

The Act of Translation: The Case of Juan Goytisolo's *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*

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Abstract

What defines the act of literary translation is the striving towards a final version that will be published. This movement towards words on a page encompasses re-readings, multiple research, re-draftings and possible collaborations with author and publisher, all framed by contract, copyright and the inevitable deadline. In this paper, the tasks of the translator will be analysed in the context of a work-in-progress —my translation of a recent novel by Juan Goytisolo, *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, to be published by Serpents Tail in September 2002. The paper will focus on the interpretive moves of the translator within a determining process of writing. The translator is not a depersonalised subject but a critical, historical and emotional subjectivity. The different layers of consciousness are above all galvanised by the re-creation of the original text: a musical, verbal architecture whose making is not adequately captured by most of the concepts currently in vogue within Translation Studies.

Key words: literary translation, drafting process, layers of meaning, collaboration translator-writer-publisher.

Resum

El que defineix l'acte de la traducció literària és l'esforç per donar una versió final que es publicarà. Aquest moviment cap a les paraules d'una pàgina comporta un seguit de lectures, recerques, revisions i possibles col·laboracions amb l'autor i l'editor, i tot plegat emmarcat pel contracte, el *copyright* i l'inevitable termini. En aquest article s'analitzen les tasques del traductor en el context d'un treball en curs: la meua traducció d'una novel·la recent de Juan Goytisolo, *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, que serà publicada per Serpents Tail el setembre de 2002. L'article se centra en els passos interpretatius del traductor en el si d'un procés d'escriptura determinant. El traductor no és un subjecte despersonalitzat, sinó una subjectivitat crítica, històrica i emocional. Els diferents nivells de consciència estan fusionats per la recreació del text original, una arquitectura verbal i musical l'elaboració de la qual no és captada adequadament per la majoria dels conceptes actualment en boga en els Translation Studies.

Paraules clau: traducció literària, procés de revisió, nivells de significat, col·laboració traductor-escriptor-editor.

I want to contrast my own analyses of my recent practice of literary translation with the light or darkness cast by the language commonly used to describe literary translation within what has developed as the academic discipline of Translation Studies in its pursuit of theoretical frameworks to analyse practice. The analyses

will be driven by the assumption that literary translation is a unique, distinctive form of writing and that consequently a literary translator has to be and become a unique, distinctive form of writer. The specificity of the practice as a complex subjective process within defined historical, socio-economic contexts of human communication requires detailed studies of that material process.

In its struggle to establish itself within universities, Translation Studies has adapted to or become enmeshed in various subject power struggles that threaten what should be an essential interdisciplinarity with tunnel vision: legion are the articles and books embedded in self-referential genealogies limited to Translation Studies when most of the individuals concerned in fact owe their critical theories to pre-existing disciplines. Theories are pursued in an often prickly relationship with practice. Why? Because university ideals of scholarship privilege a disconnection from 'doing it' in a tradition of scientific objectivity that belittles the practising subject, or of an education that flees contamination with the vocational. Behind these issues lurk more controversial realities: academic staff who have embraced Translation Studies for professional survival after the collapse of foreign language or comparative literature teaching, or the old philologies, the marginalisation of experienced translators and the enshrining of theoretical debates and research practises that obfuscate the essentially writerly nature of translation within the Humanities, or students who competently or incompetently argue the toss over 'domestication' versus 'foreignising' strategies or discourse or corpus analysis over a year or two, but who never critically confront their ability to write creatively and imaginatively as translators because the assumption is created that the 'right' theory will lead to the 'right' practice. Translation offers an unparalleled field for scholarly research and professional creativity: the two should be conjoined in the construction of routes out of obsolete hierarchies and archaic discipline boundaries. The statement of the obvious, of basics, and the analyses that follow are offered as elements in a necessary debate to try to re-position the practice and theory of literary translation and to enhance consideration of the practice and the culture of translators.

