predictable international diplomatic prose, for tourist inquiries at hotel reception desks, and maybe for other uses as well.

You will then enter the era of tertiary orality. It will be another world.

25. *Match* Me *If* You *Can*: Translating Humour

A relatively uncontentious way of saying what translation does is this: it provides for some community an acceptable match for an utterance made in a foreign tongue. This doesn't go very far, but as it applies equally well to conference interpreting, comic strips, legal contracts and novels, it's a reasonable place to start.

What it leaves open are three huge questions:

1. What makes a match acceptable?
2. Which of the infinite catalogue of qualities that any utterance has are those that a translation may or must make match?
3. What do we mean by 'match', anyway?

Those are the questions that translation studies have always sought to answer, sometimes under heavy academic disguise. 'Translation quality evaluation criteria', for example, is a label for answers to question 1. But whatever way you ask these three questions, the answers are not easy to provide.

All sorts of criteria may be involved in judgements made by different people at different times about the acceptability of a match – theoretical criteria, or practical, social or cultural ones, and no doubt, on occasions, purely arbitrary ones too (such as the translator is a famous prize-winner and *must* have got it right). Trying to rank these criteria or to distribute them to

classes of situations where they might apply seems too complicated by half. It is perhaps more fruitful to work in from the outside edge, and to begin by looking at places where matches are commonly believed to be extremely difficult to find.

One area flagged by nearly all translation commentary as being match-poor is utterances that raise a laugh or a smile. Here's an old Soviet joke about Stalin:

> Stalin and Roosevelt had an argument about whose bodyguards were more loyal and ordered them to jump out of the window on the fifteenth floor. Roosevelt's bodyguard flatly refused to jump, saying, 'I'm thinking about the future of my family.' Stalin's bodyguard, however, jumped out of the window and fell to his death. Roosevelt was taken aback.
>
> 'Tell me, why did your man do that?' he asked.
>
> Stalin lit his pipe and replied:
>
> 'He was thinking about the future of his family, too.'[1]

Well, that's a translation (from Russian), and even in Russian it's a translation already, because exactly the same joke has been told over the centuries about other brutal potentates, starting with Peter the Great. We can safely assume that this joke-form can be preserved together with its point in any human language under two conditions that are only incidentally linguistic ones: the target language must possess an expression for 'thinking about your family' that can apply to two slightly different projects (to provide support for your spouse and children, and to protect them from persecution); second, that the listener understands or can guess that evil potentates punish disobedient underlings by persecuting their relatives. These two conditions may not be met in all cultures and languages in the world, but they are surely widely available. The 'untranslatability of humour' hasn't survived the very first dig of the spade.

Provided the two general conditions given above can be met, the jump-for-Stalin joke can be rejigged to fit a wide variety of other historical and geographical locales in the same language or any other, and still be the same joke. There are very many transportable, rewritable joke-patterns of that kind – including those politically incorrect ethnic disparagements of near neighbours that you hear in structurally identical form when the French talk about Belgians, Swedes about Finns, the English about the Irish, and so on.

Translating these kinds of circulating jokes means matching the pattern made by the interplay of presupposition and meaning that constitutes the point, and then rewriting all the rest to suit. An ability to recognize the match is not rare, and may be almost universal. But the ability to find a good match is one that only some people have. However, we don't have to go far to find humorous uses of language that work in a slightly different way.

> A Brooklyn baker became deeply irritated by a little old lady who kept standing in line to ask for a dozen bagels on a Tuesday morning despite his having put a big sign in his window to say that bagels were not available on Tuesday mornings. When she got to the head of the line for the fifth time in a row the baker decided not to shout and scream, but to get the message through this way instead.
>
> 'Lady, tell me, do you know how to spell "cat" – as in "catechism"?'
>
> 'Sure I do. That's C-A-T.'
>
> 'Good,' the baker replies. 'Now tell me, how do you spell "dog" – as in "dogmatic"?'
>
> 'Why, that's D-O-G.'
>
> 'Excellent! So how do you spell "fuck", as in "bagels"?'

'But there ain't no "fuck" in "bagels"!' the little old lady exclaims.

'That's precisely what I've been trying to tell you all morning!'

