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Translating the Commune: Cultural Politics and the Historical Specificity of the Anarchist Text

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Article abstract

Translating the Commune: Cultural Politics and the Historical Specificity of the Anarchist Text — This essay deals with three interrelated matters: the first is the role of discourse analysis and the conscious theorization of discourse typologies in translation methodologies; the second is the absence of any complete English translation of Jules Vallès's autobiographical/historical trilogy, Jacques Vingtras, comprised of L'Enfant (1879), Le Bachelier (1881), and L'insurgé (1885); and the third is the analysis of specific discursive characteristics which establish the formal and functional identity of the Discourse of the Commune. Though widely published in popular and scholarly editions in France, Vallès's novels have not been included in the lycée corpus through an act of conscious cultural exclusion. This has contributed to the exclusion of Vallès abroad and to the absence of translations of the trilogy. In order to remedy this situation the translator must be aware of the specific socio-political context surrounding these novels as well as the particular formal characteristics which make up the discourse from which these texts emerge. Radical decentralisation, narrative fragmentation, multiple enunciative positions, neologisms, a structure based on an unresolved binary dialectic, interdiscursive mixing and semantic ambiguity are common characteristics of the discourse of the Commune as they are transposed metaphorically from the anarchistic theoretical discourse of P.-J. Proudhon to the Vallès texts: these specific factors coupled with a cultural politics of exclusion have long marginalized the trilogy in various curricula and, in addition, led to its exclusion from non-francophone cultures both in the original French and in translation.

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Donald Bruce

Introduction

Translation requires the recognition of discourse typologies in order to ascertain the fundamental characteristics of particular texts to be translated. That is to say that the *conscious theorization* of the problematic embodied in a particular source-text is a useful and, I would argue, necessary step in achieving a 'satisfactory' translation. This is one way in which translation constitutes itself as what might be called an "interdiscipline," for the tools of translation do not reside entirely within the discipline itself. Translation in general and literary translation in particular have benefitted greatly from the developments which have taken place in literary and cultural theory during the past thirty years in that these have done much to provide a renewed conceptual basis for translation methodologies. In what follows I would like to suggest how translation methodology has been assisted by discourse analysis to examine a specific case of this. At the same time, in relation to this case I would like to enquire into a familiar question of cultural politics which returns repeatedly to haunt translators and cultural historians: what factors determine whether a text will be translated or not? Reception history would be a good place to begin.

Translating the Trilogy

The texts I shall discuss are the major literary works to come out of the Paris Commune of 1871. They are the *Jacques Vingtras* trilogy by Jules Vallès, comprised of *L'Enfant* (1879), *Le Bachelier* (1881), and *L'Insurgé* (1885). To date, there exists no complete English translation of these texts, a situation which must certainly signal a "significant absence" (Macherey, 1966, pp. 105-110) in the corpus of translated XIXth century French literature. In order to understand why Vallès has not been translated into English, we must first examine a few salient characteristics of the publication and reception history of the trilogy in France. My aim in doing this is to suggest here that the most important reasons for the neglect of the trilogy in English speaking countries are intimately related to attempts at ideological marginalization and delegitimization of these novels within the French educational apparatus itself.

Though many texts written within the main nineteenth century *counter-discourses*[1] (socialism, nascent feminism, aestheticism) have eventually been absorbed into the institutionalized canon of French literature, some texts have not. Amongst these one must count the *Jacques Vingtras* trilogy. These novels describe, in terms of an autobiographical/ historical narrative, the process by which a young *bachelier* becomes a *communard*: generically, these novels constitute a Second Empire *Bildungsroman* but one in which the very function of bourgeois humanistic culture is challenged and subverted. In many ways the protagonist's marginalization and ultimate end is not so very different from the situation of other XIXth century heroes. In fact it is meant to be quite representative: one has only to think of that other archetypal anti-*Bildungsroman*, *L'Éducation sentimentale*, published in 1869, almost on the eve of the Commune, and of the

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1.   These systems were "[...] the principal discursive systems by which writers and artists sought to project an alternative, liberating *newness* against the absorptive capacity of [...] established discourses. I call these alternative systems 'counter-discourses'" (Terdiman, 1985, p. 13).

fate of the young men whose destinies are portrayed by Flaubert. However, there is nonetheless a significant difference here. Though Flaubert excoriated the *bêtise* of his own class and used the considerable resources of irony to undermine hegemonic capitalist values, he neither took up arms in favour of anarchism nor did he valorize working class or artisanal culture and oppose it to bourgeois culture. In fact, Flaubert like most writers of the period accepted the popular representation of the Communards as madmen and of their women as *pétroleuses*, harbingers all of the apocalypse. Initially exiled from France and condemned to death *in absentia*, the Communards and in particular Vallès as the group's primary cultural spokesman were to know another type of death upon being amnestied in 1880: institutional death by exclusion and marginalization. The reasons for this, as Charles Stivale points out, are evident: "l'attitude contestataire de Vallès, la méconnaissance délibérée de la part des institutions littéraires bourgeoises et l'oppression politique de certains éléments de l'intelligensia par le pouvoir" (Stivale, 1988, p. 7). For these reasons the trilogy has been conspicuously ignored by the French educational system.[2]

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2.   Over the years many are the readers of Vallès who have asked themselves why his novels should be so rigorously excluded from the accepted corpus of XIXth century texts within the educational system. Almost fifty years ago, Jean-Pierre Richard put the problem this way: "Que tous les manuels de littérature — de Lanson jusqu'à Thibaudet — aient organisé autour du nom VALLÈS une vaste conspiration du silence, ou ne le mentionnent — dérision suprême — que comme «l'ancêtre du roman autobiographique», je vois dans cet oubli ou ce dédain une suite juste et logique de ce que fut le destin de *l'Insurgé*. [...] Ayant refusé de jouer le jeu il est exclu du palmarès" (Richard, 1947, p. 430). Maurice Nadeau, pointed out that: "Jules Vallès n'est pas de ces écrivains envers qui la postérité se soit montrée bonne fille. [...] Feuilletez une histoire de la littérature (les manuels de classe ont jugé plus simple de passer son nom sous silence), vous le verrez expédié en trois lignes entre la date de sa naissance (1832) et celle de sa mort (1885) avec le soufflet d'un jugement comme: «écrivain coloré et expressif»!" (Nadeau, 1950, p.119). Some twenty years ago,