The literary translator works with a text written by someone else in another language which he transforms into writing in another language. This simple declaration hides a complex process of imaginative transformation that remains deep communication with the original writing. The translator reads, re-reads, writes, re-drafts, self-edits, re-writes. During this struggle to understand and create, like any other reader and writer of literature, the words will appeal to the translator's emotions, memories, ideas within an intense flow of subjective consciousness. This is not an operation in a void, not a clinical transplant of meaning but a process of literary reading and writing. Just as the words chosen by the original author will have many resonances that remain private to the writer, resonances central to the life of the text, so words chosen by the translator will also sometimes have strong personal resonances and be central to the re-writing. Their selection is related to the critical process of the translation, not to arbitrary impositions of the subjective. The literary translator has to nurture a critical relationship with his or her repertoire of languages.

In the Benjaminian enterprise of translating literary and not transactional language, in the tussle to excavate meanings and create, the translator embarks on an interpretive — intellectual and artistic — adventure that will throw up a series of research tasks: literary, intertextual references, political and historical background, the writer's whole work and surrounding scholarship, linguistic varieties, colloquialism, archaic registers... In the course of this to-ing and fro-ing, the translator has to be sensitive to ambiguities, images, word-play. These will emerge throughout the drafting process along with new layers of meaning to research. However, the penetration of the architecture of the work being translated, the relation of the word to the whole is not pursued in order to write an academic article, an analytical discourse of interpretation, but a literary work in which the writing reaches to the artistic level of the original. The force driving the translation is the music of the words powering the movement of narrative: the music will often suggest writerly solutions. These can emerge with apparent spontaneity, as intuitions, as if irrationally, but they arise from the complex intellectual and imaginative process of research, reading and drafting, from the cultural knowledge and experience of the translator. The writing must have appropriate swing, informed by that critical consciousness which ensures that the translation is a translation and not a free-wheeling adaptation.

A literary translation is an artistic practice which takes place in a commercial socio-economic context. The writer wants his work to be read in other languages and cultures, the publisher hopes this will happen, that books will be sold. The translator should have a proper contract vetted by his or her professional association and this is likely to contain a clause about the translation being 'in good literary language'. A living writer, his publisher, a copy-editor may well intervene in the process of drafting — as was the case with *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*. There is no pure, individual agency for the writing as the translator must respond to the various collaborations offered: though changes that ensue can be moulded by the translator's over-all feel for the text, sometimes the climate can become more litigious, writers and editors can insist on what the translator finds unacceptable and the latter has the right to remove his name from the translation. This crucial area in the negotiation of texts is little referred to in Translation Studies. These preliminary readings before publication can be vital but although the translator will inevitably think about the eventual readerships for his translation, the reader he must translate for is himself as no-one else will be so embedded in the struggle between original and nascent texts, will have the multiple verbal relationships on the brink of consciousness in the form of a writing that is coming into being.

Such a translator will be working in an optimal professional space for completing the translation. Many translators in many countries do not work in such conditions: they have impossible deadlines, inexperienced copy-editors who make changes without consultation, rates of pay that do not allow professional standards, simply because they only offer the possibility of a 'living wage' if translators rush their work, translate a book or two per month. So much 'scientific' translation research is vitiated by perspectives that ignore this socio-economic context and draws conclusions about what the translator has or has not done without any

consideration of these processes which require archival research. (In the same way that assumptions are made on the influence of translation strategies on book sales, without any examination of the relative expenditures and approaches of publishers to promotion.)

The following examples of the writing process of a translation are taken from drafts of *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*. This novel by Juan Goytisolo, published as *Carajicomedia* by Seix Barral in 2000, tells the story of the successive transmigrations of the soul of the priest Father Trennes, named after a character from the novel *Les amities particulières* (1945) by Roger Peyrefitte. Trennes roams through Spanish literature and history from the soul of Friar Buego Montesinos, author of the late medieval *Carajicomedia*, to the heady Paris of one Saint Juan of Barbès in a sardonic satire on the Catholic Church and the philosophy of Opus Dei founder, Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer, threatened by the enjoyment of the flesh lurking, behind many a clerical vow to celibacy. The translation is at final draft stage. I normally send my final draft translation to the authors that I translate. Juan Goytisolo always sends detailed comments and is ever prepared to respond to queries. At the suggestion of the author, the French translator, Claude Bleton and I, exchanged final drafts and made a few changes as a result. I have also received and responded to comments from the author, the publisher, Pete Ayrton of Serpents Tail, and the copy-editor, Ruth Petrie. One feature of this translation is that the author has changed the Spanish text from the one that was first published and that these changes will first see the light of day in the French and English translations. It is quite fitting that the English translation will be launched in London on October 6, the day of the Monsignor's canonisation.

