

Preconceiving the 'I' World in the Other's : The Self, the Other and the Problem of Translation of the Literary Text

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The aim of my paper is to lay bare the complications and complexities in translating a literary text. A literal text is, no doubt, straight and unambiguous. Thus, its translation is not so tricky and problematic. But the literary text is another matter. Its literariness and wonder of words are real difficulties for a thorough and faithful translation.

I would like to start my paper by raising two major questions: If there is no faithful translation, can we, then, accept without any wonder, approximations? Is approximation the text that we are willing to translate, or only a stimulus that triggers some internal personal responses?

The act of reading is an act of awakening ambiguities as well as complexities that stay dormant in the text. Such ambiguities and complexities make you look for a 'relevant' and 'adequate' way to penetrate the text. But the more you get into the text, the more you transform it. And the more you transform it, the more you become the other, or you make the other your 'I'. In other words, you possess the other, and, subsequently, you possess his world.

But possessing the world of the other is, in fact, dispossessing it from him. His world becomes yours.

Translating is looking in the eyes of the other, through the eyes of yours. It is to transgress the sanctity of the text and step forth the threshold of another world. In other words, it is to abolish the barrier existing between 'I' and 'Other', and dislodge the latter from his own construction—his own niche.

The reader interprets by himself and for himself. The ambiguity of the text and its complexity make him rather an interpreter than a real translator. Such difficulty is caused by the text's resistance. The translator uses, relentlessly, all his efforts to be closer to what the text means, but he fails. Thus, he uses his own introspection, and further, more freedom to act through intuition and motives that are rather subjective. He uses correspondences between his imagination and the imagination the text triggers. Such *force des choses* makes the translator adopt a perceptual vision which influences the mind and gives a personal colour to the constructed world of the text. Such world becomes the world of the reader-translator. Harvena Richter points out:

Perceptual vision is influenced in similar manner by the mind itself with its own obstructive process of combining unrelated precepts into a unity which we consider the object-process that corresponds to what we loosely term 'imagination'. Memory and thought likewise influence perceptual vision, since we tend to project our pre-concepts about, and memories of an object.¹

Being is always ongoing. Thus, imagination is always in perpetual movement. The 'I'-world preconceived in my first reading is not the same in the second reading. Such never static imagination makes the job of the translator difficult. There is a great difficulty to handle the world of the text. "Man as a measure of all things," points out Isaac Golberg, "measured himself against creation. That is, whatever he

beheld he interpreted to himself in terms of himself. Life in language as thought, became an extension of the body."²

To translate is to 'deviate' from the world of the author as well as the spirit of the text, since the translator blows, within the body of the text, his own spirit. In his book Matter and Memory, Henri Bergson asserts that: "between the affection felt and the image perceived there is this difference, that the affection is within our body, the image outside our body."³

What hides behind any translation of a literary text is primarily the self, then comes the nature of impact of the text on the self. The self that reads, therefore, transforms, reconstructs and adapts the text to its own world. Bergson adds:

It is the whole soul, in fact, which gives rise to the free decision: and the act will be so much the freer the more the dynamic series with which it is connected tends to be the fundamental self.⁴

The self introspects before reproducing any response to the text. "There is knowledge which depends upon introspection."⁵, underlines Bertrand Russell in his book An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth. The world the self constructs from the text-stimulus is a world based on psychic material and motives. Adele King, commenting on language and style, points out:

Rather it [language] is a construction from the materials of the psyche-materials which will reflect both the pressure of the symbolic (society and culture order) and the pressure of the semiotic (desire, the real of the imaginary). Writing is 'an activity of transgression, breaking into

the fixed position of language, opening
out a moving tissue of meaning.⁶

The self fragments the form of the text-world, and realizes its own
through the 'debris' of such world.

In literature the question of the self appears at least in four possible
types, according to Paul De Man. There is the self that judges; the self
that reads; the self that writes, and finally the self that reads itself.⁷

Seemingly, What is drawing attention in these types is their
complexity. They are four in one. In other words, the reader judges,
reads, writes and reads himself. Moreover, reading is abolishing the
barrier that exists between the 'I' and the 'Other'. Reading comes to
be, thus, an avenue or a way the 'I' gets into the Other's territories.