There are different ways of saying what the point of this – admittedly paltry – joke is. It makes a character speak out loud a truth she had been unable to internalize. There's no reason to suppose that matches cannot be found in any language to make fun of some person in the same way. The overall point is made by playing on a difference between written and oral language: structurally similar plays can probably be found and constructed in any language that has an imperfectly phonetic writing system. But once we get down to the implementation of these two features, hunting for matches becomes much more difficult. The assimilation of the present participle of a taboo word to the stem of that word plus the preposition 'in' is only possible because in English the distinguishing mark of the first – the final consonant 'g' – is habitually dropped in colloquial speech. That's a low-level, local feature of a particular language, and it turns on the slight mismatch between its spoken and written forms. A structural match in any other language would most likely have to turn on a phonetically and grammatically different feature that may or may not allow the same point – making someone stupid say what they don't want to understand by diverting their attention from the issue through an intentionally deceptive spelling game.

What's usually considered to be at issue in humour of this kind is the capacity that all languages have for referring to themselves, and thus for playing games with words. Metalinguistic expressions – sentences and phrases that refer to some aspect of their own linguistic form – carry meanings that are by definition internal to the language in which they are

couched. 'There ain't no "fuck" in "bagels" may be vulgar and silly, but it is a good enough example of a metalinguistic expression. It is not about bagels, only about the spelling and pronunciation of a word of the English language seen exclusively as a word and not as a sign. 'Plays on the signifier' are traditionally viewed as the dark corner of language where translation becomes a paradoxical, impossible challenge.

That would be a valid position if the criteria for an acceptable match obligatorily included matching the signifiers themselves. But they obviously do not. What a translation makes match never includes the signifiers themselves. It would not count as a translation if it did.

Just as only some jokes exploit the metalinguistic function of language, so not all self-referring expressions are funny. Especially not those used as example sentences by philosophers of language, such as:

1. There are seven words in this sentence.

It is no trouble to find a matching sentence in German:

2. *Es gibt sieben Wörter in diesem Satz.*

However, that particular trans-linguistic match is regarded as a happenstance – an arbitrary and irrational coincidence in a particular case. What's usually seen as problematic about sentences like (1) is that they cannot reliably be translated into other tongues, and they thus appear to contradict the axiom of effability – that any thought a person can have can be expressed by some sentence in any natural language and anything which can be expressed in one language can also be expressed in another (see p. 156).

The real problem with a sentence like (1) above is that it can't be translated into English either. 'This sentence consists of seven words' rephrases ('translates') (1), but by doing so it becomes counterfactual, which (1) is not. Likewise, rephrasing it in French produces an untruth if you think that translation means matching signifiers one by one with equivalents provided by pocket dictionaries:

3. *Il y a sept mots dans cette phrase.*

The main cause of problems is solutions, an American wit once declared, and the conundrums created by rephrasing self-referring sentences taken out of any context seem to be good examples of that. That's because (3) is not the only way you can express (1) in French. Indeed, it's just about the least plausible version you could come up with. A better match would be:

4. *Cette phrase est constituée par sept mots.*

But because philosophy is written by philosophers and not translators, the clash between (1) and (3) is taken to be a demonstration of a wider, general truth:

> Translation between languages cannot preserve *reference* (what a sentence is about), *self-reference* (what a sentence says about itself) and *truth-value* (whether the sentence is right or wrong) at the same time.[2]

This would explain in a nutshell why puns and plays on words and all those kinds of joke that exploit specific features of the language in which they are expressed cannot be translated. Because this is presented as a general assertion it can be disproved by a single persuasive counter-example. But the reason

why it is wrong is not contained in any counter-example. The flaw in the axiom lies in its failure to say what it means by 'translate'. So here's my idea of a better approximation to the truth about translation:

> Arduously headscratching, intellectually agile wordsmiths may simultaneously preserve the reference, self-reference and truth-value of an utterance when fate smiles on them and allows them to come up with a multi-dimensional matching expression in their own language.

In Chapter Fifty-Two of Perec's *Life A User's Manual*, a depressed young man called Grégoire Simpson wanders round Paris and stares for hours at shop windows. He saunters into a covered arcade and gazes at the display of a jobbing printer's wares – dummy letterheads, wedding invitations and joke visiting cards. Here's one of them:

Adolf Hitler
Fourreur

Fourreur is the French word for 'furrier', but it is also an approximate representation of the way the German word *Führer* is pronounced in French. The joke is a metalinguistic and self-referring one, provided you know who and what Hitler was, know in addition that a furrier and a dictator are different things, and are able to subvocalize the French word as if it were a German sound and vice versa. What needs matching to make a translation of this joke is not any one of these particular things in French, but the relationship between them – the pattern of mismatched sounds and meanings between two tongues, one of which has to be German.