Before the analysis, some basic biographical details about author and translator may be helpful. Juan Goytisolo was born in Barcelona in 1931 into the well-to-do family of a small industrialist. As a child, he had bitter experience of the Spanish civil war: his mother was killed, whilst shopping, by a bomb dropped by Mussolini's airforce on the centre of the Catalan city. He rebelled against the right-wing, pro-Francoist views of his family and became a radical young writer in the 1950s before he left for exile in Paris in 1956 as a 'self-banished Spaniard'. He has never returned to live in Spain. For many years he lived in both Paris and Marrakesh. Since the death of his wife, Monique Lange, he lives in Marrakesh. His life and writing, was transformed in the 1960s by his recognition of his homosexuality. He is one of the most important living, authors in and beyond the Hispanic world and a multilingual one, able to speak Arabic, English, French and Turkish as well as Spanish and all these languages and cultures impact on his writing. As for myself, I was born in Lincolnshire in 1946 into a rural working-class family. I read Spanish and French literature — from medieval to modern — at Cambridge University and this literary knowledge has been invaluable to me as a translator as was subsequent political activity and teaching in Oxford, London and Spain in the 60s and 70s. I have lived for periods in Madrid, Barcelona, Murcia, Havana and Montevideo. I first made contact with Juan Goytisolo in the 1980s when I edited his travel writing on Almería, Campos de Níjar and have subsequently translated his autobiography, several novels and books of essays.

There follow two extracts from the translation with some drafts and the French translation and commentary on the process of translation. Apart from the straightforward lineal reading of the drafts, it could be interesting to read and re-read the original, the drafts and the French before looking at my comments, and to write your own version. If you don't read Spanish, start with the English drafts and then glance occasionally at the Spanish or French.

Extract 1: From the opening chapter of the novel when Trennes turns up in Barcelona and enjoys the company of the poet Jaime Gil de Biedma and his entourage.

Subí ex profeso el volumen del altavoz (mis padres dormían fuera y Pepe se había retirado con tacto). Los compases del pasodoble elevaban gradualmente la temperatura afectiva: el respetable salón familiar parecía más bien un real de feria o encierro taurino. Colina embestía briosamente el foulard de Cucú y ésta se había agenciado un par de abanicos de la vitrina y se servía de ellos como banderillas. Luego, el *père de Trennes* pasó a ser Miura. ¡Una colcha roja! Fui a buscar una de un rosa desteñido y se la pasé a Colita. El buen padre rascaba la alfombra con sus elegantes pezuñas antes de entrar al trapo. Cucú le azuzaba con rugidos de leona en celo. Nuestro novillo de casta no temía al ridículo. Enrojecido y algo despechugado, actuaba conforme al guión con furia de poseso. El pasodoble nos enfebrecía: nada más excitante que su crescendo *bien arrosé* con ginebra. Al cabo de unos minutos nos sentíamos agotados. El *père de Trennes* se puso sobre los hombros la colcha rosada y preguntó: '¿Qué tal estaría yo de bailarina?' 'Requetebién' dijo Colita. Intentó unos pasos de baile, pero no pudo. El gin-fizz puntualmente servido por Jaime le había dado la puntilla. Estaba borracho y empezó a cantar.

First draft

I turned up the volume ex profeso (my parents were out-of town and Pepe had beat a tactful retreat). The rhythm of the pasodoble gradually raised the emotional pitch: our respectable family sitting-room seemed more like a ring, at the flair or a bull-run. Colita brandished with brio Cucú's cravate and shed purloined a pair of fans from the glass-case, now whirled them like banderillas. Then *père de Trennes* became the Miura. A red quilt! I fetched a faded pink one which I handed to Colita. The good priest pawed the carpet with his elegant hoofs before making for the cloth. Cucú goaded him roaring like a lioness in heat. Our noble young bull wasn't afraid of ridicule. Red in the face and a little unbuttoned, he followed the script with the passion of the possessed. The pasodoble turned us on: nothing was more arousing than its crescendo well-watered with gin. After a few minutes we felt exhausted. *Père de Trennes* wrapped the pink quilt round his shoulders and asked: «How'd I be as a dancer?» «A real hit», said Colita. He tried a few steps, but he couldn't. The regularly poured gin-tonics had made their mark. He was drunk and started to sing.

