic language; a would-be materialist composing metaphysical texts in the least concrete of media; an anti-idealist who, like the plant that only uses the world as a mine for its protoplasm, digs into humanist culture merely for raw material, but evolves a neo-humanism combining classical techniques with romantic self-awareness; a fabulist who ridicules his moralizing; a Renaissance craftsman who uses modern science to fashion jewels—and all part of a search for beauty that prob-

ably exasperates his new-found supporters among the cultural Maoists.

What Ponge is offering us is a taste of genuine culture, a synthesis of past and present, and at a time when sub- and counter-cultures are dulling our senses. Just as strings have been humiliated into making percussive sounds, and rhythms have been reduced to a hallucinating throb, so words have been simplified to the level of Orff instruments, limited to elementary meanings as are they to elementary sounds. In place of uniform bricks for factories, Ponge has unearthed varied material for palaces and temples, be they no larger than a snail shell.

And finally, he constructs a cosmogony which turns out to be an account not of the origin, but of the agony of the cosmos—an agony of joy as well as an agony of death. One has a feeling of eternal resurgence and surprise, each word like Chinese boxes opening one into the other, each text a fresh attempt to seize a fragment of the universe. If there is any graphic symbol to characterize Ponge, it would be the circle—the cycle of the seasons, the sea-rounded pebble, the orange, the plate—but above all, the circularity of his technique. He begins with the word, which inspires the form, which constructs the idea, which determines the word. In the beginning was the word, and in the end as well.

B. A.

*Honfleur, New Haven, 1971*

THIS TRANSLATION presents the second version of *Thomas l'obscur* (the only version available at this time). The original work was designated as a novel (*roman*), the revision as a *récit*. Three-quarters of the bulk of the original disappeared in the process.

It is tempting, in this context, to give away some of the secrets of the complex rhetoric of this rich work, to analyse them,* to beg the reader to realize the fact that much of the discomfort he will experience in confronting this work is due to other factors than the translator's failure to iron out difficult points. Suffice it to say that the translator's energies and abilities have been taxed principally to respect and retain the author's level of difficulty, of challenge to the reader, to translate at once the clarity and the opacity of the original.

ROBERT LAMBERTON

* Readers in search of such an analysis are referred to Geoffrey Hartman's perceptive article "Maurice Blanchot: Philosopher-Novelist" in his collection *Beyond Formalism* (Yale University Press, 1970).

> Still, one must translate (because one must): at the very least one must begin by searching out in the context of *what* tradition of language, in *what sort* of discourse the invention of a form that is new is situated—a form that is eternally characterized by newness and nevertheless necessarily participates in a relationship of connectedness or of rupture with other manners of speaking. There scholarship intervenes, but it bears less on the nearly unrecoverable and always malleable facts of culture than on the texts themselves, witnesses that do not lie if one decides to remain faithful to them.
>
> *L'Entretien infini*, 119-120

Blanchot is writing here of the difficulty of approaching the language of Heraclitus. The pretext of his observations on translation is the principle developed by Clémence Ramnoux that Heraclitus' language remains largely untranslatable because of the subsequent formation (completed in the age of Plato and Aristotle) of a basic vocabulary of abstractions that constitute fundamental building blocks of our language and thought.[1] Heraclitus, no less than Homer, speaks a language which is foreign to our own on the levels of vocabulary, of semantic fields, of the relationship of the word to that which it designates.

By the Fourth Century BC we (Europeans) had become linguistic dualists. *Signifiant* and *signifié* were forever divorced, the arbitrariness of their association exposed.[2] Nevertheless, from before the moment of Socrates—in the age which lies in his enormous shadow (since we see him invariably illuminated from a proximal source, himself a myth projected back into the Fifth

Century by Plato and Xenophon and constituting the brightness that creates the darkness around and beyond him)—from before Socrates we have a few precious verbal artifacts expressing, manifesting the state of language before the *felix lapsus* of the Greek enlightenment.

Subsequent texts are susceptible to translation. The languages in which they originally became manifest constitute arbitrary wrappings applied to a core of ideas. The situation recalls a science fiction film of the Forties in which substantial, corporeal, but utterly transparent (and therefore invisible) monsters were throwing the world into disorder. Once captured and subdued they revealed their form when coated with *papier mâché*. Any other plastic medium would have served the same expressive function: fly paper, clay, perhaps even spray-paint. These interchangeable media would have expressed the same fortuitously imperceptible outline: the bug eyes, the claws, the saber-toothed-tiger fangs.