I came up with this:

Adolf Hitler
German Lieder

It took a while to find, and it took a stroke of luck. It may well be not the only or the best possible translation of Perec's joke visiting card, but it matches well enough in the dimensions that matter. It plays a sound-game between English and German and it relies on the same general field of knowledge. It doesn't preserve all dimensions of the original – what ever does? – but it matches enough of them, in my honest but not very humble opinion, to count as a satisfactory translation of a self-referring, metalinguistic and interlingual joke.

Humorous remarks, shaggy-dog tales, witty anecdotes and silly jokes are only untranslatable if you insist on understanding 'translation' as a low-level matching of the signifiers themselves. Translation is obviously not that. The matches it provides relate to those dimensions of an utterance that taken together account for its principal force in the context in which it is uttered.

That still doesn't tell us what we mean by 'match'. But we're getting closer.

26. *Style* and *Translation*

Translations typically alter numerous features of the source in order to produce matches for those of its dimensions that count in the context it has. But there is one traditionally perceived quality of written and spoken language that is identified not with any particular dimension of an utterance, but with the overall relationship between them – its style.

Style is more than genre. Kitchen recipes are typically translated not into something as vague and undifferentiated as 'English', but into 'kitchen recipese', the genre constituted by the conventional features that kitchen recipes have in our tongue.

In like manner, you don't translate French poetry into 'English', but into poetry, as the American poet and translator C. K. Williams insists. Poetry is a characteristic social and cultural use of language and can therefore count as a genre in our sense, but it comes in many different forms. Beyond the genre, a poetry translator has to choose the particular style that he is going to use.

Twenty years ago Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz brought out a curious essay-cum-anthology entitled *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* – nineteen different English translations of a poem by a Chinese poet of the eighth century CE, 王維. Setting aside all their arguments about which of these 'ways of Wei' is to be preferred, what is quite obvious is that they represent nineteen different ways of writing poetry in English, nineteen 'styles' of fairly recognizable kinds

(Eliotish, Ashberish, free versish and so forth). Ten years later, Hiroaki Sato brought out *One Hundred Frogs*, a compilation of actually rather more than a hundred already published English versions of a famous haiku by Matsuo Bashô:

古池や蛙飛び込む水の音

Furu ike ya
kawazu tobikomu
mizu no oto

I
The old pond
A frog jumped in,
Kerplunk!

II
pond
  frog
    plop!

III
A lonely pond in age-old stillness sleeps . . .
Apart, unstirred by sound or motion . . . till
Suddenly into it a lithe frog leaps.

If 'style' is the term that names the principal means of distinguishing the differences between these three versions of Bashô's haiku, then it means something that is not an individual property of, say, the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, John Masefield and Ogden Nash, but a collective property of poetry written in that style – in Ginsbergish, Masefieldish

and Nashish, so to speak (one of them *was* written by Allen Ginsberg, in fact). Style in this sense is eminently imitable, and not just for comic effect. Students of musical composition develop their skills by writing in the manner of Mozart or Bach, and writers also practise at writing like Flaubert,[1] or writing like Proust.[2] The following pieces are *not* by William Wordsworth, T. S. Eliot or J. D. Salinger – but it does not take much more than vague memories of school to know which among them are Eliotish, Salingerish and Lake Poetish respectively:

There is a river clear and fair
'Tis neither broad nor narrow
It winds a little here and there –
It winds about like any hare;
And then it holds as straight a course
As, on the turnpike road, a horse,
Or, through the air an arrow

Sunday is the dullest day, treating
Laughter as a profane sound, mixing
Worship and despair, killing
New thought with dead forms.
Weekdays give us hope, tempering
Work with reviving play, promising
A future life within this one

Boy, when I saw old Eve I thought I was going to flip. I mean it isn't that Eve is good-looking or anything like that, it's just that she's different. I don't know what the hell it is exactly – but you always know when she's around. All of a sudden I knew there was something wrong with old Eve the minute I saw her. She looked nervous as hell. I kinda felt sorry for her

> – even though she's got one of my goddam ribs, so I went over to talk to old Eve.
>
> 'You look very, *very* nice, Adam,' she said to me in a funny way, like she was ashamed of something. 'Why don't you join me in some apple?'

These examples could lead us to believe that the translation of style is an exercise in pastiche, the translator's task being the choice of an existing style in the target culture to serve as a rough match for the 'other'. Many literary translators go about their job in just that way. On reading a new work in French, for example, I certainly do run through in my mind the kinds of English style that might fit, and when starting on a new job, I often rifle through the books on my shelf to remind myself of the particularities of the 'style match' I have in my head. But this idea of style as a culturally constituted set of linguistic resources characteristic of an author, period, literary genre or school clashes with another widespread idea of what 'a style' is: the irreducible difference of any individual's unique forms of language. In brief: if style is 'inimitable', how come it can be imitated?