Sixth draft

I turned up the volume *ex profeso* (my parents were out-of-town and Pepe had beat a tactful retreat). The rhythm of the *pasodoble* gradually raised the emotional pitch: our respectable family parlour seemed more like a ring at the fair or a bull-ring. Pigtail brandished with brio the foulard of Cuckoo who'd purloined a pair of fans from the glass-cabinet, and was whirling then like banderillas. Then, le père de Trennes turned Miura bull. A red quilt! I fetched a faded pink specimen which I handed to Pigtail. The good priest pounded the parquet with his elegant hoofs before making for the cloth. Cuckoo goaded him like a lioness on heat. Our pedigree youngster wasn't afraid of ridicule. Red-faced and rather unbuttoned, he performed to script with the passion of the possessed. The *pasodoble* turned us on: its crescendo *bien arrosé* with gin was the perfect arouser. After a few minutes we felt exhausted. Le père de Trennes wrapped the pink quilt round his shoulders and asked: «Would I make it as a flamenco-dancer?» «And how!», cried Cuckoo. He tried a few steps, but couldn't. The regular offerings of gin-tonic had done the trick. He was drunk and started singing.

French translation by Claude Bleton

Je montai à dessein le volume du haut-parleur (mes parents dormaient ailleurs et Pepe s'était éclipsé avec tact). Au rythme du paso-doble, la température affective s'élevait progressivement: le respectable salon familial ressemblait davantage à un champ de foire ou à un lâcher de taureaux. Colita fonçait avec brio dans le foulard* de Cucú, laquelle avait déniché une paire d'éventails dans la vitrine et s'en servait comme de banderilles. Ensuite, le père de Trennes devint le Miura. Une couverture rouge! J'allai en chercher une, d'un rose passé, que je tendis à Colita. Le bon père raclait le tapis de ses sabots élégants avant de foncer dans le tissu. Cucú l'excitait avec des rugissements de lionne en rut. Notre taurillon de race n'avait pas peur du ridicule. Rubicond, légèrement dépoitraillé, il respectait le scénario avec l'énergie d'un possédé. Le paso-doble nous enfiévrât: rien de plus excitant que son crescendo *bien arrosé* * de gin. Au bout de quelques minutes, nous étions épuisés. Le père de Trennes mit sur ses épaules la couverture rose et demanda: 'Comment me trouvez-vous en danseuse?' 'Vachement bien', dit Colita. Il essaya d'esquisser quelques pas, mais sans y parvenir. Le gin fizz méthodiquement servi lui avait donné l'estocade. Il était ivre et il se mit à chanter.

Eighth draft

I deliberately turned up the volume (my parents were out-of-town and Pepe had beat a tactful retreat). The rhythm of the *pasodoble* gradually raised the emotional pitch: our respectable family parlour seemed more like a ring at the fair or a bull-run. Pigtail brandished with brio the foulard of Cuckoo who'd

purloined a pair of fans from the glass-cabinet, and was whirling them like banderillas. Then, Father Trennes turned Miura bull. A red quilt! I fetched a faded pink specimen which I handed to Pigail. The good priest pawed the parquet with his elegant hoofs before making for the cloth. Cuckoo goaded him roaring, like a lioness on heat. Our pedigree youngster wasn't afraid of ridicule. Flustered and rather unbuttoned, he performed to script with the fury of the possessed. The *pasodoble* turned us on: its crescendo *bien arrosé* with gin was a perfect arouser. After a few minutes we felt exhausted. Father Trennes wrapped the pink quilt round his shoulders and asked, «How'd I do as a flamenco dancer?» «Like a mad cow, honey», cried Cuckoo. He tried a few steps, but couldn't. The regular offerings of gin and tonic had done the trick. He was drunk and started singing.

Comment

First draft

i) Literal version?