At the very heart of the trilogy, simultaneously operative on the thematic, formal and functional levels, is the rejection and subversion of the oppressive ideological apparatus constituted by the state educational system of the Second Empire. What is even worse, of course, is that these texts constitute a living demonstration of how to turn the oppressor's cultural weapons *back against* the oppressor: a sort of 'how to build a bomb in the *lycée* rhetoric class' text for use in cultural guerilla warfare. Rhetorical strategy, juxtaposition, irony, classical reference, neologisms, syntax, and many other discursive elements are functionally inverted in the trilogy: though derived from hegemonic discourses, these formal elements act to *subvert* dominant cultural structures and values rather than to promote them. Given Vallès's critique of the way in which cultural products (in this case, literature) are appropriated by the dominant classes for ideological control,[3] as well as Vallès's

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Henri Guillemin also commented on the conspiracy of silence: "Vallès reste un écrivain de deuxième plan, dans l'histoire littéraire officielle. Et c'est parfaitement injuste. Nous tâcherons de savoir pourquoi il en est ainsi. Considérer avec déférence, et selon la tradition, Alphonse Daudet, par exemple, comme un grand écrivain et réserver une petite place dans son ombre — une espèce de niche à chien — à Vallès, cela relève de la bouffonnerie. Encore une de ces farces dont fourmille l'histoire littéraire telle qu'on nous l'a faite" (Guillemin, 1973, p. 262). And most recently Michel Tournier has added his voice: "[...] si Vallès est indiscutablement un grand écrivain — frère aîné de Zola —, il est non moins discutable qu'il se souciait de la littérature comme d'une guigne. Ses écrits même littéraires [...] se confondent pour lui avec l'action sociale" (Tournier, 1981, p. 190).

3.   It is quite clear that Vallès's analysis of the forms and functions of the French educational system, and the manner in which cultural products were appropriated, circulated, and then consumed during the XIXth century is very much a precursor of the type of analysis which Althusser has applied to the state educational apparatus and Bourdieu to the operation of systems of cultural (re)production. What is particularly fascinating from

openly anarchistic leanings and his active participation in the Commune, it is no wonder then that his texts have long been excluded from the traditional canon in France: in part for revenge, in part lest the virus spread.

From a non-French perspective, a noteworthy consequence of this intentional exclusion and marginalization within the school system has been that curricula in French literature which have been used in non-francophone countries and which have modelled themselves on the traditional *lycée* canon, have tended to ignore Vallès's work. Since it is this canon which is taught in non-francophone undergraduate literature courses, Vallès has effectively been eliminated outside of France. Political non-conformists, like women, have long had trouble obtaining legitimization in hegemonic (patriarchal) bourgeois structures. But, just as in the case of women, it is not always necessary to openly condemn the political Other in order to dominate him/her: silence, exclusion from the *lycée* syllabus, and strategic neglect all facilitate the disappearance of uncomfortable texts written by uncomfortable people.

Some examples. As early as a few days after his death, Vallès was vilified by Fernand Brunetière in an article in *La Revue des deux mondes*: "C'est d'un vilain homme que je vais parler..." (p. 212). This essentially sets the tone amongst establishment commentators for the next seventy-five years. In Gustave Lanson's highly influential *Histoire de la littérature française* (1894), virtually the Bible of generations of *lycée* literature teachers,

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the perspective of cultural critique is that although the novels contain no theoretical analysis, the narrative, the thematics, the discursive structures, indeed the very function of the texts themselves all *illustrate* an intuitive understanding of cultural relations. It is here that the *modernity* of Vallès's texts undoubtedly shocked his bourgeois contemporaries and seemed incomprehensible to them.

Vallès's name does not appear once in the index.[4] In Lanson's very widely used *Manuel d'histoire de la littérature française* (1931), which continued to be reprinted and used until well after World War II, Vallès is mentioned once but only briefly in reference to Michelet. Vallès has never been included in the XIXth century volume of the anthology set published by André Lagarde et Laurent Michard which has been quite popular both in French and in foreign classrooms (Daudet has five pages!). What cultural logic, one could ask, dictates that this volume has not one word about Vallès while the volume on XXth century literature in this series includes a section on Louis-Ferdinand Céline (a political non-conformist of a different stripe)? In J.-Y. Tadié's *Introduction à la vie littéraire du XIXe siècle* (1970), Vallès is mentioned twice in passing; in Michel Raimond's *Le Roman depuis la révolution* (1967) Vallès has almost one page of essentially descriptive commentary; in Morris Bishop's *A Survey of French Literature* (1965), which is aimed at anglophone students, there is no mention of Vallès. It is only after the curriculum changes that were enacted in the wake of the events of 1968 that Vallès's texts began to make their way into the *lycée*: in the Arthaud *Littérature française* series, the third volume (1869-1896) for the XIXth century by Raymond Pouillart contains a short but neutral mention of *l'homme et l'œuvre*; in Henri Mitterand's *Littérature. Textes et documents* (1986) there is an extract from *l'Insurgé*; and in J. P. Beaumarchais and Daniel Coutry's *Anthologie des littératures de langue française* (1989) there are four pages of extracts and analytical comments. Evidently, by the 1980s the tide was turning. As Roger Bellet, the editor of the Pléiade edition of Vallès has commented:

> Quand il n'était pas ignoré ou maudit, Jules Vallès était, dans les manuels de littérature, relégué dans le coin des «écrivains réalistes». La moindre lecture révèle pourtant que ses œuvres sont avant tout une littérature du sujet et dérivent de l'autobiographie la plus passionnée. En vérité, la force unique de l'œuvre paraît être dans la «couture» (l'image est de Vallès)

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4. This remains the case well into subsequent editions: by the time of the 1951 edition, Vallès is allotted three-quarters of a page out of almost 1500 pages.

de l'histoire d'un homme avec l'histoire du siècle, effectuée par un style unique, sans doute *trop moderne pour son temps*. (Bellet, 1973, p. 2376; my emphasis)

In general then, though my brief survey of the number and length of references accorded to Vallès in various anthologies and literary histories of the XXth century is not statistically scientific, there are two main points to be noted which would be corroborated by further research: the number of references to Vallès has tended to increase since ca. 1968, particularly in the last ten years or so; and, these references increasingly attempt to locate his work in the larger framework of XIXth century literature by identifying its *modernist* qualities. Though banished from the *lycée* classroom and only *tardivement included in the curriculum*, Vallès's writing and the critical discourse about his work have flourished elsewhere.

