TTR
Traduction, terminologie, re?daction

« La Traduction philosophique », *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, n° 1, 1989.
Sherry Simon. *L'inscription sociale de la traduction au Québec*. Montréal, Office de la langue française du Québec, 1989, 157 p.

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Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

du « viol » qui soutient la pensée des sourciers — auquel s'opposerait la jouissance dans le consentement de la pratique des ciblistes — Ladmiral contribue à faire monter le ton polémique.

Mais enfin, ne s'agit-il pas en vérité d'un monde divisé entre deux partis-pris esthétiques ? C'est ce que suggère Bernard Lortholary en défendant sa traduction de Kafka contre celle de Vialatte, d'une part, et celle de Goldschmidt de l'autre. Lortholary s'oppose carrément à « ce bateau-école romantique (...) qui hante les mers de la traduction, terrorise parfois les traducteurs ». Goldschmidt par contre parlera de « l'âme des langues, ce qui se passe en elles », comme la chose la plus essentielle à traduire, tout en évoquant l'entropie qui les gagne.

Même si la confrontation des positions se révèle assez peu fructueuse, il faut savoir gré à Ladmiral d'avoir dans ce volume (et dans son article) articulé sur un mode très fort l'essentiel des deux positions qui dominent la scène de la théorie française. (En même temps, il faut souligner l'absence de voix importantes sur cette scène, mais dont les noms sont évoqués par quelques intervenants : celles de Derrida, de Blanchot, de Lévinas). Le volume contient également plusieurs articles qui se situent autrement par rapport à la problématique de la traduction : des orientations linguistiques (Jean-Marie Zemb sur la question de la compréhension, Gérard Genot sur le « jeu » de la traduction), des réflexions théoriques et personnelles sur la traduction d'e e cummings, de la poésie coréenne, de Dante, et enfin une belle analyse de Marc B. de Launay qui distingue deux « logiques » de la traduction, l'une qui relève de l'ordre cognitif et d'une démarche hypothético-déductive, l'autre qui est davantage une reformulation et qui relève de la communicationalité et de l'interaction.

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These are two quite different contributions to translation studies. One — the special issue of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* — has a deliberately narrow focus, indicated by its title, a title which nevertheless permits of various interpretations and points to a certain ambiguity in the undertaking. « La traduction philosophique » refers at once to an abstract *type* of translation (« Philosophical Translation »), to the translation of specific texts (« Translating Philosophical Texts »), and to a manner of translating (« Translating Philosophically »). These different, and even in a certain sense contradictory, possibilities are reflected

in the questions raised by the articles in the issue. The nature of the relation of theory to practice, of a translation to its original, of meaning to language — fundamental questions for translation studies — are posed explicitly. In addition, as most of the articles take as their point of departure a single work, or the works of a single author, they also raise another question, indirectly this time, which is what exactly generalizations from particular cases are able to tell us about the practice of translation as such, if indeed it is possible to speak abstractly about translation and not at the same time produce a form of ideology rather than of theory. The second work, Sherry Simon's study on translation in Québec, can in a sense be seen as an attempt to provide an answer to these questions, by adopting an approach which relates the practice of translation in Québec to other social and cultural practices. The emphasis here is not on translation divorced from context, on general types and discussions of what should be, but rather on developing a sociological approach to translation, a description of what is and of the actual effects of translations.

1. « La traduction philosophique »