It is often said that a first draft is a literal version, but the word 'literal' implies that the translation is word-for-word and this is nonsense in literary translation where ambiguity, music, word-play hold sway. There can be no such thing as a literal translation in a draft process. The first draft is the first stab at the re-writing at an imaginative transformation:

dormían fuera : 'were out-of-town', not 'were sleeping away'

se habían retirado con tacto : 'had beat a tactful retreat', not 'had retired with tact'

ii) Humour

As this is a comic novel, there is a need to re-create the word-play, as in the alliteration in this scene of the winding-up of the holy father:

embestia briosamente – 'brandished with brio'

se había agenciado un par de abanicos – 'she'd purloined a pair of fans' (using the more informal contraction, a handy piece of English flexibility).

iii) Compensation?

This is a word used by some translation theorists and translators. It draws on simplistic notions of profit and loss. The process of loss and gain in translation is writing-led and not a mechanical exercise in weights and measures:

antes de entrar al trapo – 'before making, for the cloth' adds an irony not present in the Spanish because of the English designation of priests as 'men of the cloth'.

iv) Cultural context and multilingualism

The names remain untranslated. The bullfighting references include *banderillas* and *Miura* and are unexplained. Can the translator assume readers of Juan Goytisolo or readers at large will know something, about Spain and bullfighting? What about Trennes himself? Should the French words be translated or the Spanglish version of a drink?

Sixth draft

i) Compression

The text has become much tighter, denser; the English strives to grasp the ‘timing’ necessary for what is a farcical scene. Again, this is a writerly move, not a mechanical exercise in word-counting:

Enrojecido y algo despechugado actuaba conforme al guión con furia de poseso.

Red-faced and rather unbuttoned, he performed to script with the passion of the possessed.

ii) Humour

In the translation of the following sentence, the slight shift in register with the translation of ‘furia’ is continued into the rendering of ‘enfebrecía’ (‘fury’ and ‘fevered’) and the use of the French in the Spanish is used to advantage with the play of ‘arrosé’ and ‘arousal’:

El pasodoble nos enfebrecía: nada más excitante que su crescendo *bien arrosé* con ginebra.

The pasodoble turned us on: its crescendo *bien arrosé* with gin was the perfect arouser. (But would it be better to keep the ‘fury’ and the ‘fevered’ and turn the ‘red-faced’ into flushed’?, the re-drafter wonders.)

In an earlier sentence, I’ve slightly changed the furniture in order to extend the alliteration:

El buen Padre rascaba la alfombra con sus elegantes pezuñas.

The good Father scratched the carpet with his elegant hoofs.

The good priest pawed the carpet with his elegant hoofs.

The good priest pounded the parquet with his elegant hoofs.

iii) Names

I have decided to translate the names of the priest’s playmates but not that of the père himself. The names add to the comedy and are not transparent whereas I’m expecting readers to have a reasonable level of French as in the Spanish there are

extended passages of French which I won't translate. The author in his re-writing after the first edition has mentioned the priest's literary provenance. I decided to clarify what a Miura is.

Eighth draft

Between the sixth and eighth draft, I received three other forms of commentary which made an impact on my final translation — the French translation and comments by the editor and copy-editor. Neither editor nor copy-editor has a knowledge of Spanish.

One concern is the text's multilingualism. Pete Ayrton would like all the French and Latin to be translated, on the basis that the text is already full of difficult literary references and language, chunks of untranslated other languages would add to the opacity, detract from the humour for English readers. I argue that the Latin tags are part of the clerical scene, and the context gives them a meaning: Juan Goytisolo adds that many of his Spanish readers don't understand them or the French. I agree to translate the speech in French by a pedantic scholar and a page purported to be from a diary by Roland Barthes, but leave there and elsewhere a scattering of French words. Occasionally, I have introduced French words which seem to me fit the English, add an amusing touch. I don't change the various Arabic or Turkish words and phrases, the drift of which is clear or ironically unclear as with the Arabic sentence which the narrator declares is impossible to translate into Spanish and which the English translator declares is impossible to translate into English.