The truest Platonist among translators, Thomas Taylor, expressed the relationship with characteristic clarity and good conscience in 1787:

> That words, indeed, are no otherwise valuable than as subservient to things, must surely be acknowledged by every liberal mind, and will alone be disputed by him who has spent the prime of his life, and consumed the vigour of his understanding, in verbal criticisms and grammatical trifles. And, if this is the case, every lover of truth will only study a language for the purpose of procuring the wisdom it contains; and will doubtless wish to make his native language the vehicle of it to others. For, since all truth is eternal, its nature can never be altered by transposition, though, by this means, its dress may be varied, and become less elegant and refined. Perhaps even this inconvenience may be

> remedied by sedulous cultivation. . . . [*Concerning the Beautiful,* Introduction]

Maurice Blanchot has not, to my knowledge, addressed himself publicly to the problem of translating Maurice Blanchot. I have inevitably wondered what he would think of my efforts, though I have respectfully refrained from entering into a dialogue with him.[3] In the absence of any concrete evidence, I imagine the author of the works of Maurice Blanchot responding to the idea, the fact of the translation of his work (whether mine or another) with that "Nietzschean hilarity" Jeffrey Mehlman sees as characteristic of him—the dialectical twin of the austerity of his prose—and that this imaginary confrontation might be summed up in a phrase from *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas* equally evoked by Mehlman: "This gaiety passed into the space I thought I occupied and dispersed me" ("Orphée scripteur," *Poétique* 20 [1974]).

To do justice to the problem of translating Blanchot, to provide a theoretical substructure to lend credibility to the enterprise, would require the formulation of a methodology antithetical to (but not exclusive of) that of Thomas Taylor. This second position would insist upon the absolute opacity of language, on the impossibility of translation, on the incorporeality of the bug-eyed monsters and the absurdity of the effort to reclothe them in some new plastic medium. It would emphasize the integrity of each word, each phrase, each volume of the original text and the necessary triviality of the effort to create some equivalent for it. It would, finally, rush between the legs of the Socratic colossus and take refuge in the absolute refusal of the duality of language, planting itself firmly beyond the fall, beyond the radiance.

This methodology would, of course, be no methodology at all. It would not open up a possible mode of action, but humbly, insistently, it would join hands with the viable methodology of Thomas Taylor to undermine and redeem the good conscience of that methodology. On the level of application, it would illuminate (but not solve) the major problem that confronts the translator of Blanchot (and not uniquely of Blanchot: one is tempted to say of any text since Joyce, since Mallarmé, since Nietzsche). This is the problem of the *unit* to be translated. Word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, work: all demand to be rendered as unities, one enclosed within the other without the sacrifice of their integrity. And then there is the bug-eyed monster—Thomas Taylor would call it the eternal thought. Whether or not it exists, it makes its demands, it disrupts the world.

This is the point I have reached in the understanding of my task. Blanchot is not Heraclitus but *Thomas l'Obscur* is more than coincidentally related to Héraclite l'obscur—*ho skoteinos, obscurus,* an epithet used in antiquity to separate *this* Heraclitus from others of the same name, such as the allegorical commentator on Homer. Both epithets are probably developments from *ainiktes,* "the riddler," applied to the Ephesian philosopher by the third-century satirist Timon of Phlius (so Geoffrey Kirk). Blanchot himself insists on the epithet and its force which extends beyond the satirist's trivial slur to indicate the fundamental impulse to "make the obscurity of language respond to the clarity of things" (*L'Entretien infini,* 122). As he goes on to project the heritage of Heraclitus' mode of discourse, expressed in the figure of Socrates himself, Blanchot (as so often in his critical writings) illuminates the method of his own fiction: ". . . Heraclitus then

becomes the direct predecessor and as if the first incarnation of the inspired *bavard,* inopportunely and prosaically divine, whose merit, as Plato claims—and surely it is a merit of the first order—consisted in the circularity of his undertakings, which 'by thousands of revolutions and without advancing a step would always return to the same point'" (*L'Entretien infini,* 125). Surely this is the same *bavard* whose austere, gay tone is heard in the belated incarnation of the narrative voice of *Thomas l'obscur.*