After a brief introduction by Marc B. de Launay, Jean-René Ladmiral's article, « Pour une philosophie de la traduction », opens the issue. There are essentially four parts to his presentation. He begins by evoking the uneasy relation existing between philosophy and translation. The difference between the two disciplines lies not in the questions they raise — both have to do with the relation of meaning to language — but in their answers to these questions : « ...il y a dans la traduction quelque chose de blasphématoire. Doublement, donc, puisque ce sont non seulement les grands Textes de la philosophie qui sont profanés et notre rapport à eux, mais aussi la Raison philosophique elle-même. » (p. 7) In a sense, translation, in reminding us of the contingent nature of linguistic expression, provides a measure of philosophy's excessive ambition, its desire for pure reason divorced from language. The author then proceeds to examine what would constitute the foundations of a science of translation, to arrive at the claim that such a science would be a human, a social science, and essentially philosophical in nature. In the third part of his article, Ladmiral distinguishes the translation of philosophical texts from that of technical texts, centered on the referent, and of literary texts, in which the play of signifiers is of crucial importance. Philosophical translation emphasizes the meaning of the text and as such has a metalinguistic function, since it involves replacing one set of signifiers with another while, at the same time, leaving the signifieds unchanged. As the author points out, these are ideal and abstract types of texts and of translation (technical, literary, philosophical), and a particular text may well be both literary and philosophical, giving rise to two separate and quite different

translations. In the final section, Ladmiral situates the translation of philosophy in relation to translation in general, making the claim that insofar as it deals with the meaning of texts it is a synecdoche for translation as a whole. Rather than fetishizing the source text, says Ladmiral, a translator should focus on the point of arrival — the translation and its readers ; in doing so, the translator would simply be acting in a « rational » manner.

This short summary of Ladmiral's article gives a sense of the variety of themes dealt with. Three remarks are called for : the first is related to the ahistorical approach taken, the second connected to the relation of theory to practice, and the third involves the question of translation typologies. Firstly, Ladmiral's ahistoricism. The author's vision of the « good » translator as a writer « dont l'esthétique littéraire est un classicisme radical : la forme est chez lui serve, totalement assujettie au fond, au sujet traité » (p. 9) cannot stand as a definition for all time of what constitutes a good translator, but rather needs to be seen as a statement of the function given the translator within a particular context and tradition. In fact, it has been and indeed will continue to be possible to conceive the role of the translator otherwise, as others have done, most notably those translators dismissed by Ladmiral (Henri Meschonnic, for example) who do not wish to separate the meaning of a text from its form, but rather attempt to reproduce a relation between form and meaning. Ladmiral's notion of a « good » translator, ideally transparent to the meaning of the original text, takes as unproblematical both meaning and its « expression »/« transmission » in language and through translation. Related to this idealization of meaning and of the role of the translator is the second point : the ambivalent nature of the relation of theory to practice. On the one hand, the author states that his views on the translation of philosophy are the result of his vast experience as a translator, and that such experience is absolutely necessary for theorists of translation if they are to avoid empty reasoning devoid of any relation to reality (p. 9) ; on the other, he characterizes the opposition between technical and literary texts as being the product of merely practical concerns. Technical translation and literary translation « renvoient autant et plus à des clivages socio-professionnels et économiques qu'elles ne désignent des catégories proprement traductologiques ou linguistiques » (p. 15). Thus, whereas in one case practical experience permits « correct » theorizing, it can in another lead to error. The question here of course is to know how it is possible to distinguish error from truth. The answer would seem to be, tautologically, through personal experience. And while the importance of practical experience in theorizing can be granted, it needs also to be said that such theorizing must at the same time be regulated by something more than the practice of a particular translator. Theory and practice are indeed interconnected, but the forms this interconnection takes can and do vary. The reduction of theory to a

purely practical dimension has been one form of interconnection, and is evidenced in the reduction of theory to the criticism of individual translations or in the distinction on purely practical grounds between technical and literary texts. But this interconnection has as well taken many other forms, which also need to be recognized and analyzed, and this can only be done through an historical approach. My third and final remark concerns the use of translation typologies. There is a certain ambiguity here, which lies in the distinction made between the metalinguistic function of translations of philosophical texts, the referential function of technical texts, and the emphasis on the signifier in literary texts, on the one hand, and the claim, on the other, that the translation of philosophical texts is representative of translation in general : « Du lieu privilégié qui est le sien, la traduction philosophique manifeste avec évidence le primat du sémantisme et l'évanescence des signifiants, dès lors qu'il s'agit de traduire. » (p. 20) Both technical and literary translation are marginalized here — a marginalization which would need to be treated in institutional and historical terms : when did such distinctions first come to the fore and what functions have they served ? In addition, Ladmiral gives a central role to the translation of philosophy, making it a model for all translation, and, perhaps more importantly, a model for all language use. This shifting of the translation of philosophy to centre stage is not particularly convincing (other articles in this issue would seem to belie the notion that philosophical texts do not place the emphasis on the signifier) and simply reproduces the oft-repeated gesture of abusively reducing the various possibilities of language use to that of a unique function.