Claude Bleton marks the multilingualism of the text by italicising the French that is in the Spanish and using an asterisk. I prefer not to mark up what is in English in the Spanish text in this way as I feel the asterisks give an academic flavour. Pete Ayrton suggests the translation of the priest's name intensifies the comic by suggesting a resonance of Father Ted, the UK television priestly sit-com. (The jacket blurb boasts 'Jo Orton meets Father Ted'.) Copy-editor, Ruth Petrie, italicises 'pasodoble' (corrects my erratic spelling!) and 'banderillas' and suggests putting an 'and' into the gin-tonic which I am happy to accept because it consolidates the well-to-do bourgeois tone and reinforces the 'tonic', 'trick' English echo of the Spanish 'puntualmente' and 'puntilla'.

Between the sixth and eighth draft, I dither slightly over what to do with the 'bien arrosé' – well-watered? – before finally deciding for the fully French 'bien arrosé'. The French translation climaxes the priest's performance with a brilliant joke that is available in French but not in Spanish. Cuckoo tells him he is 'vachement bien' as a dancer in translation of the 'Requetebién' or 'Really, really good'. I move from 'And how!' to '!Y olé!', searching for a more comic anti-climax. Following Claude Bleton's cowly lead, I slightly re-phrase the question and introduce a note of anachronistic bovine camp – 'How'd I do as a flamenco dancer?' 'Like a mad cow, honey!'

Extract 2: From section 6 of chapter 6, «The Transmigrations of Friar Buego», when the Friar transmigrates into the person of Guzmán de Alfarache, the hero of the

picaresque novel of the same name written by Mateo Alemán. The first five sentences are taken whole or adapted from Alemán's text included at the end of the Spanish edition in a small anthology of extracts from Spanish literary texts referred to or glossed by Juan Goytisolo within *Carajicomedia*. At a meeting at the French Literary Translators Centre in Arles, Juan Goytisolo and his translators (into English, French, German and Bosnian) agreed a number of changes, one being the decision to exclude this anthology from their translations. It is one of a number of literary transmigrations that involve the re-writing by Juan Goytisolo of scenes from other 16th and 17th century works or inspired by certain writers and intellectuals.

¡Oh bondad grande e Dios! ¡Largueza de su condición hidalga! Desnudáronme para vestirme, quitáronme de pedir para darme y pudiese dar. Nunca Dios quita, que no sea para hacer mayores mercedes. Este santo varón lo hizo a su imitación. Luego de asegurarse de que me hallaba limpio y arreado, Monseñor se acercó bonico a mi cuarto. Holgose de verme porque correspondían mucho mi talle, rostro y obras. Con la diligencia del santo curtido y cursado, se inclinó a contemplar mi natura y la acarició con manos de seda. Entre retozos, meneos e invocaciones a la Madona, de la cual era muy devoto, completó su labor y contentamiento con muchas mercedes limpias de polvo y paja.

'A tuerto o a derecho nuestra casa hasta el techo', dijo. '¡Entre sastres no se pagan hechuras!'

First Draft

O God so great and good! Largesse from his gentlemanly condition! They stripped me to dress me, spared me begging to give to me and what a wherewithal. God only takes away, to give more generous bounty. This saintly male followed in his imitation. After ensuring I was clean and tidy, Monsignor perkily approached my quarters. He warmed to my sight because my figure, face and fruits fitted. Expertly like a saint practiced in performance, he bent down to peruse my peter and caressed it with silken hands. Stroking, fingering, invoking the Madonna, whom he worshipped deeply, he drew his task to a contented conclusion with heartfelt thanks clear of jerks or interruptions.

'A tuerto...

Third Draft

O God who art so great and good! Largesse from his gentlemanly condition! They stripped me and dressed me, spared me from begging in order to give to me and so I could give. God only takes away, so he can shower more bountifully. This saintly male followed in his imitation. After informing himself that I was clean and tidy, Monsignor perkily approached my quarters. He warmed to my sight because my figure, face and fruits fitted. Expertly like a

saint practised in performance, he bent down to peruse my peter and caressed it with silken hands. Stroking, fingering, invoking the Madonna, whom he worshipped devoutly he concluded his task with a spurt of thanksgiving straight from the heart.

'Lord and Master of all that we survey,' did he say. 'One tailor stitches another for naught!'

