



Willis Barnstone

The Poetics of Translation

History, Theory, Practice

— — —
Yale University Press New Haven and London

I too am untranslatable.
Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

Willis Barnstone

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*To David Michael Hertz for tuning the word and to Lowry Nelson, Jr., for
rectifying mine*

As S. Augustine saith; A man had rather be with his dogge then with a stranger (whose tongue is strange unto him).
Miles Smith, preface to the King James Version

To a thousand cavils one answer is sufficient; the purpose of a writer is to be read, and the criticism which would destroy the power of pleasing must be blown aside.
Samuel Johnson, *Life of Pope*

[Greco-Roman writers] interest us, they matter to us, I repeat, as errors, not as masterpieces. We have scarcely anything to learn from them because of what they said, thought, and sang, but simply because they were, because they existed, because, poor men like ourselves, they swam desperately as we do in the perennial shipwreck of life.
José Ortega y Gasset, "Misery and Splendor of Translation"

Think of the Chinese translating the Sanskrit texts, or the Jews translating in Alexandria the Hebrew Testament and the Romans translating the Greeks. The history of the different civilizations is the history of their translations. Each civilization, each soul, is different, unique. Translation is our way to face this otherness of the universe and history.
Octavio Paz in conversation with Edwin Honig

Translation saves you from your contemporaries.
Kenneth Rexroth, "The Poet as Translator"

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Acknowledgments

A poet or scholar writes in solitude with the voices of other books near by. The words of Aristeeas, Horace, Augustine, Jerome, Dryden, Herder, Jakobson, and Steiner have been with me all these years. But I do not have a long list of friends and colleagues who gave me information and hints or tore the manuscript apart and mended it. That might have been good. This book was put together in solitude with those other written voices in my ear. Yet there have been friends whose very presence and goodwill have been crucial.

Once in Buenos Aires—it was 1975 during the *Guerra Sucia* (the Dirty War)—Jorge Luis Borges, with whom I was working on the translation of his sonnets, conveyed through Carlos Frías that I had not found a good rhyme to go with "Walt Whitman," the last two words of a poem. I protested, and then Frías said diplomatically but firmly: "Borges says to try harder." Those words have sustained me for many years and have made things easier. Matei Calinescu, by his own example, has set me to work. James Halporn prepared me for the sins of the Latin class Latin test when I took his course at Columbia University in translating Cicero's *De senectute*. My colleague David Hertz, to whom (along with Lowry Nelson) I dedicate this book, has shared hot chocolate breaks in the cement tower in which I have spent much of my adult life, night after night. The janitors have offered friendly reality after midnight in this otherwise deserted monster building. When I escape with a laptop computer to the Cycladic island of Serifos, my sons and daughter are there and they are the best and most candid critics. In Oakland, California, I finished this volume in the house of Sarah Handler, who praised me generously for every page. I thank my editors at Yale University Press: Ellen Graham, for making me finish this, and Susan Laity, perfect editor, whose good hand and spirit determined the book's final contours.

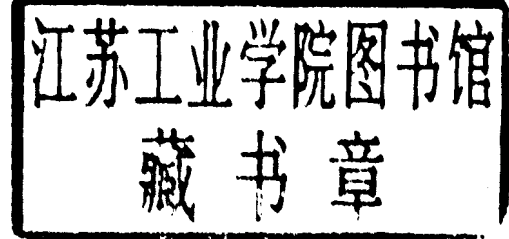
Three friends have gone over the manuscript, and they are exceptions who make up my stout list of three. Lowry Nelson, Jr., meticulously gave the text his time and generously shared the plenitude of his polyglot knowledge and wisdom, Sharon Sieber read the versions, made creative suggestions, and did not let me

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With the exception of epigraphs, all translations are my own unless otherwise noted. All unidentified quotations from the Bible are from the Revised Standard Version.

PART

I Introduction and General Issues



1 Introduction

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. . . .

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:1-9

The Other Babel

With the fall of Babel, God dispersed the word, gave us tongues and the solitude of difference, and also the impossible but pleasurable duty to repair our separation. After the destruction the deity implicitly challenged us to look up again and rebuild the tower of another Babel. The act of translation is the other Babel, that impossible tower. From its high observation circle, the eye glances back an instant, uncertain, through time's distorting glass and then glares ahead, in a new distorting mirror, to see the ever-changing places where new Babels will temporarily be reconstructed.

Some think the oral or graphic words of the past can really be heard, seen, and transported intact, word by word, note by note, brick by brick to a new site and erected again in stunning duplication. They call this process *translatio*, or "moving," "transportation," or "translation." Some think of *translatio* as realistic—photography or even photocopying. Let them think so. The scientists who cut up matter, even the most invisible world stuff, can actually have precise information from their experiments transferred into other languages in which nothing essential is added or lost. Externally, the reports carried over may look and sound different, but that is only appearance. The sense, the meaning, is transferred intact. And such *translatio*, which if properly done is risk-free, is an innocent, tedious, and exacting task, with no decorative frills.

But the work of the singer, the poet, the Bible-maker, and scribe is different, and the carriers of the word stumble at every step on the road to revelation. Their way is as crooked as a butterfly's ruler. Losing their way, they must add and alter routes. And to cart their words out of the past, they invent vehicles in which nothing fits exactly. They gamble with their talent, and in the end are condemned to surprise and the art and infidelity of re-creation.

With the deconstruction of Babel, God gave us not only tongues and their anxiety but a knowledge of mutability. After Babel nothing can be seen as fixed, for the eye has discovered that with each passing second every living thing transforms and is translated anew. Even those things inert, dead, are not fixed but are distorting, translating. The eye itself contributes to that process of re-creation. After Babel we witness the inconstant yet eternal building of the other Babel.

THE POETICS OF TRANSLATION

In choosing its title, I sought to make clear this book's scope and intentions—to brighten the focus on translation as art. I wish to distinguish literary translation, including the ancient art of imitation, from routine information transfer, such as the interlingual rewording of scientific or business documents. Poetry is central, being the ultimate challenge at the complex heart of the art of literary translation. More so than prose, poetry, because of its prosody, is polysemous, with many layers of meaning—aesthetic, phonic, and expressive—to transpose between tongues.