The general lack of reference to Vallès in anthologies and *manuels* should not, then, be taken as a sign of his status, for outside the educational establishment there are other more revealing indications which tell a very different story. Strikingly, during the last twenty five years, several new editions of the *Jacques Vingtras* trilogy have appeared in France. These include two very reliable scholarly editions: the Livre Club Diderot *Œuvres complètes* (4 vols., 1969: undertaken by Lucien Scheler and Marie-Claire Bancquart), and most recently the *imprimatur* of the Pléiade *Œuvres complètes* (2 vols., 1975 & 1990: produced by Roger Bellet) has been fully accorded to Vallès's writings.[5] Amongst the popular editions, these have been issued by a variety of publishing houses such as Gallimard, Livre de Poche, Flammarion, Presses-Pocket, Messidor, Lérot, and others. The increase in the number of popular editions parallels the revival of Vallès's texts in the *lycées* since the early 1980s. Even a cursory glance at the shelves of bookshops in Paris or Montreal reveals

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5.   This does not include two previous editions of the *Œuvres complètes*: that of Lucien Scheler (Éditeurs Français Réunis, 1950-1972) and that of Gaston Gille (Le Club Français du Livre, 1969) which, however, are not true scholarly editions.

that Vallès is indeed included with all the other 'standard' authors of the XIXth century, just before and Verne and a little after Stendhal and Taine: the trilogy still sells well in general book commerce. Such a degree of publishing activity and re-edition would seem to indicate then, that if Vallès's writings have only slowly been integrated into the canon by the French educational system and legitimized by it since 1968, both scholars and the general public find his works worth reading. How else could one explain so many popular and scholarly editions over a twenty year period? All this activity in French is, interestingly enough, supplemented in other languages by a number of new critical books, popular biographies and scholarly articles.[6] In other words, the general public and knowledgable scholars have accepted Vallès's works, the educational system (his old nemesis) has not and continues to practice the politics of exclusion.

As to translations of the trilogy into foreign languages, a look at the contemporary scene reveals the following. The first complete German translation of the trilogy came out in 1980 (*Jacques Vingtras. Das Kind. Die Bildung. Die Revolte.* Zweitausendundeins Verlag)[7] as did the translation of a lesser known work, *Les Réfractaires* (*Die Abtrünnigen* Nautilus/Nemo Press). A new translation of *L'Enfant* appeared recently in 1992 (*Das Kind* Rowohlt). *L'Enfant* (1984) and *L'Insurgé* (1989) have been translated into Spanish (*Niño*, Edition B, and *Insurrecto*, Arte y Literatura, respectively), but there is no Italian translation of any Vallès texts. As stated at the outset of this discussion, there is no complete translation of the trilogy into English, though Sandy Petrey published an American-English translation of

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6. A partial bibliography of this material is to be found in the two volumes of the Pléiade edition. A complete bibliography will be included in my own monograph, *The Socio-Semiotic Nexus. Jules Vallès and the Discourse of the Commune* (in preparation).

7. There is a review of this translation in *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 6/1980, pp. 199-202.

L'Insurgé in 1971 (Prentice-Hall)[8] and in 1972 W. D. Redfern prepared an annotated French language edition of *Le Bachelier* (University of London Press).

Why then is there nothing or at least so little of Vallès's work in English? The first and foremost reason is ideological: as outlined above, Vallès's anarchist links to the Commune, his biting analysis of the role of educational institutions in maintaining the *status quo*, as well as his insightful critique of the oppressive social function of humanistic culture have made his writings 'persona non grata' in the French educational system. In turn, the traditional dependence of foreign educators on anthologies, *manuels*, literary histories, etc. produced in France has as a result effectively banished Vallès's writings from non-French consciousness by inadvertently reproducing the cultural politics of *l'hexagone*: at least in native French speaking areas popular editions are available to fill in the gap created by institutional exclusion. Beyond that there are other possible reasons which may have contributed to the ghettoization of Vallès's writings. Amongst these one might consider the following:

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8.   *L'Insurgé*, the third volume in the trilogy, is probably the weakest of the three novels in terms of 'quality,' largely because Vallès died before having a chance to completely revise it. In many ways this text resembles the incomplete state of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* at the death of Flaubert. I believe that Petrey's reasons for translating this novel and not one of the others had more to do with its overt political 'message' than with its *literariness*. Its lack of commercial succes at the time might also be attributed to the unfortunate series title adopted by the publisher: 'The Library of Forgotten Books.' Perhaps simple integration of the text into an already existing series of translations might have been a more successful marketing strategy: this would have functioned as a type of legitimation. In addition, the third novel makes little sense isolated from the the first two: a commercially and aesthetically successful translation requires that all three novels be published together.

• Stylistically, the texts incorporate many *journalistic* devices, Vallès himself having been a well-known journalist of his day (editor of *Le Cri du peuple*). This has made them seem 'inferior' in the eyes of those who have a 'belletristic', highly evaluative vision of literature. Of course, in the past the same criticism has been levelled at Dickens, Balzac and other writers associated with serialized publication.

• The texts are strongly *referential* and become increasingly so as one reads through towards *L'Insurgé* which portrays the explosion of the Commune. Yet, they are no more referential than Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* or Hugo's *Quatre-vingt-treize*, both of which are virtually indeciphirable for the foreign reader without socio-historical contextualization.