French Translation by Claude Bleton

Oh, infinie bonté de Dieu! Générosité de sa noble nature! On me dépouilla pour me vêtir, on m'ôta toute raison de demander l'aumône pour m'en donner et me donner de quoi en donner. Jamais Dieu n'ôte rien, si ce n'est pour nous combler de plus grandes grâces. Ce saint homme ne faisait que l'imiter. Après s'être assuré que j'étais propre et équipé, monseigneur s'approcha gentiment de ma chambre. Il se réjouit beaucoup de me voir, car il appréciait beaucoup mon maintien, ma mine et mes attitudes. Avec la diligence du saint prouvé et éprouvé, il se pencha pour contempler ma nature et la caressa de ses mains de soie. Entre badinages, ballottements et invocations à la Madone, dont il était très dévot, il compléta sa besogne et contentement avec beaucoup de grâces tombées du ciel et du fiel.

Sixth Draft

O God who art so great and good! O what largesse from that gentlemanly estate! They did strip and dress me, spare me from begging in order to give unto me, so I could give unto others. God only taketh away, so He can shower more bountifully. This hallowed male followed in his imitation. After informing himself that I was clean and tidy, Monsignor perkily approached my quarters. He warmed to the sight of me because my figure, face and fruits were a perfect fit. Expertly, like a saint practised at what he performs, he stooped to peruse my peter and caressed it with silken hands. Stroking, fingering, invoking the Madonna, whom he worshipped devoutly, he concluded his task with a great spurt of thanksgiving straight from the heart.

'Lord and Master of all that we survey,' did he say. One tailor's needle never leaves another's idle!'

Comment

First draft

i) Context of translation

I translated this and other sections of the second half of the book while enjoying a translator residency at the Banff Arts Centre in Canada. I had limited access to

dictionaries and reference books and had to decide to leave gaps in the first draft — not a usual practice of mine — as here with the proverbs.

ii) Re-creating the experience of the original readers

This is often forwarded as one of the goals of a literary translator. It is another formula that attempts to elide the specific art of reading and writing of the translator with that of the ‘common’ reader. How could one go about analysing the experience of contemporary Spanish reader? How does one re-create that imponderable in a reader in another language?

iii) A professional reading

The translator would try to recognise the intertextual reference and the different layers of language. First, the archaic verb forms where the reflexive is added to the end of the verb – ‘Desnudáronme para vestirme... Holgose’. Second, the colloquial ‘bonico’ and the sexual humour involved in the ‘santo curtido y cursado’ — a reference, amongst other things, to an earlier chapter of lives of quite lusty saints — and ‘polvo y paja’ where behind the cleanliness free of dust or straw are references to love-making and masturbation. Thirdly, there is the Catholicism permeating the text and providing the satirical edge. Can one assume a depth of reaction to this in the more Protestant, English-speaking world?

iv) A first writing

The first draft skirts the issue of the archaic verb forms because I had decided to add that layer at a later stage when I had got deeper into the text. The first draft introduces a series of humorous alliterations: ‘because my figure, face and fruits fitted’ for ‘porque correspondían mucho mi talle, rostro y obras’, and then ‘like a saint practiced in performance, he bent down to peruse my peter’. The two key changes are ‘fruits’ for ‘obras’ or ‘works’ and ‘peter’ for ‘natura’: both Spanish words are religiously and sexually charged as are the English which are also more immediate and palpable, ‘fruits’ as in those of an honest or sinful life or of the vine, ‘peter’, as in a colloquial word for penis, St. Peter or the rock of life. ‘Peter’ is, however, a word that came from my childhood used by mother in a usage I presumed was hers because of my name and not of more general coinage. Subsequent reference to a dictionary revealed that this is a colloquial or archaic use. Claude Bleton has, in the first case, turned to alliteration – ‘mon maintien, ma mine et mes attitudes’ — and, in the second, to a repetition of ‘noble nature’ and ‘ma nature’ playing on the religious/sexual double meanings of ‘nature’.