The book's subtitle refers to its ancillary concerns. To give a notion of the history of translation I have used as the central paradigm the history of the translation of the Bible, the most translated book in the world and a work containing the main genres of writing.

With regard to theory, after a discussion of general issues and theory from a linguistic and then a semiotic slant, I look closely at Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator," which is a little world made cunningly of theory, literary translation, and language. Benjamin's radical, Kabbalistic spirit finds in translation the

way to reconstitute pure universal language, yet he dismisses with disdain the transfer of subject matter and proposes an utterly word-for-word literalism that, he acknowledges, threatens comprehensibility. At first glance his means seem to negate the very notion of translatability, but, as we shall see, although his strategy will not guide us to an empirical rendering of Sappho into German or English, it lets us enter, at least vicariously and sympathetically, the intense fantasy realm of his third, paradisaical language, the *reine Sprache*. Whether we share his messianic purpose of ultimate residence in that pre-Fall linguistic terrain, in mapping our way Benjamin takes us through the enigmas centered within the art and theory of translation.

The last section of this book, practice, is a personal ABC of translation, a guide for the poet translator. It is eclectic, almost libertarian in presentation, offering diverse approaches under whatever name the translation process may assume. The ABC singles out no approach for special benediction, but does ask that each method be named and acknowledged. Once acknowledged, the whole method, fact, and matter of translation may be forgotten so that the poem before us can be read as an original act. The poem deserves to be seen as a naked creature, and, as Pierre Grange observed, "It is sinful and sad to mark the face of a poem, beautiful in translation, with scabs of authentic history" (*Dream Time* 77).

In this ABC, fidelity reflects a debt not only to a paraphrasable literal meaning but to its aesthetic quality. It should be said, however, that *fidelity* is a lofty word, like *virtue* or *truth* or *good*, claimed by diverse and opposing approaches to translation. In my discussion of the *Bay Psalm Book*, I suggest that firm principle and actual practice often separate soon after having made vows of mutual devotion; in the instance of Benjamin, the dichotomy between principle and practice actually inspired him toward his ideal of pure language. The divorce between principle and practice, moreover, even in academic studies, seems to offend nobody.

The subject of this book is *literary* translation. I have wished to emphasize the poet translator's virtual autonomy, art, and originality. In speaking of originality and poetry translation, Octavio Paz deftly universalizes the art, asserting the primacy of translation in every speech act. "Originality in a given translation is," Paz contends with a wink, "untrue in that no text is entirely original because language itself, in its essence, is already a translation" (*Traducción* 9). After engaging in this early example of deconstructive observation in which he puts into doubt the originality, primacy, and stability of any text and thereby, like Derrida, questions the hierarchical relation in the opposition of original and translation, Paz extends the paradoxical argument, taking us full circle in order to claim the opposite, that "all texts are original because every translation is distinctive. Every translation, up to a certain point, is an invention and as such constitutes a text" (9).

Looking, then, for a key word to carry the notion of both art and method, I went back to a title I had used for an earlier book, *The Poetics of Ecstasy*, which

gave me *The Poetics of Translation*. The word *poetics* suggests formal aspects of art, problems that will be systematically treated, such as prosody (including meter, rhyme, and stanzaic structure), translatability, fidelity and methodology ("word-for-word" literal versus "sense-for-sense" literary renderings), equivalence and difference (phonic and syntactic), diction (archaizing versus contemporizing), and syntax (original versus naturalized).

Poetics also suggests taxonomy, the classification and naming of types of translations, such as John Dryden's *metaphrase*, *paraphrase*, and *imitation* or Novalis' *grammatical*, *modified*, and *mythical*. And, primarily perhaps, the word points to theory and methodology, which have been dealt with variously from biblical, Greek, and Roman times to the twentieth century. More recently, the emphasis has been on linguistic and structuralist approaches, on early Russian Formalism and semiotics, and on the rapid accumulation of deconstruction dicta by Jacques Derrida and his American counterparts.

TRANSLATION THEORY AND LITERARY THEORY

The histories of translation theory and its practice constantly intersect. Before the twentieth century, theory has a pragmatic focus and is actually a history of prevailing or recommended practice, while in our century theory qua theory prevails, with relatively little relevance to its literary use. Theory and practice today, in every respect, operate in isolation from one another in books on translation and in translations themselves.

Insofar as translation is seen as merely a restricted literary activity—transferring aesthetically framed information between languages—it has generated diverse, learned, and sometimes rhapsodic studies. In the Alexandrian (second century B.C.) *Letter of Aristeas*, we have the first real investigation of the translation process, an extraordinary, legendary work concerning the translation of the Septuagint Bible, allegedly achieved in seventy-two days by seventy-two (or seventy) scholars who under divine guidance arrived independently at perfect and identical versions. This account, which also provides the context for an intellectual history of Alexandrian Jews and Greeks, fixes translation between praxis and miracle. Although we do not possess an Aristotle to establish a single, prevailing poetics, we do have important writings by Horace, Quintilian, Jerome, Du Bellay, Tytler, Dryden, Pope, Goethe, Herder, Arnold, Croce, Benjamin, Ortega, Wittgenstein, Jakobson, Derrida, Steiner, and Eco.

The late Czech linguist Jiří Levý—whose book *Czech Theories of Translation* (1957), which emphasizes linguistics and theory, is perhaps the most ambitious and comprehensive work on translation in the modern period—has dourly lumped the work of all earlier studies of literary translation as empirical observations or essayistic aphorisms. Levý is correct that earlier studies of the art of linguistic transformation contain empirical observations and essayistic aphorisms, but his either / or strictures suggest a prescriptive rigidity that ignores the

proto-semiotic discrimination of Augustine, the insights of Johann Gottfried von Herder, the meditations of Benjamin, and even the structuralist clarifications of Roman Jakobson (who was for a time a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle), to name a few seminal writers who have written eloquently about translation. What is an art is often suspect and patronized, however, especially when translation is seen as merely correct information transfer. It is bad thinking, though common, to flail or ignore those who concern themselves with the *literary* word in translation theory. In reality, the theoretical problems of literary translation are far more complex, sophisticated, and ultimately meaningful—at least for the arts—than linguistic analyses of models relating to information transfer. Yet the major documents, old and recent, whether the focus is literary or language science, will weather restrictive comments.