• These are also very political novels which, instead of providing escape, bring us back to the realities of social conflict and oppression as seen through the eyes of a nineteenth century anarcho-socialist. Again, the belletristic approach has tended to avoid overtly political literary texts which indeed problematize the political, ideological and institutional functions of literature.

• Finally, I would also suggest that there have simply not been enough informed readers of Vallès due to his exclusion from the canon. In this sense the delegitimization process has worked very well, for his writing has remained largely unknown not only among anglophone students of French literature but also among their professors: the only Vallès text ever mentioned at all as a candidate for the undergraduate curriculum is *l'Enfant*, and that is because it appears to be a relatively innocuous story about an unhappy childhood (in the style of *Poil de carotte* and *Petite chose*). In my own university department, few of my collegues have ever read or taught the novels and many would not have any idea as to how to situate Vallès's work in the XIXth century context. The anthologies which colleagues use in undergraduate classes (e.g., Lagarde et Michard) do not include Vallès and many colleagues would argue that exclusion must necessarily indicate inferior literary value. In this manner the cycle of exclusion engendered

by cultural politics is both consciously and unconsciously perpetuated.

For all of these reasons, most of which are fundamentally ideological in nature, there exists today no complete translation of *Jacques Vingtras* in English and little knowledge about Vallès's writing amongst anglophone French literature specialists.

In the preceding I have attempted to present the status of Vallès's work in France in order to explain his status as an *untranslated author* in the English-speaking world. If cases such as this one are to be remedied, the translator (and indeed the publisher) must attempt to conceptualize several elements of the problem: first, the strategies of cultural politics (Vallès's position in the French cultural field) which are responsible for the conspicuous absence of any English translation to begin with and which implicitly colour the opinion of anlgophone readers; second, the *formal and functional specificity* of the discourse of the Commune as realized in these texts, that is, the qualities which render them 'subversive.' In my view, part of the "task of the translator" is to conceptualize this situation and to determine in what way it has an effect on the actual translation process. In this particular case, it is precisely the historical specificity of the *Discourse of the Commune*, as it emerges in the trilogy, which is of import to the translator.[9]

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9.   It should be noted that the argument which I am making here for the importance of the discourse of the Commune as the fundamenal semantic model for the trilogy does not exclude other 'influences' or non-Commune related characteristics. However, this particular argument is called for precisely because it has not been made very forcefully in the past. Ironically, the absence of analyses demonstrating the significance of the notion of anarchy as a semantic model in the texts has contributed to the marginalization of the trilogy: the novels have not been accorded the discursive, aesthetic and ideological specificity which makes them distinct from the backdrop of XIXth century bourgeois cultural production.

Elements relating discourse theory to translation

The studies undertaken in the analysis of the discourse of the Commune are based upon theoretical work done in discourse theory. These studies constitute a specific application of its principles.[10] This activity has been undertaken within the framework of an *interdiscursive* model, one which seeks to map the exchanges, transformations, and subversions which take place when discursive material passes from one discursive formation to another. This is of particular importance for translation since these transfers are historically specific: if their 'sense' is to be communicated to a contemporary reader the translator must clearly be the first to understand it in the source text and reproduce it in the target text.

In order to clarify the theoretical framework of this model I will briefly present a few operative definitions before discussing the historically specific elements found in the discourse of the Commune:[11]

i. *Discourse*: 1) a dispersion of texts whose historical mode of inscription allows us to describe them as a space of enunciative regularities; 2) a set of anonymous, historically situated rules (e. g.: generic systems, repertoires of topoï, actantial schemes, principles of narrative syntax which determine the way *énoncés* are linked) which are determined by a given epoch, and which in turn determine the conditions of enunciation for a given social or linguistic field. These are the largely implicit principles which determine what is *sayable* within a specific

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10.   In particular, Richard Terdiman and Kristin Ross have done much to elaborate discourse theory in relation to XIXth century literature, as have Marc Angenot, Régine Robin, Ross Chambers, and Dominique Maingueneau.

11.   My point of departure for these definitions is the very insightful work done by Marc Angenot on both the theoretical and practical aspects of discourse analysis. Cf. his works listed in the bibliography.

discourse. It is also essential to recognize that discourse is *embodied* in texts and that texts make up discourse: "the relation between discourse and text is one of *emergence*; discourse emerges in and through texts" (Kress, 1985, p.29; my emphasis). Discourse, then, goes beyond the aggregate of texts: it is, to a large extent, the abstract structure as related to the material conditions which are at the basis of the articulation of meaning. A translator must be aware of the characteristics which define the discourse in which a text is located if any sense of historical or semantic identity is to be maintained.

ii. *Text*: is a specific articulation of discourse, a semiotic space within which discourse emerges. Thus text and discourse are not synonymous, yet they are inextricably interconnected and interdependent. Individual texts concretize discursive characteristics in multiple ways.

iii. *Interdiscursivity*: since any given text contains a mix of discourses, this is where the notion of interdiscursivity becomes crucial to the translator. It can be defined as 'the reciprocal interaction and influence of contiguous and homologous discourses' (Angenot, 1983, p. 107), i.e. the interaction of the fundamental regulative principles of specific discourses. No discourse type is 'pure', all contain elements which find their origins in other discourses: the recognition of this is essential in the translator's attempt to define ambiguous meanings.

iv. *Intertextuality*: this is a more punctual phenomenon, and can be defined as 'the circulation and transformation of ideologems' (Angenot, 1983, p. 106). These are one-to-one relationships of varying kinds. This is the more readily explicable referential network within which the text is located, the sense of which the translator can most immediately transmit to the culturally, temporally or spatially distanced reader (by means of notes, paraphrases, etc.).

v. *Ideologem*: can be defined as a small signifying unit possessing the attribute of acceptability within a given doxa (Angenot, 1983, p. 107). It contains within itself both the logical

basis for its probability and the implicit argumentative structure which realizes it. What is particularly significant about an ideologem is its ability to migrate from one discourse to another and to undergo successive re-semanticizations which result in its variability (Angenot, 1989, pp. 902-903). The translator must come to recognize those ideologems which are typical of a particular discourse and period in order to use them in reconstructing the semantic relations in the target text.