Sixth draft

i) The comic archaic/the ludic

The translator can draw on various strands of archaic English in writing this translation. The St. James Bible and Shakespeare have had a widespread influence on the language and there is long tradition of using archaic English forms in comedy whether with the Goons, Cyril Fletcher, Frankie Howerd on his way to the Forum,

or more recently the Black Adder television series, not to forget the forgettable Benny Hill school of innuendo. I drew on this tradition in my final drafts, relying on memory in relation to the Bible and popular humour and by re-reading several of Shakespeare's comedies. The writing, itself depended on a drafting procedure where the playful enjoyment had to prevail. The French translation achieves this through a series of alliterations and double-meanings: 'la caressa de ses mains de soie', 'entre badinages, ballottements', 'sa besogne', 'du ciel et du fiel'. Ludic pleasure is at the heart of any experience of literary translation, shaping the response which will emerge from the professional structuring of the writing of the translation.

ii) Biblical forms

These came readily in the writing, of the sections set in the 16 and 17th centuries and drawing on literary works of that era – 'art', 'did strip', 'taketh', 'unto' and so on.

iii) Innuendo

The idea of God 'showering' bountifully assumes that these are his 'gifts' or 'mercedes'; by leaving out the noun, the text allows a broader range of possibilities. Similarly 'perkily' allows the possibility of 'hindquarters' resonating behind 'quarters'. The second round of 'thanks' involve 'a great spurt' on the way to the climax of the sequence in the proverbs via the seminal coupling of 'polvo y paja'.

iv) Proverbs

The translation of proverbs has attracted a great deal of research of the most arid form. Proverbs are translated in context and, again, not mechanically, following the most obvious route of the 'equivalent' English proverb, if such a one exists. Here, the sexual charge and comedy is what is most important. The proverbs which can be rendered simply as 'To the left and the right our house to the ceiling' and 'Tailors don't pay for repairs done for each other' depend for their impact on the context and their repetition of sounds as much as any obvious meaning. My final translation takes an English saying, 'Lord and Master of all that we survey' and engineers a humorous twist with the archaic 'did he say'. The second is an invented proverb that endows the tailor with a hyper-active phallic needle and comic rhyme 'idle'.

I would like to stress two lines of thought that arise from the above. Firstly, much of the writerly aspect of literary translation which appears to be spontaneous and ludic is spontaneous and ludic but can only hit the mark — if it does — because it is embedded in a critical professional approach. Many of the rationalisations I give for specific translation choices emerge from a rational, conscious process but are post-choice, are led, with this book, by the comedy of language. Secondly, my approach is only possible because I have a broad knowledge of Spanish life and culture and have had long exposure to different kinds of English and Spanish within but especially beyond the realms of higher education. The recognition and creation resonating from experience, education and

general culture are all important for the professional discipline of the act of translation.

To conclude these preliminary remarks on the writing of literary translations and research and pedagogy within Translation Studies, I suggest a scholarly turn to the examination of the act of translation. This would establish the undoubted specificity of translation, one which should be the cornerstone of erudite investigation and pedagogy a scholarship fixated by the process of individual creation in a socio-economic and cultural context.

The glorification of theory which eliminates this complex interplay whether in corpus, poststructuralist or discourse analysis or generalising descriptivism in the end leads Translation Studies down a series of academic blind alleys. It creates the arid situation where leading translation scholars enforce the opinion in their departments and in the wider world of research that 'translation' is not a scholarly activity and therefore riot worthy of doctoral ennoblement or research grants.

The pursuit of status and visibility by consorting with other disciplines is all very well and necessary but the real love affair should be with the act of translation. This affair would touch not only the literary sphere —where are the detailed studies of the translation of scientific, philosophical or historical writing that would really point up the centrality of translation to any critical concept of truth or thought, to human communication and culture? Could Translation Studies thus be rescued from an amorphous interdisciplinarity? Not translation as metaphor, as prologue, as adaptation, as disembodied idea or words, as something we can't evaluate, but translation as was and is, a historical act capable of critical dissection.

This is why the British Centre for Literary Translation is establishing a national archive of literary translation as part of the Writers and Translators Archive at the University of East Anglia. There are already substantial holdings in Texas and Bloomington in the USA and in other archives with material from the publishing world. Few translation scholars venture there. Perhaps, a new turn can be created by a new generation of scholars who translate and who are excited first by the act of translation and second by the need to develop a theory that can catch the excitement.

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