Levy's terrible comment on all earlier studies, frequently quoted by other detractors, is foolish. But the question is not whether those writers who have written about translation are major, minor, wise, or even foolish, nor is it about a division between scientific linguists and literary figures. Such divisive labeling is odious. The key question is whether the activity of translation itself is to be seen as separate from or intrinsic to general theories of literature and language. It is my view that when translation is considered a transforming principle, a fundamental and vital ingredient in perception, writing, reading, and rereading, then its study, by necessity, takes its place as an essential element in any general theory of literature, ranging from Aristotle to recent reading theory and semiotics.

Translation theory and literary theory come together in the act common to them both: reading. Reading is an act of interpretation, which is itself an act of translation (an intralingual translation from graphic sign to mind). Harold Bloom asserts that "'interpretation' once meant 'translation,' and still does" (*Map of Misreading* 85). Bloom, George Steiner, and Fredric Jameson all remind us that reading and translation are intermingled activities. In *The Prison-House of Language*, Jameson describes the means of developing a new literary system as one of translating the diction of the old one to the new terminology (132). In short, and with innumerable applications, reading is a form of translation, and, conversely, translation is obviously a form of intense reading. Given these intimacies, it impoverishes us not to think of translation theory as essential in literary theory, and of both notions as necessary to a general field theory of literature.

Hence *reading is translation and translation is reading*. This aphorism can be applied specifically, with all its qualifications and quirks. Translation tends to be a certain kind of reading, an "intensive reading" of the original text, which as a result becomes an "interpretive reading," or, as John Hollander has pointed out, a reading that functions as an "interpretive translation" ("Versions, Interpretations" 214–16).

Similarly, *writing is translation and translation is writing*. The very essence of the activity of writing is that at every millisecond of the writing process the

writer is simultaneously interpreting, transforming, encoding, and translating data into meaningful letters and words, and at every millisecond of the translation process the translator is the writer, performing the same activities. Jackson Matthews comments on Paul Valéry's coupling of writing and translation: "At moments Valéry seemed to think of translation as the model of all writing: 'Writing anything at all, as soon as the act of writing requires a certain amount of thought and is not a mechanical and unbroken inscribing of spontaneous inner speech, is a work of translation exactly comparable to that of transmuting a text from one language into another'" (in Valéry, "Translations" 75).

At the same time the translator, according to Valéry, who of course saw his writer as a formalist seeking meanings to match the poet's already discovered harmonious words, is the ideal writer. Valéry's view is only one specific fleshing out of the notion of translator-as-writer, narrowly in keeping with his own formalist, language-biased ideals of poetry, but his views give a special advantage to the translator, the "inventor of forms": "It would seem then that Valéry considered the translator as an original artist working (like a Chinese miniaturist) within severer limits and for this reason composing in a purer medium than an original poet" (Matthews in Valéry, "Translations" 74). Valéry's lifelong experience of writing and translation equates these two activities, which is not only right in theory but is, in all wider understanding of translation, the practical experience for any writer and translator, playwright and director, choreographer and dancer. The original titles are interchangeable, writer and translator. In the deeper or lighter sense of their resonance, they are one.

Because translation then comprises the transforming principle at the heart of all literary activity, any diffidence with regard to it is out of place for either its formal study or its creations. Yet, as we shall see, such diffidence, in the form of shame or concealment of shame, is perfectly ordinary.

THE SCARLET BRAND OF T FOR "TRANSLATION"

In literary translation the source author and the translator commonly set up a dialogical relationship, instigated for chronological reasons by the translator, and then parent and child struggle for primacy. In his essay on Franz Kafka and his precursors, Jorge Luis Borges points out that a later author may alter the text of the precursor as decisively as he or she is influenced by the precursor. So too the translator not only receives from the precursor but recognizes and resurrects the author and actively determines our understanding, reception, and evaluation of the source in a re-creation that ultimately vies with the "original" for authority and even originality.

The agon between source and receptor authors is inherent in struggles concerning the eternally unstable canons and traditions of general literature.

Because a literary translation is a work of literature, its existence and formation can be studied only within a theory of literature—whether it be from Athens, Paris, or New Haven. In this light, the question of originality which has

always obsessed the literary mind concerns source author and translator authors alike. Insofar as a new work of literature in a tradition needs to prove its originality rather than its base dependence on precursors, so an outstanding literary translation, suffering under the stigma of dependence on a source precursor, mitigates the shame of translation by concealing the sources and thereby taking on the respectability of original authorship. So the New Testament, most of which is translated from lost sources, is presented as original gospel, not translation; so the Authorized or King James Version of the Bible is popularly perceived to be God's words, delivered by the Creator in English and sacredly original; so Noah and his flood purport to be unique rather than a late reincarnation of two millennia of Mesopotamian flood stories; so Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus* stands alone, without reference to Chaucer's genius in revising versions from Boccaccio and from French epic love poetry; so Richard Crashaw's close translation of Saint Teresa's famous "Vivo sin vivir en mí" (itself an intralingual glosa of a traditional anonymous poem) goes unrecognized as a translation of a translation in all editions of Crashaw's writings; so even W. B. Yeats's "When You Are Old" (a close version of Pierre de Ronsard's most famous sonnet), is exonerated from the shame of translation by means of a misleading footnote in David Daiches' section of M. H. Abrams' *Norton Anthology of English Literature*: "A poem suggested by a sonnet of the 16th-century French poet Pierre de Ronsard; it begins 'Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle' ('When you are old, sitting at evening by candle light') but ends very differently from Yeats's poem" (1345). The words "but ends very differently from Yeats's poem" (a disputable assertion) mean to suggest that by its original ending, belonging to Yeats alone, the poem is more than a mere translation, and therefore worthy of our attention.