The Other becomes, then, a mirror where the 'I' is projected, not
reflected. In other words, the reader resembles a child who "comes to
realize its image in the looking glass; but as it looks in the glass it sees
its image as an Other."⁸

Reading is an 'I'-strategy which allows the self to define itself
through the Other. "This sense of always looking at one's self through
the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by this type of the world
that looks on in amused contempt and pity."⁹ is, I see, the only
purpose of the reader. Such fact classifies translation in the second
degree. "The preconception of the self," points out Todorov, "is
constituted by the preconception of the other."¹⁰ or in the terms of
Jean-Paul Sartre, the "Other reveals to me what I was."¹¹ Or in Julia
Kristeva's words, "De vouloir recevoir les mots de l'autre, de les
assimiler, reproduire, je deviens comme lui: un sujet de
l'énonciation."¹²

The self quests in the field of the paradoxical, the hidden and the
unknown parts of the text. Such act makes it more in search of itself in
such text rather than understanding the other's world. Tzevetan
Bakhtin attests that

To be means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself. Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself he looks in the eyes of the other or through the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception).¹³

Responding to the other, through the text, is becoming the other. In other words, you perceive the other as your self. A Self-other which, according to Todorov, "entails an acceptance of responsibility for him or her as well as for one's own other-centred self."¹⁴

But the more the 'I' tries to discover and know the real, it fails. The real is always beyond language. Thus, any decisive judgement on the world of the other comes always from the world the reader wants. Mary Klages formulates Jean Lacan's point of view about such matter as follows:

The other is a structural position in the symbolic order. It is the place that everyone is trying to get to merge with, in order to get rid of the separation before 'Self' and 'Other'.¹⁵

To round off, I would say that no self is an island. It is always identified through the other and fabricates relations, whether consciously and unconsciously, that are more mobile and ever-changing.

Can we, thus, hail and say, I have translated a literary text faithfully?

I dare say no, because:

1-Reading and re-reading are acts of remaking, or repositioning oneself into the world of the text, which is not ours, but nonetheless, we possess it.

2-The principal aim of the reader is to discover the clues of/in the text. But is he able to decipher them? "It is the very alien-ness of the texts that makes interpretation possible."¹⁶, admits Frank Kermode.

3-Words live in the mind, not in dictionaries. It means the individual produces, or reproduces, them and dresses them up with ideas and motives he wants. In other words, the self hides itself in the structure that shapes the construction of the text. "[Style] is rooted in content; it is the specific form of a specific content,"¹⁷ points out George Luckacs.

To finish with, I would end my paper quoting Gabriel Merle:

Si personnel que ce soit un style, il a ses racines. Si personnelle que soit l'architectonique verbale qu'il dessine, elle est autre chose qu'une forme sur la page blanche. Il n'est pas facile de gommer l'homme et son milieu.¹⁸

Endnotes

¹ Harvena Richter, Virginia Woolf : The Inward Voyage (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1970),p.36.

²Isaac Golberg, The Wonder of Words : An Introduction to Language for Everyman (New York, London: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938, repr. 1939),p.71.

³Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory, Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul, and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1911, repr. 1962),p.311.

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⁴ Time and Free Will : An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, Trans. F.L. Pigson (London , New York: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, Macmillan Co., 1910, repr. 1921),p.148.

⁵Bertrand Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth (London : George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1940, repr. 1976),p.73.

⁶Adele King, French Women Novelists : Defining a Female Style (New York : St Martin's Press, 1989),pp.37-8.

⁷ Paul De Man, Blindness and Insight : Essays on the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (Minneapolis : University of Minneapolis Press, 1971, repr , 1983),p.32.

⁸Sidonie Smith, and Julia Kristeva, « Introduction : Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practice, » in Women, Autobiography, Theory, ed. Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson (Madison, London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998),p.18.

⁹Susan Stanford Friedman, « Women's Autobiographical Selves : Theory and Practice, » in Women, Autobiography, Theory, ed. Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson (Madison, London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998),p.76.

¹⁰Tzvetor Todorov, « Human and Inhuman : Mikhail Bakhtin, » in Literature and Its Theories (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988),p.20.

¹¹Jean-Paul Sartre, The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, ed. and Trans. Robert Demon Cunnig (New York: Random House, 1965),p.189.

¹²Julia Kristeva, « De l'Identification : Freud, Baudelaire, Stendhal, » in Travail de la Métaphore, Présenté par Maud Mannoni (Paris : Editions Denoël, 1984),p 59

¹³Tzvetan Bakhtin, « Towards a Reworking of the Dostoewsky Book, » in Problems of Dostoewsky's Poetics, Appendix II, ed. And Trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1984),p.391.

¹⁴Tzevetan Todorov, Op.Cit.,p.91.

¹⁵Mary Klages, « Lacan , "in lec.htm.www.Colorado.ed., parag.3.

¹⁶Frank Kermode, Essays on Fiction (1971-1981) (London, Melbourne : Kegan & Paul, 1982),p.263.

¹⁷George Luckàcs, The Meaning of Comtemporary Realism, Trans. John & Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1963),p.19.

¹Gabriel Merle, « Lytton Strechy ou la Strategie du Style, » in Etudes Anglaises (Grande-Bretagne--- Etats-Unis), N°4 (Octobre-Decembre, 1980),p.397.