vi. Two further notions should also be specified in this context. First, the interdiscursive theory which is being proposed here as a model for translation describes the relationship between *competing* discourses. In particular, towards the mid-XIXth century, certain discourses come to constitute a type of symbolic resistance, a *counter-discourse,* to hegemonic discourses. Thus, the agonistic or conflictual dimension is inherent to this model. Second, one of Mikhaïl Bakhtin's fundamental principals is a key element of the translation strategy proposed here for it seeks to relate formal and functional elements within representation. As Bakhtin says: "The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present, too. *Everything ideological possesses semiotic value*" (Vološinov, 1970, p. 10). In other words, representation is always ideologically informed, and ideology is always formally inscribed into signifying systems. If discourse-dependent characteristics can indeed be identified and represented in a typology, then the task of the translator is simplified: in so far as translation criteria are established for the general discursive model, the lexical and syntactical choices which the translator faces at every turn of phrase can be submitted to some degree of justified regularity. It is these representational relationships that the translator must comprehend — and maintain in the target text — if the discourse of the Commune is to make any sense. I say *maintain* because this is a key part of the counter-discursive historical specificity of the

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text.[12] An understanding of the interdiscursive links is essential when making choices between competing interpretations of the source text. The importance of all this for the translator is that the prior theorization of the text to be translated in terms of its interdiscursive features is an *essential* step: it aids the translator in establishing those complex relationships between linguistic form and meaning, between *signifiant* and *signifié*. To this end the translator requires conceptual tools for determining and rendering the formal and functional specificity of the texts to be translated.

Elements relating discourse theory to the historical specificity of the discourse of the Commune and its translation

Politically the discourse of the Commune is an *anarchist* discourse: the meaning of this term must, however, be understood in its correct historical context. Here, anarchism is synonymous with the 'radical decentralisation' of autonomous political units into freely connected networks. It signals a refusal of social and political *hierarchy* and introduces a notion of

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12. Throughout the XIXth century oppositional discourses took diverse forms according to the hegemonic, conjunctual relationships of the moment. After 1848 it was evident that the class struggle was thoroughly engaged not only in the political arena, but also in the area of cultural relations. During this period forms of resistance became more subtle. As Terdiman makes clear: "Notably, in the earlier part of the century, when one might say the game was still up for grabs, counter-discourse tended to take the form of direct *thematic* contestation. Conversely, as the period wore on, the increasing hegemony of an infrastructural discourse became the first condition under which any other discourse could be produced and socially circulated. It is in such a situation [...] that the more subtly subversive *formal and functional* strategies [...] become pertinent" (Terdiman, 1985, p. 63). An awareness of this type of historical discursive conjuncture is of considerable importance for the translator if the target text is to retain any of its linguistic and thematic effectiveness in relation to the set of previously translated texts.

perpetual *dynamism* which must inevitably clash with the requisite stability of hegemonic socio-political formations. In this sense then, anarchy is *not* synonymous with the popular meaning of 'chaotic disorder and destruction'. At the heart of the interdiscursive model which I have proposed for the discourse of the Commune is the particular 'brand' of anarchism which we find in the works of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) whose writings inspired much anarchistic thought and political action in the second half of the nineteenth century.[13] It is my hypothesis that Proudhon's political discourse of anarchism renders explicit on the *conceptual* and *thematic* level relationships which are embodied *formally* and *functionally* in different types of representation in the texts of the Discourse of the Commune. In other words, the *relationships* which found the theories articulated explicity in Proudhon's political writings are reproduced in other discourses. If the translator is to adequately 'seize' the specificity of this anarchistic discourse, and the set of semantic relationships which informs the trilogy, then these characteristics must be clear from the start.[14]

Since the Commune is, at least to some extent, not only an event but a number of *linguistic practices,* we should be able to determine aspects of the Commune which are characteristic and which distinguish its use of language from the surrounding

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13.   Proudhon's influence throughout this period was extensive. Before the Commune, a clearly proudhonist group dominated over the collectivist orientation of the Marxists within the International; during the Commune, proudhonian ideas were very much in evidence and represented by Vallès and others; after the Commune, the political ideals of Proudhon were furthered within revolutionary syndicalism (cf. K. Steven Vincent, 1984, p. 232).

14.   I do not have sufficient space in this essay to develop in depth the analysis of the characteristics of the discourse of the Commune. That will be the task of a more substantial but as yet incomplete study (cf. note 6). However, further information is available in Bruce (1991, 1993, 1994), and Bruce and Butler (1993).

background of the *discours social.* In fact, the translator's problem lies precisely in the fact that the Commune remains an historical event whose linguistic *status* is as yet unclear in respect to other forms of linguistic representation of the period. Thus, my own overall project which consists of both discursive analysis and translation of the trilogy includes three essential elements: 1) the description of the linguistic status of the Commune; 2) the description of the relationship between Proudhonian anarchy, on the one hand, and the various types of representation which allow the reproduction of elements of this model in the cultural products of the Commune, on the other hand; 3) the translation of the historically specific interdiscursive phenomena localized and recorded in the source corpus.

If one accepts that dialogism is a characteristic of language *per se* and that interdiscursivity is the rule rather than the exception in social interaction, then it is precisely the quantity and quality of the interdiscursive relations which are of particular interest to the translator. These are the formal and semantic *traces* of the underlying cognitive model, i.e. the way in which the world is perceived and rendered in representational systems. These are the structures of representation which the translator must apprehend and reproduce as much as possible in order to seize the *relational* qualities of the discourse of the Commune. For example, the translator must apprehend the complex interrelationships between a hegemonic discourse and its counter-discourse(s). Whereas the former actively obscures numerous factors by means of ideological mechanisms, the latter seeks to unmask these mystifications and make them obvious: this is often done subtly by means of parody, syntactical and narrative juxtapositions, and semantic ambiguity. In order to realize these formal changes, the counter-discourse must participate in the very discourse which it is subverting. The texts of the Discourse of the Commune are subversive: that is their intent. This subversion manifests itself at all levels and obviously is of import for the translator when it comes time to make decisions concerning semantic fields, syntactical organization, rhetorical devices, lexical choices, and so forth. In what follows, I would like to examine a few representative elements which

constitute the historical specificity of the discourse of the Commune as it emerges in the Vallès trilogy and which are of practical significance for the translator.