In the first part of our century Ezra Pound was "the great mover," "the grant translateur," to use the title held by Chaucer for his original writings. And Pound's original corpus is essentially linked to or derived from translation and textual memories of translation. The reception of his work reflects all the neuroses of translationitis. The critical community has always been troubled and ambivalent about his rendition in *Cathay* of poems by Li Bai (Li Po). *Cathay* is either derided for its howlers by American and British Chinese scholars who discern literary translation as an accurate crib for deciphering original texts in Chinese or grudgingly praised by literary admirers who nevertheless remain uncomfortable about receiving a beautiful translation as an equal among equals and prefer to see it through Pound's own confusing guises that transform it into a semi-mythical work by a Japanese named Rihaku. If accepted as Pound's own rather close literary rendering, *Cathay* cannot, as translation, be considered to have the same authority and value as Pound's original work. So *Cathay*, despite its good name, still inhabits its own literary no man's land.

The shame of translation is real, and, alas, universal, even though superficial and absurd, more real and more traumatic than Harold Bloom's related "anxiety of influence" (a similar dialogical battle between authors in a tradition).

To counter the scarlet brand of T for Translation which the translator must wear prominently displayed, much secular literary translation before our century, and specifically after the late Middle Ages, has taken the form of what Dryden calls imitation, or near imitation, a very free version in which the source text is subservient to the near-autonomous translation. Hence we have Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát*, a total re-creation, almost invention, of the Persian poet Omar Khayyám; George Chapman's ecstatic version of Homer (which enraptured John Keats); and Alexander Pope's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which defined not Homer's Greek heroes but the prosodic speech and comportment of eighteenth-century English gentlemen. Of Pope's *Iliad*, L. G. Kelly says, "This is Homer in a powdered wig declaiming in a baroque theatre" (*True Interpreter* 59). These are examples of earlier translations, under transparent cloaks, which almost pass as originals. Although the letter T for Translation, or the incriminating Theft by an adulterer of a virgin text, remains decipherable on the book jacket and on the poems themselves, by one means or another its glowing shame is muted and absorbed into the achievement or great name of the translator who has the fame and cover of being, in his own right, an original author.

There are those who come to the aid of translation, who see it not only as a translational activity but place it clearly and dominantly in the transformational act of thinking, reading, writing, and interpreting. Yes, translation in its larger sense may conquer the world of mind, writing, and existence itself, for ever since God translated himself into being, we imitate that furious activity until we die. We translate ourselves from bed to our feet, from sleep to awakening, from darkness to sunlight, from one level of dream and consciousness to another and back. But less grandiosely there remains the problem of ordinary literary translation. We must not only define original literature and translation and everything in between but, once the beast of a translation is sighted, trapped, and named, determine what value to give it. What place in literature is there for literary translation? Is a literary translation literature?

G. N. Devy, in a recent study of translation theory, confronts one aspect of this question with direct lucidity: "A literary translation has a double existence as a work of literature, and as a work of translation. Those who do not know the original language tend to look at it as literature, those who do know the original look at it as a secondary product of translation" ("Translation Theory" 58). Translation does all the expressive, imaginative things of ordinary literature. But, as Devy states, "While creative literature has received ample attention by critics and philosophers, literary translation has no privilege of having a well developed philosophy of beauty in translation" (65). What do we do with an orphan of dubious parentage? And is translation, as J. Hillis Miller stated in Bologna in 1988 (quoted in Devy 65), a "wandering existence in perpetual exile"?

After George Steiner's *After Babel*, the most eloquent recent apologia for the translator as artist appears in Susan Bassnett-McGuire's jewel of a book on trans-

lation, a uniformly insightful study disguised in the Methuen New Accents format as an "introduction," presented under the plain title *Translation Studies*. Bassnett-McGuire discusses Renaissance translators who were, in that period of discovery, imbued with a spirit of original creation. To the translators of the day such as Thomas Wyatt, the earl of Surrey, and Chapman, she relates the Platonic notion of divine inspiration of poetry: "The Platonic doctrine of the divine inspiration of poetry clearly had repercussions for the translator, in that it was deemed possible for the 'spirit' or 'tone' of the original to be recreated in another cultural context. The translator, therefore, is seeking to bring about a 'transmigration' of the original text, which he approaches on both a technical and metaphysical level, as a skilled equal with duties and responsibilities both to the original author and the audience" (55).

In Renaissance England and France, in a period swelling with discovery and innovation, the translator was a radical artist and intellectual, bringing in and ordering the past, altering national traditions of writing and thought. The translator as beggar at the church door, the scribe or servant, does not describe a man who could lose his head for a phrase and intoxicated the generations of Wyatt, Dryden, Pope, Shelley, and Pound.

So the translator has had many postures, from Puritan shame to revolutionary exuberance. His or her work appears today under many lights: shadowy service of a mean sort; chiaroscuro disguise to pass for real; and, rarely, the bright arrogance of an Edward Fitzgerald, who wrote in a letter to E. B. Cowell, "It is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who . . . are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them" (*Fitzgerald to His Friends* 103). What is missing, what has always been missing, is a fair and rational approach to the reading of translation. The double authorship has inevitably confused reader and critics, who must come to terms with the enigma of originality that has afflicted all reasonable criteria of judgment.

JUDGING TRANSLATION AS LITERATURE

There is translation and translation. Jakobson speaks of ordinary translation as "interlingual transposition." Yet since synonymy and full equivalence are impossible, "poetic art is therefore technically untranslatable" (Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* 15)—but only in an absolute sense. If we seek near-full equivalence, the best we can hope for is "creative transposition," with an emphasis on "creative" if the translation is literary. But how do we judge the translation? Are we to limit ourselves to the linguistic possibility of achieving equivalence, and shape our judgment to the degree that this equivalence, ordinary or creative, literal or free, is accomplished? Or do we consider and judge the translated text on its own, as an autonomous aesthetic object?