The muddle about what style is began in the gilded halls of the Académie française, an institution set up by Louis XIII to promote and defend the French language. In 1753, a natural scientist was invited to take his place as one of the forty 'immortals', as members are called. Georges-Louis de Buffon, an eminent botanist, mathematician and natural historian, gave an extraordinary acceptance speech that has since become known as the 'Discourse on Style'. In it he sought to reassure his audience – the thirty-nine academicians who had just elected him – that the promotion of a mere scientist to such elevated rank would not topple rhetoric from its proper place at the pinnacle of French culture. He may even have been

sincere – but I wouldn't count on it. In his much-quoted but mostly misunderstood conclusion, Buffon emphasized that what mattered above all were the arts of language. Scientific discoveries, he declared, were really quite easy to make, and would quickly perish unless they were explained with elegance and grace. That was because mere facts are not human achievements – they belong to the natural world, and are therefore *hors de l'homme*, 'outside of humankind'. Eloquence, by contrast, was the highest evidence of human agency and genius: *le style est l'homme même.*

This meaning of 'style', as a synonym for elegance and distinction, continues to motivate most modern uses of the word and its cognates. Stylish clothes are those considered elegant by some group of people; to ski or to dance or to serve cucumber sandwiches in style is likewise to do these things with fashionable grace. Buffon's style is a social value. Nobody is free to construct his or her own idea of what is stylish, save by getting other people to agree. Similarly, stylish writing conforms to a shared notion, however vague, of what is fashionable, appropriate, socially elevated and so on, in the way you speak and write.

Matching posh for posh in translating between languages used by cultures with linguistic forms that correspond to hierarchical social structures is no sweat. Where the social structures of the source culture are more elaborate than those of the target, a degree of flattening occurs: the different social implications of *Estimado señor* and *Apreciado señor* at the start of a formal letter in Spanish, for example, can't be represented in English, which can only say 'Dear Sir'. To compensate for losses of this kind, which can be far more substantial when translating between cultures as unrelated to each other as Japanese and French, for example, the translator may invent

target-language analogues for distinctions that belong to the social world of the original, and be accused variously of quaintness, condescension or fidelity to the source. But there are even less tractable issues involved when the social register of the language used in the source is low. There is a seemingly inevitable bias against representing forms of language recognized in the source culture as regional, uncouth, ill-educated or taboo by socially matching forms in the target tongue – presumably, because doing so risks identifying the translator as a member of just such a marginal or subordinated class. As a result, translation usually takes the social register of the source up a notch or two. The social dimension of 'style' doesn't flow easily from tongue to tongue.

Novelist Adam Thirlwell has argued that the meaning of the word 'style' changed in 1857.[3] In the convincing story he tells, 'style' flipped over, almost in one go, from being a description of the elegance of a whole manner of expression to being about just one sub-element in the composition of prose – the sentence. The culprits for this radical reduction of style were Gustave Flaubert, his novel *Madame Bovary*, and the many comments Flaubert made about sentences in his partly teasing letters to his girlfriend, Louise Colet. Since 1857 or thereabouts, Thirlwell argues, critics and readers have needlessly restricted their idea of a writer's style to those low-level features of grammar and prosody that can be exhaustively identified between a capital letter and a full stop. Henri Godin, writing about 'the stylistic resources of French' just after the Second World War, was quite certain that style and syntax are the same thing and reach their point of perfect harmony in the writing of . . . Flaubert.

Because the grammatical forms, the sounds of individual words, and the characteristic voice rhythms of any two lan-

guages do not match (if they did we would call them the same language), the 'Flaubert shift' made style instantly untranslatable. Thirlwell's main aim is to show that this is nonsense – and that the novel is a truly international and trans-linguistic form of art.[4]

At some point in the course of the nineteenth century, the idea of style as 'the aesthetics of the sentence' got thoroughly muddled up with a completely different tradition that came to France and Britain from German universities. Scholars in departments of Romance Philology tended to justify the attention they paid to canonical writers on the grounds that their works represented special, innovative uses of language, distinct from the norms of the speech community, and were therefore important factors in the course of linguistic change. Poets, they argued, were not simply users of language, but the creators of it; a language was not a smooth and rounded whole, but a gnarled old potato marked by bumps and dents which speak the history of its creation. 'Style research', or *Stilistik*, pursued with fervour for a hundred years, and reaching its brilliant peak in the essays of Leo Spitzer (1887–1960), was an exciting but quite circular pursuit: the language of a 'great work' becomes a fine-grained map of the ineffable individuality of some great writer's 'self'; but the 'self' or the essence of, let us say, Racine is entirely constituted by what can be mapped through his language, subjected to a particular kind of analysis of his style. *Style* in this sense is inimitable by definition – that's the point of it. And if it can't be imitated in the same language, it's not even worth trying to translate it.