Examples of discursive features to be accounted for in translation

The following categories are all central to the discourse of the Commune where they are formally and functionally instantiated. By way of illustration, I have included in this essay the opening scene of the second novel in the trilogy, *Le Bachelier*, as an example of some of these characteristics. If these categories are indeed present in a variety of texts which could be located within the discursive space of the Commune, they are also realized in a variety of textual forms (for example, Rimbaud's poetry, Élisée Reclus's scientific writing). Though typical of many texts, what follows is specific to Vallès's aesthetic realization of these categories.

Radical Decentralisation. The most obvious effect upon the text of the key proudhonian notion of radical decentralization is a breaking up of the narrative flow, a fragmenting of the novels. The text is fragmented into narrative segments as small as a sentence and as large as page-long paragraphs, all separated by a *blanc*. It is absolutely essential that the translator maintain this deceptively simple but fundamental discursive feature. For example, in preparing the English translation of Vallès I have consulted the existing German translation and have been surprised to find that the translators have not rigorously adhered to this principle of narrative fragmentation which corresponds clearly to such 'anarchistic' notions as decentralization, autonomous experience, spontaneity, or even "instantanéisme" as Jacques Dubois has called it (Dubois, 1963). This type of fragmentation in the Vallésien text *metaphorizes* into visual, textual terms what is enunciated explicitly in Proudhon's anarchist doctrine in terms of the elimination of hierarchy, centralization, and authority structures. At the same time, these breaks also serve to separate "scenes" since the narrative is

presented in 'dramatic' and dynamic fashion.[15] In this case, since these breaks have semantic value, the translator must be aware of the *(anarchistic) representational system* which they instantiate and must consult the most reliable edition of the French text.[16] In other words, the very typographical *form* of the text reproduces the semantic model informing the discourse of the Commune. This 'visual' dimension of the linguistic text is most certainly a significant 'modernist' element which is essential both in conceptualizing the trilogy and in translating it.[17]

Tense Shifts. Related to this structural feature is a characteristic of a somewhat different nature but which

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15. Though a roughly similar distributional technique is to be found in certain naturalistic narratives (such as Zola's string of *tableaux* in *L'Assommoir*), the highly fragmentary nature of the narrative distribution which we find in the trilogy corresponds to a fundamentally different model (i.e., the discourse of the Commune). However, the possible interrelationship of 'fragmentary models' in the late XIXth century (for example, impressionistic visual representation and the political models of anarchy) has not yet been the object of any in depth research project.

16. There are significant differences in the distribution of the narrative breaks between the recent Pléiade edition by Roger Bellet and the earlier, popular editions such as the Garnier-Flammarion. In this case the most reliable editions are those used by Bellet: the 1884 Quentin edition for *L'Enfant* (the manuscript of which has been lost), corrected by Vallès; the 1881 Charpentier edition for *Le Bachelier* (the ms. is in the Bibliothèque Nationale), corrected by Vallès; and the 1886 Charpentier edition of *L'Insurgé* (the ms. is also in the Bibliothèque Nationale), also corrected by Vallès just before his death in 1885.

17. On the level of visual signification, the narrative fragmentation which extends throughout the texts is clearly reinforced and illustrated by the use of devices such as the 'word cross' (chap. I) and the 'word circle' (chap. VII) in *Le Bachelier*. Again, it is clear that these texts function on multiple semiotic levels.

nonetheless also corresponds to the overall discursive model. In order to maintain a sense of spontaneity and immediacy, the French text is often written in the present historical and verb tense shifts can be quite abrupt. This is sometimes related to shifts in enunciation as different narrative voices (Jacques as child, as young man, as insurgent, as retrospective exile, as 'ominiscient' third person narrator) take charge of the narrative. This pluri-vocality also renders the narrative 'fragmented.' The translator must choose whether to accord the tenses in the target language or to maintain the *temporal discordance* of the French. The translator's first impulse might well be to 'smoothen out' the system of tense relationships. This decision will have to be adjudicated, however, by the overall principle established through initial discursive analysis: i.e., that tenses shall remain as in the original so as to maintain overall discursive integrity and function, with changes being introduced only in those cases where the English would be logically incomprehensible.

Lexicon, binary dialectic. Key semantic fields must be maintained if the lexical integrity of the discourse is to be protected. In the trilogy thematic elements, as represented by lexical items, as well as juxtaposed discourses and enunciative positions, are arranged in a formal proudhonian dialectic: oppositional terms function to sustain narrative and ideological tension without attaining any level of resolution. This tension, or *unresolved binary dialectic*, is fundamental to the anarchistic vision. As Proudhon puts it, "les termes antinomiques ne se résolvent pas plus que les pôles opposés d'une pile électrique ne se détruisent. Le problème consiste à trouver non leur fusion qui serait leur mort, mais leur équilibre sans cesse instable, variable selon le développement de la société" (*Théorie de la propriété*, Chap. 1, p. 52).[18] This analogy could serve as a description of

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18.   The same physical analogy is to be found in a letter to G. Chaudey from 30 December, 1861 (*Correspondance*, XI, p. 314). It is no accident that the analogy between the physical and the social universes should be articulated in this manner: in Proudhon's vision the unresolved binary dialectic is a natural phenomenon.

the fundamental semantic model of the text. Examples of this type of relationship are to be found everywhere in the trilogy and are either lexically explicit or implicit. In *L'Enfant*, for example, the chapter headings establish this structure (mère, famille, propreté, collège, foyer, pension, alternate with terms such as vacances, voyages, départ, évasion); throughout the texts certain terms articulate this antinomy in an explicit fashion: blouse/redingote, province/ville, boulevard/rue, mouvement/ stabilité are explicit; action/témoignage, mythe (creation)/mythe (destruction), foule/individu, Vallès/Vingtras, spontanéité/ contrainte, rêve/réalité are less explicit as lexical items but constitute fundamental semantic categories of the discourse. These relationships and their distribution must be *maintained throughout the text* if semantic integrity is to be safeguarded. Again, the dialectic of *antinomies* as enunciated by Proudhon's version of anarchism is metaphorized in the trilogy: the translator must be aware of this in order to make proper lexical and syntactical choices within the overall semantic framework.