I think we can and should do both: measure and describe the degree of achieved equivalence (naming the method will usually do—metaphrase, translation, imitation), and then move on to the more important matter of evaluating the translation as we would any discrete semantic and aesthetic unit. But how do we accomplish the latter?

There are many obstacles in the way of literary reception of translation. There is a tradition working to deflate the notion of true achievement in literary translation, meanly according it secondary and shadowy status. At one extreme, translation may be a scholarly crib or interlinear gloss to return us to the original. Conversely, old and modern Edward Fitzgeralds look imperiously on a source text as a specimen of inferior culture, a pretext not a text, in need of improvement to enter the dignity of the English language. Many readers of the *Rubáiyát* and versions of the Christian Bible, for example, value the receptor text, not the source, and indeed consider the existence of the source text an irritant and doubtful at best.

Since we do make judgments, let us, for our purposes, posit an outstanding translation (that is, a poem in translation that independent of its genesis seems in its new version to be an excellent poem) and then, by meditating on this outstanding translation, move on to the overriding question of determining its literary value.

Good translation is good literature. It is not diminished because of its race. It is branded and cursed, inevitably so, but it should not be. Remember that the best have been branded and cursed, from Eve to Hester Prynne to Pablo Picasso, although Picasso did not have to wait long until his translations of Paul Cézanne and others were esteemed and were again translated by Roy Lichtenstein. In Eve (transformed into mortal Eve), Picasso, and Lichtenstein, the act of translation is an act of rare originality, which is never unprecedented, without a source text.

A translation is what we perceive when we do not read the script as primordial genesis—as the very first created original. Even this criterion, in keeping with those (particularly Paz) who contend that all texts are translations of text, is generous to originality, for let the original text which has no genesis stand up and be accounted for. When we have that translation, if it is beautiful and profound and its language magnificent, why must we see it not for itself in the present but invidiously in history and intertextuality? Why must it be, like Borges' Argentine coin the *zahir*, only a symbol of a past and a future with virtually no value in the present? Why must a translation's unknown, unseen past occlude its real presence in our eyes? Usually, the translation is seen in this way because of a perception, external to the text in front of us, that the translated poem has reference and is subservient to a master subtext, which may be inaccessible to the reader because of its indecipherable foreignness.

Perhaps it is good for us to see all literature in the humble and humane frame of history, yet to demean the poem before us because the word *translation* has

been attached to it is to permit history and information extrinsic to the poem to undo us as readers. To allow an obtrusive intertextuality—the fact of its translation—to subvert the reading experience is to surrender to frivolous ignorance and to obey a feudal principle of originality; it cheapens the reality of the literary object in our possession. In doing so, we substitute a dream of the unknown subtext (of what is indecipherable or inaccessible, yet acclaimed real) for the actual page before our eyes and end up unjustly deprived. At least the most pious readers of the Bible do not suffer from such deprivation, for they have banished the original source text and accept the translation as the unique reality.

So how can we cope with translation? Should we take the way of denial and conceal the fact of translation? It will not work for most of us. Our revelation, our mastery, as readers comes when we can accept the translation as the word of its ownness, or, as Wallace Stevens says in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," "the cry of its occasions." In the end the poem in translation is more candid and courageous than its unstigmatized parent, for it presents itself with the label of its dependence. We are foolish readers to deprive ourselves of what is ours to love, rejecting the translation for the vanished memory of an earlier infatuation. When Ezra Pound begins his epic *Cantos* with a translation from book 2 of Homer's *Odyssey*, we read both authors in a union of harmony, and grace comes to us as reading interpreters from not caring who is speaking those wondrous words with their ancient sonority.

If we do insist on possessing the name of the author in order to redeem the work before us, it is "Homer and Pound." That's the name of the team. The translation is a collaboration, the work of two artists, or a double art. To produce a translation the normal triad of author-text-receiver is doubled. So technically, we may discover that we are reading the writing of an author who is reader-translator of another author's writing. But given such a heavy load of awareness, it is best, except in a moment of analysis, to read on with no reservation, erasing the brand of T from our consciousness and accepting the authorial firm of Homer and Pound in order to give ourselves fully to the pleasure of the text.

Reading is a mystical union. A secular one, usually. It follows the simple rules of Saint John of the Cross's negative way, way of illumination, and way of union. That union should be the product of each good reading experience but, by the intrusion of external signs warning of the ills of translation, the reader is captive in the night of aridity, unable to move into affirmative light.

Then when we have come to terms with the scarlet T its destructive meanings will pass. As Hester's odious A eventually came to mean not "Adultery" but "Able" and finally "Angel" scrawled across the sky, so we will insist that translation's T signify *Techne*, "art."

And then, with the stigma of translation removed, it will not be bad also to remember the past and be comfortable with the author of the translation—even when the sounds of the source language are still in our ears. That we have heard

the rough, sonorous Italian melody of Dante's dark forest need not be a threat to its foreign translation. Best, however, is to see and hear only the text before us. For in reading well and fully, in doing justice to the work before us, we encounter the past and present together, redeem the source author through the present, and dignify the reading experience and all its participants.

Then a poem in translation becomes a poem.

2 Problems and Parables

Whoever hears translates words that sound in his ears into his intellect, that is, practically speaking, into the language of his mouth.

Franz Rosenzweig, *Translating Literature*

Poetry is waiting not only for a translation but for another sensibility. Poetry is waiting for the translation of a reader.

Octavio Paz, *Traducción*

We are digging the pit of Babel.

Franz Kafka, "The Pit of Babel"

Meanings of a Sign, or Parable of the Greek Moving Van

After rounding the stormy Peloponnisos, when your ship docks at the Greek port of Piraeus you will see a frenetic waterfront speckled with little vans, some pulled by smoky motorcycles, others by small truck motors, but each bearing a similar logo boldly scrawled on the side panels: μεταφορά. The sign means TRANSPORTATION.