The second article, by Michelle and Jean-Marie Beyssade, is on the necessity of a retranslation into French of Descartes' *Meditationes de prima philosophia*. After presenting some of the differences between the original Latin text published in 1641 and the translation by de Luynes in 1647, a translation which received Descartes' imprimatur, the authors arrive at the conclusion that a retranslation of the Latin text is called for, using Descartes' vocabulary and expressions from his other texts in French. This undertaking and its justification have a more general import, going beyond that of the particular translation project. The argument for a new translation of Descartes' text proceeds as follows : the translation authorized by Descartes reflects changes in his thought subsequent to the text which was translated ; as such it is at once a translation and an original text. As a translation, write Michelle and Jean-Marie Beyssade, « il peut être remis en question » ; as an original, « il est intangible ». If what is desired is to have a translation of the 1641 Latin text, then a retranslation is called for, and such a translation becomes possible since the translation authorized by Descartes, insofar as it purports to be a translation, can be put into question. There would seem then to be a fundamental distinction to

be made between an original text and a translation. A closer examination, would, however, tend to undermine this distinction, inasmuch as a translation presupposes by its very nature not only the existence of an original text but also, « within » that original text, the very possibility of translation. If original texts are intangible, how would translation *ever* be possible ? In addition, the intangible nature of the original and the questionable status of the translation need also to be seen from a more historical perspective, as there are translations which have at certain periods been considered intangible (certain translations of sacred texts, for example) and original texts which have been freely changed (the notion of an original text as intangible is itself historical in nature). In the particular case discussed here, there are two translations at two different moments : the translation published in 1647, authorized by Descartes and including modifications to his original text, and a translation carried out towards the end of the twentieth century, using Descartes' words and expressions — but without the advantage of his presence — and claiming greater faithfulness to the original text. This second translation can certainly be justified — the history of translation also provides many examples of retranslations of texts — but perhaps not for the reasons mentioned. The two translations raise the questions of the translator's and of the author's relation to the text, as well as of what constitutes faithfulness in translation. Is a translation faithful if it reproduces the meaning of a text but dœs not take into account modifications made to the text by the author at a later date ? Is a translation faithful if it, instead of reproducing the meaning of the original text, produces a version of the text which corresponds to what the author later thought, or wrote ? How, in other words, is the object of translation to be defined (to what is a translation to be faithful) and what is to be the relation of a translation to this object (what dœs it mean for a translation to be faithful) ? Such questions cannot be given general answers ; the nature of the object and the nature of the relation of a translation to its object can only be defined in connection to sociohistorical contexts. It was one thing to translate Descartes' text during his lifetime ; it is quite another to translate it now, even using his words, if indeed they can still be said to be his.

Gérard Granel's article, « les Craquelures du texte », has as its subject the translation of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, for which, the author claims, there can be no « good » translation, since a « good » translation can only exist for a text that designates, a text « écrit dans un régime de langage qui désigne des « réalités » » and by « réalités » is understood not only objects, « mais encore toute espèce de signifié qui reçoit, par un réglage empirique ou formel, une *fixité* rendant le sens repérable et répétable » (p. 38). Heidegger's text is not one which designates and thus a translation will, of necessity, aim at another form of reproduction, attempting to represent the original's resonance.