Word play/ideologems. This is another essential characteristic which metaphorizes the inherent notions of *dynamism* in the discourse of the Commune. The *semantic ambiguity* inherent in word play is ideologically motivated and, of course, extremely difficult to maintain, though functional equivalents can be devised (e.g., "carrière" — > "quarry" in the *Bachelier* text which follows). It is here also that we most clearly perceive the functioning of *ideologems*. Since these are no more than phrase-length expressions, they are embedded in longer syntactical structures. In the following text, the truncated ideologem "la lutte [pour la vie]" versus "la lutte [des classes]" which opens the novel creates dynamism by mixing and opposing two discourses: on the one hand the socio-darwinian discourse of the state ideological apparatus (the *lycée*), and on the other a marxian which defines the class struggle as the motor of historical dialectic. This discourse/counter-discourse conflict is articulated within the same syntagmatic space and sets the structure of semantic ambiguity which permeates this whole opening scene as well as the rest of the novel. What is essential here is the translator's recognition of the functional role of lexical

ambiguity in the trilogy: both form and function are *resemanticized* in terms of counter-discourse. They are subversive and that subversion must be maintained by the translator.

Interdiscursive mixing. These texts are obsessively aware of the mechanisms of semiotic encoding and decoding: this is already evident in the clever ambivalence of the opposing discourses in the "lutte" ideologem discussed above. Be it through the representation of clothing, the interweaving of different discourse types by juxtaposition, the eruption of foreign discursive elements (Latin and Greek expressions, revolutionary slogans, bourgeois platitudes) into another discourse, or the constant ambiguity which attends the use of language throughout the texts, at all times this same fundamental model of linguistic ambiguity manifests itself. The translator must maintain the formal and functional distinctions between discourses since the very aim of this structure is to demonstrate that language is *not transparent*, that the meaning of language has a *social* source, a *class* source, and within capitalist society is used to hegemonic ends. In the text one of the roles of *italics*, for example, is to demonstrate this by drawing attention to particular terms and the translator must distinguish among the many functions of XIXth century italics in the source text when reproducing the function in the target text.

In the following extract, the opening scene of *Le Bachelier*, most of the above elements are at work and an attempt has been made to account for them in the English translation: word play ("carrière, boucler, bagage"); juxtaposition and interdiscursive mixing of discourses (the narrator's multiple discourses, the teachers' clichéd and hegemonic discourse, the spontaneous intervention of dead languages into contemporary discourse); ideologems ("lutte" with the implicit elisions 1) "pour la vie," 2) "des classes"); tense shifts (not always 'logical' but consistent with 'spontaneity', 'immediacy'); use of italics (to indicate the alterity of foreign discursive elements); discursive tension (maintained by juxtaposed discourses 'teacher/student', 'literal/metaphoric', 'empirical/ideological-mythological'). Stylistically a modernist

text, *Le Bachelier* remains thematically a product of the XIXth century.

French original

J'ai de l'éducation.

«Vous voilà armé pour la lutte — a fait mon professeur en me disant adieu. — Qui triomphe au collège entre en vainqueur dans la carrière.»
Quelle carrière?
Un ancien camarade de mon père, qui passait à Nantes, et est venu lui rendre visite, lui a raconté qu'un de leurs condisciples d'autrefois, un de ceux qui avaient eu tous les prix, avait été trouvé mort, fracassé et sanglant, au fond d'une carrière de pierre, où il s'était jeté après être resté trois jours sans pain.
Ce n'est pas dans cette carrière qu'il faut entrer; je ne pense pas; il ne faut pas y entrer la tête la première, en tout cas.
Entrer dans la carrière veut dire: s'avancer dans le chemin de la vie; se mettre, comme Hercule, dans le carrefour.
Comme Hercule dans le carrefour. Je n'ai pas oublié ma mythologie. Allons! c'est déjà quelque chose.
Pendant qu'on attelait les chevaux, le proviseur est arrivé pour me serrer la main comme à un de ses plus chers *alumni*. Il a dit *alumni*.
Troublé par l'idée du départ, je n'ai pas compris tout de suite. M. Ribal, le professeur de troisième, m'a poussé le coude.
«*Alumn-us, alumn-i*», m'a-t-il soufflé tout bas en appuyant sur le génitif et en ayant l'air de remettre la boucle de son pantalon.
«J'y suis! *Alumnus*..., cela veut dire "élève," c'est vrai.»
Je ne veux pas être en reste de langue morte avec le proviseur; il me donne du latin, je lui rends du grec:
«Χάρις τῷ μοῦ παιδαγωγῷ» (ce qui veut dire: merci mon cher maître).
Je fais en même temps un geste de tragédie, je glisse, le proviseur veut me retenir, il glisse aussi; trois ou quatre personnes ont failli tomber comme des capucins de cartes.

Le proviseur (*impavidum ferient ruinae*) reprend le premier son équilibre, et revient vers moi, en marchant un peu sur les pieds de tout le monde. Il me reparle, en ce moment suprême, de mon éducation.

«Avec ce bagage-là, mon ami...»

Le facteur croit qu'il s'agit de mes malles.

«Vous avez des colis?»

Je n'ai qu'une petite malle, mais j'ai mon éducation.

English version

I've got education.

"So there you are, ready for the struggle," said my teacher by way of parting. "He who triumphs in school shall be no man's quarry in life."

Quarry?

An old friend of my father's who happened to be passing through Nantes came to visit and told him the story of one of their former school friends, one of those fellows who always won the prize in every subject. He had been found dead, broken and bloody at the bottom of a rock-quarry he had thrown himself into after having gone three days without eating.