That Modern Greek word on the van, *metafora*, is equivalent to Latin *translatio*, from the past participle of *transfere*, and both words, *metafora* and *translatio*, have the root meaning of "carrying across," their way of saying "transportation." Yet *translatio* also means "translation," and gave us our English word. Although the common word for translation in Ancient Greek is *metaphrasis*, *metafora* signifies not only carrying across but, in ancient rhetoric, transference of a word to another sense.¹ This latter definition is a round-about way of reaching another observation about μεταφορά, our original logo on the truck panels. The sign also means TRANSLATION.

Finally, the most obvious meaning of *metafora* is its cognate meaning of "metaphor." So we quickly reach the third related meaning of the logo. The sign means METAPHOR.

To sum up, *metafora* means "transportation," "translation," and "metaphor"; and, to refine the polysemy, insofar as *metafora* signifies carrying across, and translation is the activity of carrying meaning from one language across to another, in its root meaning the word *metafora* is itself a metaphor for translation. And what is the essence of metaphor but $A = B$? Or in the jargon of translation practice, A is the equivalent of B . This formula of equivalence, $A = B$, generating an intralingual metaphor from a foreign source, is also what translation is about: $A = B$ means that *metaphor is translation*.

Within the notion of metaphor is translation. But equally true, within the notion of translation is metaphor. Therefore, if we use the formula for metaphor, $A = B$, to express the general activity of translation as stated in "metaphor is translation," we can restate the equation, reversing it to read $B = A$, and come up with the startling notion that *translation is metaphor*, or, expressed in a fuller axiom, *translation is the activity of creating metaphor*.

To see metaphor as translation and translation as metaphor will be a most useful tool for discussing the fundamental question of translatability and untranslatability. To see translation's method and intention as metaphor, as opposed to duplication, counters the purist argument for untranslatability, which normally goes:

Perfect replication in translation is desirable,
but perfect replication is impossible.
Hence translation itself is impossible.

Perfect replication is of course possible only when there is no change, when there is simply repetition, when $A = A$. With any rewording, however, there can be no full synonymy. And translation, within or between languages, requires a change in language: the meaning is "transported" from one word or one set of words to another nonidentical word or set of words. In this translatio there cannot be identity but difference. Were there to be verbal identity with the original, there would be no translatio or movement or translation. And between languages we have not only the phonological and connotative differences of intralingual rewording but differences between language systems. In his essay "Impossibilities of Translation," the linguist Werner Winter-states plainly: "The system of form and meaning in language A may be similar to that in language B , but is never identical with it" (69). And, as we shall see, Borges proves that even when there is verbal identity, there will still be a difference. So the aim of translators to produce identical twins must always fail.

In Borges' masterful satire on reading, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quijote*," Pierre Menard copies out two chapters from Cervantes' *Don Quijote* word for word as they appear in Spanish and publishes the text—apparently the same text—under his own name, claiming the superiority of his version over the Cervantine original. Vulgar plagiarism has no place in the puzzle of Menard's creation. Moreover, Borges reveals that Menard's intralingual literal transcription of a text of the *Quijote* cannot even be considered a mere mechanical copy of the barbarous original by Miguel de Cervantes since the new version, though verbally identical, is not only different, but is, in fact, deeper and more complex. Borges' narrator states: "Menard's fragmentary *Quijote* is more subtle than Cervantes'. The latter, in a clumsy fashion, opposes to the fictions of chivalry the tawdry provincial reality of his country; Menard selects as his 'reality' the land of Carmen during the century of Lepanto and Lope de Vega" (42).

The narrator tells us, moreover, that although Cervantes' text and Menard's have the same words on the page, "the second is almost infinitely richer" (42). Indeed, he suggests that for a civilized Frenchman at the beginning of the twentieth century it would be impossible, despite thousands of hours and countless identical drafts, to produce a work identical for a twentieth-century reader.

Borges' intuition of the role of the reader in creating texts within a specific context establishes the basis for what is later called reader-response theory. Borges implicitly confirms the obvious yet scarcely felt fact that a text without a reader is dead ink on a page, is nothing, is not alive until each individual reader translates that perception of black on white, of shaped darkness on paper, into meaning and emotion. And each individual reader will accomplish this differently, as Pierre Menard expected his readers to do. Speaking of this story, Emir Rodríguez Monegal writes, "We can see the foundation of a new poetics, based not on the actual writing of a work but on its reading" (Borges 330). Borges writes in "Clouds (I)," one of his last poems: "The Odyssey is a cloud / changing like the sea. Something different / each time we open it" (*Los conjurados*). And Gérard Genette, commenting on this Borgesean insight of difference, declares, "The time of a book is not the limited time of its writing, but the limitless time of reading and memory" ("Littérature selon Borges" 132).

So, in reading conventional translations or even in reading identical texts, whether by the same author or fantastic "translations" by the mad Menard, there can never be identical responses. In practice, Menard proves that when once one brings the activity of reading to the page, the texts lose stability and change. In fact, even $A = A$ can never be true. In translation, since the A on the left side of the equation (the first reading) is always different from the A on the right (the second reading), in the end, even in a copy, the most scrupulous of all translations, where the intention is replication, once we introduce the reader to the formula, we end up with $A = B$. Indeed, we do not even have to make a copy. Reading the same text twice proves that $A = B$, for with each reading a second,

altered text is born. Translation then, as all transcription and reading of texts, creates a difference.

Or, returning to our earlier postulate on the meanings of *metafora*, translation is the activity of creating metaphor, which is to say, of creating differences, whose formula persists as $A = B$.

Once it is seen that translation cannot be $A = A$, the mimetic assumptions of literalists fail, of those who would demand the impossible, or throw out the whole activity of translation on the grounds of inexactitude and difference. Were truly literalist assumptions to prevail, translation would indeed be impossible, because in translation $A = A$ is impossible. And only under those impossible preconditions of literality would we then have to agree with those who assert that poetry cannot be translated—nor can prose nor any sign system. The great doubters of verse translation such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Benedetto Croce, José Ortega y Gasset, and Robert Frost would be vindicated.

But poetry is translated, sometimes felicitously, and whether well or poorly done it can be accomplished provided there is a declaration of difference, provided that $A = B$. Given such premises and helped by the axiom "translation is metaphor," the act of translation can be judged not on its attainment of identity but on the quality of its difference in seeking identity and equivalence. Success or failure in translation will be judged by the quality of the newly created metaphor, which is always the final product of translation.