The question here is that of the relation of the translation to its original, of the relation of translation to imitation, and ultimately of the relation of meaning to form. Implicit in the article is the question of whether it is possible for a translation of a text by Heidegger not to use language in a Heideggerian fashion. In other words — if indeed it is possible to express in other words, which is precisely the question raised here, and which is also more generally the question of what is to be understood by the possibility of translation — would it be possible for a translation of a text by Descartes to make use not of Descartes' words and expressions, as Michelle and Jean-Marie Beyssade do, but of Heidegger's approach to language ? Or to ask the question in yet another way, to what extent does a reflection on the problems involved in the translation of Heidegger's text(s) tell us something about the problems involved in the translation of texts not by Heidegger ? The way we answer these different questions will have to do with what we see as the role of translation and what we consider to be the nature of language. For if Heidegger is telling us something about the nature of language use and not merely describing his own particular use, then even in a translation of a text by Descartes the translator will make use of language in such a way that it would be indistinguishable from the way language is used here by the translator of Heidegger.

The examination of the four remaining articles in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* will be somewhat briefer, not necessarily because they are of less interest than those already discussed, but simply because they tend to focus more narrowly on specific issues.

Charles Aluni (« la Langue en partage ») extends the notion of translation by insisting that translation exists not only between different languages, but also within one language, between genres, models and structures, and that it is not reducible to the notion of communication : « Toute communication, et pas seulement celle d'un savoir, est effort de traduction comme *tentative d'appropriation de l'idiome de l'Autre* — ce qui ne veut dire en aucun cas que la traduction serait simplement pensable à partir de la notion floue (mais sur-déterminée) de communication. » (pp. 60-61) Rather, translation can best be described as follows : « *deux scripteurs* (auteur et traducteur) situés — au plus strict minimum — dans *deux contextes* (historiques, culturels, sociaux, idéologiques et linguistiques) *différents*, écrivant *deux textes* dans (au moins) *deux langues* différentes » (p. 61). Aluni places the accent on the differences translation brings, on the transformation of both the original text and the language into which the text is being translated. He sees as the basic question raised by translation that of defining not what does not change but rather what the original text gains in the translation process.

Barbara Cassin, in her article « Homonymie et amphibolie, ou le mal radical en traduction », examines the difficulties raised for

translation by two types of ambiguity : homonymy (one word with two or more meanings) and amphiboly (one structure which can be interpreted in various ways). These two types of ambiguity are particularly prevalent in the texts of the Sophists and thus complicate the translation of these texts, inasmuch as they make interpretation necessary. These ambiguities have the effect of underlining the distance separating translations from their originals, thereby making other translations possible : « ...quelque judicieuse que soit la version proposée, ces mêmes fragments auraient pu servir d'originaux à bien d'autres traductions... » (pp. 77-78). This interplay between meaning and linguistic structures highlights the translator's obligation to choose and the knowledge the translator has that choice somehow renders the translation imperfect and opens the way for other translations.

André Gaudreault (« Mimésis et Diégésis chez Platon ») examines a particular difficulty in translation and its importance for modern theories of narration. His aim, through a detailed analysis of a passage from Plato's *Republic*, is to « restituer la véritable pensée de Platon sur les fameuses catégories de la *mimésis* et de la *diégésis* » (p. 80). What is not explicitly recognized in the article is that our readings of texts, since they are necessarily contextual, can only be seen as adding to, and not simply replacing, those of previous periods.

The final article of the issue, « Babel » by Marc B. de Launay, raises the question of the relation of a text to the tradition in which it is situated, a tradition which provides the text with a certain meaning and which limits its possibilities. When, through translation, the text comes into contact with other traditions and cultural strategies, these possibilities, at one time hidden, once again come into play. Translation thus becomes both a reconstruction and a rewriting : « Ces deux versants de l'opération de traduction sont l'un et l'autre, mais chacun pour des raisons différentes, commandés par une situation et une évolution historiques... » (pp. 96-97) And the author takes as his example the reconstruction of Genesis XI, 1-9, to conclude : « La pensée, la vérité, la raison supposent, comme le sens, la médiation, et c'est cette leçon qu'apprend d'abord le traducteur. » (p. 105)