What other mysteries does that infuriating title hide? A reviewer of the first edition of this translation pointed to Cocteau's *Thomas l'imposteur* (Naomi Greene in *Novel* 8 [1975]). Perhaps she was correct. While working on the translation I considered every Thomas from the magical evangelist to the master of all the Schoolmen and the unfortunate Archbishop of Canterbury. I find it hard to believe that the second element of the title does not deliberately echo Thomas Hardy's title, and beyond that that the gravedigger scene of the fifth chapter of *Thomas l'obscur* does not echo the arrested burial of Jude's children, and specifically this tableau:

> A man with a shovel in his hands was attempting to earth in the common grave of the three children, but his arm was held back by an expostultaing woman who stood in the half-filled hole.

But the very ambiguity of the status of these "references" constitutes an element of Blanchot's deliberate smokescreen to foil the efforts of both reader and translator, both condemned to try to determine "in the context of *what* tradition of language, of *what sort* of discourse" his own invention is situated.

The reviewer mentioned above was kind enough to describe

this translaton as "a labor of love." I am deeply grateful to her for that description. For this new edition I have attempted to articulate some of the presuppositions of that labor, from the cooler perspective of eight years' distance. I hope that, in the spirit of Blanchot's essay on Heraclitus, I have remained faithful to *the text itself* and maintained its integrity as a witness.

Robert Lamberton
February, 1981

NOTES

1. These ideas are probably more familiar to English readers in the form they take in the work of Eric Havelock, who explored the problems posed by the language of Homer and the Presocratics in his *Preface to Plato.*
2. The Neoplatonists and the Middle Ages may have forgotten that this was the case, but this quasi-mythic formulation of our intellectual history still retains its basic truth.
3. This is, however, not impossible. Lydia Davis corresponded with Blanchot regarding her beautiful translation of *L'Arrêt de mort* (Station Hill Press, 1978). She has told me that—not surprisingly—he insisted on the importance of her contribution and on the fact that *Death Sentence* was, finally, her book.

the street with his pipe, even giving it a good thrashing now and then, and sometimes making it disappear altogether.



## "A VERY STRANGE TRANSLATION!"

Nowadays, translation in America is increasingly like Kharms's readheaded man: not to be talked about. A translator's introduction such as this can offer one of the only opportunities to say a few words on an element of literary production that has been almost "disappeared" by our assimilation of foreign writers and a book-review culture that often pretends that the translation *is* the original, often obscuring the translator's presence as much as possible. Translation in the mainstream of our culture is still deemed secondary, subservient to the "source" text.[39]

It is a tricky affair to translate a writer who suffered from and, to a great extent, embraced marginality.[40] It would be no less than a travesty

to translate Kharms into an idiom of "great books" or literary "discoveries" and to smooth out the inconsistencies and "mistakes" that make him a subversive writer, evading easy categorization. Translation often goes hand in hand with selection, and here I was charged not only with translating but also with selecting from Kharms's work, thus increasing the risk that I might paint a skewed picture of the writer. (For example, due to the limits of space and of my own abilities, I could not include in this selection examples of Kharms's longer, hybrid verse-plays, which I hope shall be made available in translation in future editions.[41]) Even categorizing the various texts as either short prose or journal entries, poems or plays, fiction or philosophy, is a pitfall in this case, as Kharms crosses these categories with emphatic purpose. Thus, in gathering (for the fourth section) a variety of texts which Kharms had not clearly marked as being parts of any series or groups, I have placed them in simple chronological order, thinking this the lesser of evils.

In contrast to Kharms, who wrote most of the texts translated here without hope (or preparation) for publication, I have not translated "for the desk-drawer." I therefore have a different intention from the author's, and that is to relay to a wider readership the effect that his writing has on me, in Russian. As a bilingual speaker I cannot know whether or not a Russian text has the same effect on me as it would on a monolingual Russian speaker. As far as I can discern, however, Kharms's writing does have a specific effect (and intends to) on the Russian language, and on language in general. I have tried more than one approach (especially with the poems) to recreate some of that effect—not on the English speaking audience, but on the English language itself.