Often the useful term *equivalence* is used to cover the difference between source language and target language or between source text and target text, but equivalence in no way signifies replication. There is no equivalence without difference. In poetic metaphor it is the difference, the tension between near-equal parts of a translation, that makes the poetry, since translation is the activity of creating related difference.

To return to the parable of the Greek moving van and the shifts in nuance and usage of the verbal sign *metafora*, we observe how carrying across a word within the same language or to another language entails a complexity of ever-changing sense found in new signs with their own lexical codes. The original significance of *metafora* in Greek persists, however, as either a primary factor or a secondary insinuation in its Latin and English versions or equivalents. More, these same observations on matters of intralingual primary and secondary meanings and interlingual change and equivalence, which all derive from that painted sign on the vans, aptly serve as an analogue—or extended metaphor—for the main questions of translation itself.

Those perky vans appear and disappear, indifferent to our vision of them. But even their appearance evokes activities of the mind which require words. We read a written logo and interpret it. To find meaning in this logo or in any linguistic sign requires its "translation into some further linguistic sign," as Jakobson stated, a formulation first articulated by C. S. Peirce, whom Jakobson

praises as "the deepest inquirer into the essence of signs" ("Linguistic Aspects" 233). So one sign breeds another, there is unending process of rewording, retelling, translation, transmutation, and wherever we turn, where meaning is sought, where mental activity takes place, we are living inescapably in the eternal condition of translation. Which is to say, we are forever making a metaphor with its related differences. We are reading and translating ourselves and the world.

In a word, to come to Greece and find that even the moving vans run around under the sun and smog of greater Athens with advertisements for transportation, for metaphor, and ultimately with signs for TRANSLATION should convince us that every motor truck hauling goods from one place to another, every perceived *metamorphosis* of a word or phrase within or between languages, every decipherment and interpretation of that logo on the panel, every act of reading, writing, and interpretation of a text, every role by each actor in the cast, every adaptation of a script by a director of opera, film, theater, ballet, pantomime, indeed every perception of movement and change, in the street or on our tongues, on the page or in our ears, leads us directly to the art and activity of translation.

Translating from one language into another is a mathematical task, and the translation of a lyrical poem, for example, into a foreign language is quite analogous to a mathematical problem.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*

All poetry is translation.

Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*

The human mind can do nothing but translate; all its activity consists of just that.

August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Translating Literature*

Every reading is a translation.

Octavio Paz, *Traducción*

Translation as Part of a General Theory of Literature

During the days of inflationary rhetoric in the battles between analytical philosophy and everything else (especially traditional metaphysics), the positivist Rudolph Carnap once declared with cold disdain that all philosophy outside

of logic and mathematics is nonsense. Given the pleasant impossibilities of translation and even of objective, unvarying reading, the positivistic paradigm might also hold that all translation outside of algebraic equations is nonsense.

But time and fashion have given us relative peace and tolerance in philosophy, and in translation we have already coped with the exclusionary argument for banning translation altogether, formulated in the objective but irrelevant equation $A = A$. We may have established in some definitive way that literary translation, like all activities of writing, is not a predictable, objective, and repeatable exercise but a venture into variations, not a science with data whose validity is proved by repeatability but an art of differences. Moreover, it should be clear that the translator, as a receiver and creator of art, is free to set and upset the parameters of translatability. These observations I offer, knowing full well, however, that literalist strictures on translatability will not go away, that translators of the Bible will not tomorrow receive the epiphany that they are dealing with literature as well as theology, and that critics of translation, longing for objectifiable system, will not cease to ask for absolute transcription in the same breath that they demand artistic maturity.

Yet it is well now to go beyond these perennial stages of contention in order to glance at some deeper implications of literary translation. Let us explore translation as an activity underlying all perception, reading, and writing, a process infusing the mind's most banal response to ordinary sense data, and an instinctive device directing the mind's most self-conscious moments of artistic creation.

WRITING AND READING AS TRANSLATION; TRANSLATION AS INTERPRETATION

Translation is a much broader venture than the ordinary transference of meaning from one language to another. To write is to translate thought into coded graphic marks on a page. To read is to translate those marks back into a mental text. To translate (in the ordinary senses) is to transform them into lexical equivalents in the same or another language. So every transformation of thought into writing, of writing into reading, and of one written text into another written text is an act of translation.

Of course these activities happen not separately but simultaneously. Only in language can we speak of them—and therefore conceive of them—as separately recognized acts. In practice the mind does not tolerate the dragging time of analytical language. So in effect the initial act of reading involves simultaneous transformations of those encoded letters on the page into a mental text that lies immediately on the screen of understanding but is also stored in memory, where it remains available for later access, and it is recalled by further transformations. These steps of building and accessing a mental text are the process that Herder calls a *secret Gedankenübersetzung* (thought-translation). Each step comprehends transformation and overlapping interpretation, all under the broader notion of translation. Therefore, to read is not only to translate but also to interpret.

Just as the act of reading involves interpretive translation, so the act of formal translation involves an interpretive reading of the source text. Indeed, translation is a hermeneutical process, or, in modern terminology, an old-fashioned exercise in New Critical close reading, performed in order to come up with the most complete understanding of the source text for the purpose of determining the target text. (I should add, however, that once that understanding of the source text takes place and the target text is prepared, the New Critical autonomy of the original reading disappears, since now we have a new text dependent historically and intertextually on the old one; indeed, translation is for Hans-Robert Jauss, insofar as it represents the interrelation between source text and target text, the ideal paradigm for his reader-reception theory.) In a word, to translate is to read and to interpret. Hans-Georg Gadamer asserts this notion dogmatically: "Every translator is an interpreter" (*Truth and Method* 349).