2. « L'inscription sociale de la traduction »

In *l'Inscription sociale de la traduction au Québec* Sherry Simon takes an approach to translation studies which is quite different from those already discussed here. Describing both the discourse on translation in Québec and translation in its actual effects, her aim is to present translation as a social reality, « ... qui participe à ce titre des multiples dimensions économiques, sociales et culturelles du contexte québécois » (p. 9). As do the polysystem theorists, the author situates translation within a wider context ; unlike these theorists, however, she extends this context beyond the purely literary. It is the specific cultural context

of the practice of translation and the attitudes towards translation in Québec that Simon wants to bring to the fore, in a first step towards a sociology of translation. Five levels of analysis are identified for this purpose : the legal, professional, etc., status of the translator ; the name of the translator (the relative importance given the reference to the translator) ; public and professional discourse on translation ; the linguistic, textual, ideational and quantitative effects of translation ; and finally the socio-political and ideological determinations of translation. It is this last level of analysis which is emphasized in particular in this work, and more specifically the rather complex interconnection between translation and cultural imperialism, translation being considered either an ally and agent of imperialism (a dominant culture recreating and reproducing its own image through translation) or as a liberating force, through the introduction of alterity within dominant discourse. In either case, translation has a political role to play, which cannot be reduced to a merely textual relationship ; indeed, translation must be seen as « ... *orientée*, à l'intérieur de paramètres pré-établis, par le *projet culturel* dont elle fait partie » (p. 21). It is thus important to identify this cultural project and the historical specificity of its determinations.

Having defined the theorical context for the study, the author proceeds in a second chapter to analyze the discourse on translation in Québec, showing the way in which reflection on the nature and function of translation intersects with questions of language and culture. Prefaces to the translations of novels and essays tend not to deal with purely linguistic matters but rather to stress questions of cultural and linguistic identity, distinguishing between « ... le « nous » du public lecteur et l'origine étrangère du livre » (p. 50). Very often in Québec, the author shows, translation was perceived as having a negative influence on language, since it was considered as one of the principal forces in the process of anglicization. Over the years, however, this exclusively negative image has been replaced by a more positive one, and translation's role in preserving the French language has been recognized. Nevertheless, translation still remains the sign of cultural dependency. As Sherry Simon points out, what is important in this view of the role translation is supposed to have played is less the exact correspondence of such a view to reality than its definition of the ideological parameters of translation.

The third chapter is devoted to the place of translations within the publishing industry in Québec. Three attitudes on the part of publishers are identified : the first is to consider translations purely as an easy source of profit, the second is to refuse to publish translations in the name of promoting Québec literature, and the third is to see translations as giving an additional dimension to Québec literature. The material constraints on the publishing industry in Québec are also examined, and a series of graphs shows the evolution in the publication

of translations for a fifteen-year period (1970-1985) for a number of areas. The book ends with a useful annotated bibliography.

The study Sherry Simon has undertaken here is, of course, far from complete, but it is nevertheless very useful, indicating as it does a particularly important direction for translation studies to take. Translation is shown to be dependent on culturally and historically defined norms, and as such, to require an approach which sees the practice of translation as an integral part of the particular context in which it occurs. Such an approach opens the way towards a more fruitful discussion of translation than can be found in studies which too often examine translation outside of any reference to its historical dimension and function, in purely abstract or textual terms. This study of translation in Québec does need to be extended, however, and in various directions. The various levels of analysis should perhaps be reexamined, as it is not at all certain that the levels identified are of equal importance, and a more detailed study would have the merit of showing these different levels in interaction. It would perhaps also permit greater differentiation of the functions given translation in the period studied. Finally, it would be interesting to compare the role of translation in Québec with its function in the rest of Canada during the same period. In closing, it should be noted that the desire expressed here for more information and an expanded study only serves to indicate the interest of the research begun in *l'Inscription sociale de la traduction au Québec*.

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