I have been reading Kharms—for pleasure, for study, as a would-be director, and as a translator—for over a decade (much longer if you count the illustrated *Ivan Ivanych Samovar* of my childhood). As Kharms has grown on me and become a favorite author of mine, he has also had an overwhelming influence on the way I have thought about and executed these (and other) translations. Much is done intuitively in the momentary event of translation, but here my intuition (shaped by and sometimes against the present cultural ear) is altered or improved by the ideas and forms Kharms himself presents to me. Here is Kharms's own take on translation:

36 DANIIL KHARMS

> Translations of different books make me squeamish. Various and sundry and, from time to time, even interesting stuff is described in them. At times it is written about interesting people, sometimes about events, and other times simply of this or that insignificant incident. But it happens that sometimes you read it and don't understand what it is you read about. It happens like that, too. And then you come across such translations that are impossible to read. What strange letters; some are okay but others are such that you can't tell what they signify. Once I saw a translation in which not one letter was familiar. Some kind of squiggles. For a long time I turned that translation this way and that. A very strange translation![42]

The present volume of translations is similarly not transparent, in that it cannot claim to be Kharms. It is not a pane of glass through which you will see Kharms as he really is, or "as if" he were an English-language writer. I should add that Kharms's texts do most of the work of creating opacity, fighting against the mimetic function, battling meaning, and parrying interpretive attacks. Partly for this reason, I present Kharms's texts as close to the manuscript form as possible in a trade edition, retaining his signatures and dates and marginal markings as much as a typeset collection will allow, to at least acknowledge that these writings were performed only once—what we have here are records of that performance, though I hope that something of that original performance comes to life again as the new reader encounters it.

Strangely, the more painstaking the work, the more attention paid to the original, the less "fluent," it seems to me, the translation becomes—the more strange. But Kharms is here, as much as I know him, and everything I know about him is here in my words—with the important exception that, were I Kharms, I would have crossed out this introduction, foregone the footnotes, and perhaps placed a red "X" over much of the rest of the book as well. In this respect, I have resisted the seductive (yet perhaps more "correct") temptation of keeping my mouth shut.

—MATVEI YANKELEVICH

*August 2007, Brooklyn and South Kortright, NY.*

39. The view of translation as a second-rate, derivative form of writing, seems to prevail in Western discourse on the subject since sometime around the 17th century. [See, for example, excerpts from John Dryden's prefaces to several of his own translations, in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, *Theories of Translation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 17-31.] The lowly status of translation is reflected in standard book publishing practices and in modern copyright law [See Lawrence Venutti, *The Translator's Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 1995).] It is perhaps because of our desire to think of the translation as a transparency, a clear window through which we see the meaning of the original, that we lose sight of the obvious impossibility of a one-to-one correspondence and take for granted the presence of the translator and the choices and praxis involved in the task.

40. In her paper given at an international conference in Belgrade marking a hundred years since Kharms's birth, the Italian scholar Rosanna Giaquinta writes: "Kharms and Vvedensky were stripped of their voices, becoming 'marginal figures,' and left isolated from their own culture and their own epoch; therefore they continue to hold an unstable position, are continuously on the edge." [Collected in *Stoletie Daniila Kharmsa [A Century of Daniil Kharms]*, Aleksandr Kobrinskii, ed. (St. Petersburg: IPC SPGUTD, 2005).]

41. Three important examples of Kharms's longer verse-plays, which can be better described as hybrid prose and poetry works with dialogs in a play-format, and which form an important part of Kharms's oeuvre, are available in English translation: "Lapa"—in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, no. 68, (May 2001)—and "The Story of Sdygr Appr" and "The Measure of Things," both in *OBERIU: An Anthology of Russian Absurdism* from Northwestern University Press (see note #20 for complete citation).

42. Daniil Kharms (Anna Gerasimova, ed.), *Menya Nazyvajut Kapucinom [They Call Me the Capuchin]* (Moscow: Karavento & Pikment, 1993) pg. 238.

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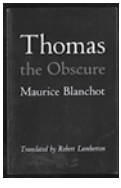


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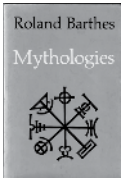


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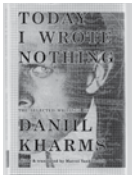


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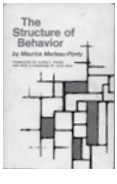


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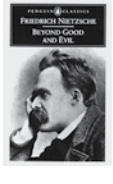


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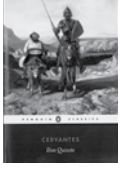


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