If we separate the mental activity of reading and translation, albeit artificially, into its discrete moments, we make interesting discoveries. The translator works intra- or interlingually to transform one text into another text, and after the initial reading to discover source meanings, the search for equivalent target meanings begins. Then the act of translation occurs, not by lingering on the page but in the mind, through interpretive readings and rereadings and the subsequent transformation of initial thought into new thought. Finally, the new thought becomes so dominant that it assumes its own authority, and then the translator transcribes this new creation onto paper as a translation of the thought into script. What is crucial is the movement of initial thought (a reading of source text) to the new thought (the mental translation).

As to the observation that translation occurs not on the page but in the mind, there is again an analogy with current reading theory, specifically with the work of Stanley Fish, who asserts: "The place where sense is made or not made is in the reader's mind rather than the printed page or the space between covers of a book" (*Is There a Text?* 36). He finds a "spectacularly successful" example in the way Christian exegetes, with the proper interpretive strategies, were able to create in their minds exactly the new texts they wished to find in their translations of Ovid (170). These apparently new notions, of meaning production in the mind and of reading as imaginative translation, were of course enunciated nearly two centuries earlier in Herder's "secret thought-translations."

The justifying principle and theory behind Christian exegesis and interpretation of Scripture, from allegory in Origen, Aristotelianism in Augustine, and general scholasticism in Aquinas, is *authorial intention*. Such interpretation is based on what purports to be knowledge of God and his scribes' holy intentions but in reality is a cover for its opposite principle: *reader participation*, or reader as author. Hermeneutical exegesis was allied before the fact with deconstructionist criticism and the reader's intervention in and invention of the text. The exegete formulates "pagan" and biblical words anew through Christianizing, in-

terpretive readings and translation in such a way that the reader speaks for the author and thereby becomes the author. Critical talk about the death of the author is misguided. Rather, we may speak fairly of the author's replacement by a new author, the reader, who takes over the job of the source author and becomes inventor and director of the text. Through a process of revisionary free translation, the reader makes the author's text his or her own, just as in "translation proper" (to use Jakobson's useful designation), through a process of free imitation the translator makes the source text her or his own—and in effect becomes its author. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, however, there remains in both reading and translation proper an artistic partnership. Sometimes, with a perceptive and imaginative reader, a double art of creation reigns, in which author and reader become co-authors.

There is a clear analogue in the changing of author into reader-author with the changing of source text into target text. Indeed, the act of reading and the act of translation are analogues of each other. This process of changing source text into target text is not only a signal act in general literary theory; reading theory in specific comprises the favorite analogical model—whether by Fish, Bloom, Jauss, or Wolfgang Iser—to describe the diverse strategies for revealing what happens when one reads. To take one example, Iser inevitably accounts for the reader's need to fill in vast gaps in an indeterminate text by resorting to the translation process. For him it is the key to what reading is all about. His implied reader sets about to fill in empty spaces during the reading experience by translating those voids into an individual world experience. In *The Act of Reading* Iser writes: "The concept of the implied reader thus describes a translation process, whereby textual structures translate themselves through ideational acts into the reader's existing stock of experience" (67). In plainer words, Iser is observing that a reader responds to a text by taking it into the mind and translating it into meaning and experience.

In sum, these principles of translation from author to translator to reader reveal a series of dependent acts of translation: the author translates the thought by writing a text; the translator reads and interprets the author's text, and then, as the second author, formally translates that interpretation by writing a second text (the translation proper); and the reader translates the second text into her or his own creation.

Translation theory is part of general literary theory, and in recent decades, with so much emphasis on reader reception, reader creation of the text, and reader reading and misreading of precursors, we have a climate especially sympathetic to translation's preoccupation with the relation among authors, texts, and the degree to which the translator-author and new text in each instance lie close to or go creatively far from prior author and source. The specific tension between fathers and sons, early and later texts, suggests the model of translation itself: the carrying over of the text in a way that may be blatantly imitative,

disguised, misguided, misread, reread, re-created, or intentionally mistranslated. The obvious bard of influence, of the dark unfriendly ties between earlier authors and their anxiety-plagued heirs, is Harold Bloom.

In his study of Bloom's theory of influence, belatedness, and misreading, Michael Gillespie shows how Bloom's declarations are perfectly displayed in the translation model. Gillespie analyzes Bloom as the quintessential speaker, at least by analogy, for a theory of translation:

For Bloom, then, meaning results from an intertextual dialectic; it is a relational event; and translations may be considered to constitute one of the relational fields that participate in the dialectical interplay of meaning. It may be said further that if no poem is wholly original, if every poem is to be read as its poet's reading of a precursor poem or of the tradition of poetry in general, then every text is, in a sense, a "translation." . . . The translation model can provide a clearer illustration of the dialectics of writing than the paradigm of original creation itself. ("Translation" 95)

With regard to these questions of influence and imitation in the act of poetic composition and its analogue in formal translation, I propose later on that the influence of translation in the work of poet translators occurs not so much because of their encounter with an extraordinary source text but through their own transformation of that source text into their own invented language. Instigated by the act of translation—or mistranslation, if Bloom's dark defensive truths be true—the poet translator self-reflexively discovers the language of his or her own inventions and borrows or steals it.

To find translation everywhere in the universe and in the mind is comforting but problematic. The notion becomes so generalized that it risks falling into mere conceptual wordplay (the danger of all theory). Yet in translation there is an underlying transforming principle: each instant of speech, writing, reading, and translation involves a multitude of transformations and transportations, a multitude of receptions, shapings, and carryings over. The general word for all these activities is *translation*. Paz speaks for the universality of translation by taking us back to the infant child asking a parent the meaning of a word. He writes, "Aprender a hablar es aprender a traducir" (To learn to speak is to learn to translate) (*Traducción* 7).

In literature the question is *how* to translate. And how to do it well is of course the rub, which leads us to the traditional and overwhelming enigma of faithful and free translation. With equal ardor and intelligence, there are those who argue, and indeed demand, utter fidelity in translation, while others, the majority, propose that one should no more ask for a slavish reproduction of the original text into its interlingual incarnation than expect that the practice of writing and reading will be a transference of the world into a perfect and unimaginative mimesis. Finally, there are those who offer a curse on both houses, saying that