That isn't the type of quarry you should have anything to do with; not at all; you shouldn't enter into it head first, in any case.

When you leave school it's to enter into a career and that means: to advance along the path of life; to put oneself, like Hercules, at the crossroads.

Like Hercules at the crossroads. I haven't forgotten my mythology. Well, that's already something.

While they were hitching up the horses, the head master came up to me and shook my hand as if I were one of his most dear *alumni*. He said *alumni*. A little confused by the idea of leaving, I didn't understand right away. Monsieur Ribal, the third form teacher, nudged my elbow.

"*Alumn-us, alumn-i,*" he whispered to me, stressing the genitive and looking as if he were buckling up his belt.

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"I've got it! *Alumnus...*, that means 'student', that's right."

I don't want to be outdone in dead languages by the head master; he gives me Latin, I give him back some Greek:

"Χάρις τῷ μοῦ παιδαγωγῷ" (which means: thank you dear master).

At the same time I make a tragic gesture, I slip, the head master tries to catch me, he slips too; three or four persons just miss falling over like cardboard figures.

The head master (*impavidum ferient ruinae*) is the first to regain his balance, and comes towards me, stepping on just about everyone's feet. He speaks to me again at this supreme moment of my education.

"With the baggage you have, my young man..."

The coachdriver thinks he's talking about my belongings.

"Do you have any bags?"

I have only one small trunk, but I have all my education.

Conclusion

Evidently, one would have to examine larger sections of the trilogy in order to adequately demonstrate the argument which I have presented here. Then, it would be necessary to examine other texts emerging from the discourse of the Commune in order to illustrate similar qualities. And finally, all this would have to be compared to the cacophony of the *discours social*. That project is underway within another framework. Nonetheless, the characteristics discussed above are enough in evidence in this brief sample from the trilogy to give the reader some indication of the *bien-fondé* of the argument which has been made.

There are a great many other discursive features which could yet be discussed here: the specific use of figurative devices, in particular, metonymies; the use of spatial metaphorization to configure the text in non-hierarchical, horizontal rather than vertical images; the use of specific cultural references to define a *counter-culture* upon which to base a counter-discourse; the problems which arise because of shifting enunciative positions;

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the mechanisms at work to demonstrate the materiality of discourse.

If translation is indeed an interdiscipline, then one of its most important constitutive elements is to be found in the tools offered by contemporary literary and cultural theory in general and discourse analysis in particular. These tools contribute significantly to the necessary conceptualization of translation problems and to their solution within a coherent socio-semiotic framework. In the case of the Vallès trilogy, a clear understanding of the discursive features of the linguistic dimension of the Commune is the correlative to understanding the cultural politics which have for so long marginalized the trilogy in various curricula and, as a consequence, have led to its exclusion from non-francophone cultures both in the orignal French and in translation.

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ABSTRACT: Translating the Commune: Cultural Politics and the Historical Specificity of the Anarchist Text — This essay deals with three interrelated matters: the first is the role of discourse analysis and the conscious theorization of discourse typologies in translation

methodologies; the second is the absence of any complete English translation of Jules Vallès's autobiographical/historical trilogy, *Jacques Vingtras*, comprised of *L'Enfant* (1879), *Le Bachelier* (1881), and *L'Insurgé* (1885); and the third is the analysis of specific discursive characteristics which establish the formal and functional identity of the Discourse of the Commune. Though widely published in popular and scholarly editions in France, Vallès's novels have not been included in the *lycée* corpus through an act of conscious cultural exclusion. This has contributed to the exclusion of Vallès abroad and to the absence of translations of the trilogy. In order to remedy this situation the translator must be aware of the specific socio-political context surrounding these novels as well as the particular formal characteristics which make up the discourse from which these texts emerge. Radical decentralisation, narrative fragmentation, multiple enunciative positions, neologisms, a structure based on an unresolved binary dialectic, interdiscursive mixing and semantic ambiguity are common characteristics of the discourse of the Commune as they are transposed metaphorically from the anarchistic theoretical discourse of P.-J. Proudhon to the Vallès texts: these specific factors coupled with a cultural politics of exclusion have long marginalized the trilogy in various curricula and, in addition, led to its exclusion from non-francophone cultures both in the original French and in translation.

RÉSUMÉ: **Traduire la Commune: la politique culturelle et la spécificité historique du texte anarchiste.** — Cet article prend pour sujet trois problématiques apparentées: d'abord, le rôle de l'analyse du discours et de la conceptualisation théorique dans la traduction; ensuite, l'absence de traductions de langue anglaise de la trilogie autobiographique/historique de Jules Vallès, *Jacques Vingtras* (*l'Enfant* (1879), *le Bachelier* (1881), et *l'Insurgé* (1885)); enfin, l'analyse des caractéristiques formelles et fonctionnelles qui fondent l'identité spécifique du discours de la Commune. En dépit de multiples éditions populaires et savantes au cours des années, la trilogie reste toujours exclue du corpus lycéen par un acte d'exclusion culturelle conscient. À l'étranger, le résultat en est l'absence de traductions et d'éditions commentées. Afin de remédier à cette situation le traducteur doit être conscient des circonstances socio-politiques qui entourent la trilogie ainsi que les caractéristiques formelles qui constituent le discours d'où émergent ces romans. La décentralisation radicale, la fragmentation narrative, les multiples positions énonciatives, les néologismes, la structure antinomique 'non-résolue', le mélange interdiscursif et l'ambiguïté sémantique sont quelques-unes des caractéristiques formelles du discours de la Commune tel qu'il s'exprime par transformation

métaphorique. uepuis le discours théorique anarchiste de P.-J. Proudhon jusqu'aux textes de Vallès et d'autres écrivains de la Commune ce discours se constitue par transformation. Ces éléments spécifiques ainsi qu'une politique d'exclusion culturelle contribuent depuis longtemps de diverses manières à la marginalisation de la trilogie dans la francophonie et à son absence en traduction dans les pays non-francophones.