But it isn't true. Most of the features of language use that Spitzer identified as significant aspects of Racine's 'self', for example, can also be found in the language of Racine's contemporaries writing in the same literary genres. Yet the

remarkable tenacity of the philologists' principle that every great writer has a manner that is unique and inimitable led people to reinvent the very history of the idea of 'style'. They went back to Buffon's famous 'Discourse', took his maxim that *le style c'est l'homme même* ('style is what makes us human'), lopped off the last word and recycled the remainder – *le style, c'est l'homme* – so as to prove that 'the style *is* the man'. As the noted Oxford scholar R. A. Sayce put it in his study of *Style in French Prose* (1953), 'details of style . . . reveal the deeper intentions and characteristics of a writer, and they must be dictated by some inner reason'.

'Style' thus has a very curious history. A sentence uttered in 1753 as a defence of literary eloquence came to be touted around as a pithy formulation of the idea that no two people speak or write in exactly the same way because no two speakers are the same person.

It's indisputable that every speaker of any language has an idiolect, a characteristic set of (ir)regularities that is not identical to the usage of any other person. Why this should be so is discussed in the last chapter of this book, but it should be obvious that there are no intellectual, psychological or practical obstacles to speaking in the same way as some other person (impersonators and pasticheurs do it all the time). But the fact of linguistic variation at individual level has some very practical applications – such as catching out forgers. Among the early applications of computers to the humanities were statistical programs for identifying the authorship of suspect documents. The programs themselves rested on rival theories about what 'style' was: typical patterns in individuals' use of verbs, or vocabulary, or other parts of speech, that were unfalsifiable by anyone else; or else that 'rare pairs' (two words occurring typically together) could be used to identify and

distinguish different authors; or that the position in the sentence of common words was what gives the identity of the writer away. This last guess was called positional stylometry and was developed in the 1970s by A. Q. Morton and Sidney Michaelson at Edinburgh University. Results of their computer program were admitted as evidence in court in many cases, and also used to make scholarly hypotheses about the provenance of different parts of the Hebrew Bible.

Style in this individual sense cannot possibly be the object of translation. It would make no sense to try to simulate in English the statistically irregular positioning of, say, the negative particle *pas* in some French original.

Two interesting consequences ensue. If 'style' is such an individual attribute that it cannot even be controlled by the writer (thus allowing sleuths to catch forgers out), then every translator has a 'style' of that kind in his target language, and the style of all his translations must be more like itself than it can ever be like the style of the authors translated. I often wonder, in fact, whether my English versions of Perec, Kadare, Fred Vargas, Romain Gary and Hélène Berr – whose characteristic uses of French are manifestly quite different – are all, stylistically speaking, just examples of Bellos. By some accounts, they have to be: computational stylistics gives no quarter on that score. Secretly, though, I am quite happy that it should be so. After all, those translations are *my* work. But it will be known for sure only by a large computer program.

All the same, style can't be swept away just like that. Admittedly, we do not mean 'elegance', as Buffon did, when we talk about literature and translation, even if we still do when we talk about clothes or cucumber sandwiches. We do not mean statistical regularities in the way we place the indefinite article,

though we do when we gratefully accept a court ruling on the incompatibility of the style of our uncle's alleged will with its claimed authorship.

We mean something else, not so difficult to express: *style* is the reason why a novel of Dickens is just Dickens's, why a piece of P. G. Wodehouse – even if it were written by somebody else – is still in its essence a piece of Wodehouse. Style is, if not the man, then the thing! It is what makes any work uniquely itself.

I also know a Dickens when I see one. But that's trivial. The question is: at what level is the Dickensianity of any text by Dickens located? In the words? the sentences? the paragraphs? the digressions? the anecdotes? the construction of character? or the plot? Because I, translator, can give you the plot, the characters, the anecdotes, and the digressions; I can even give you the paragraphs and most of the time I can give you a fair approximation to the sentences too. But I cannot give you the words. For that, you have to learn English.

For Adam Thirlwell, novelistic 'style' is the name of a holistic entity that comes somewhere between 'a writer's special way of looking at the world' and 'a writer's own way of writing novels'. Characteristic uses of sentence structures and sound patterns are certainly a part of the latter, and maybe of the former too – but only a part. Style in Thirlwell's sense – the most usable and purposeful sense – is something much larger. If it were not, it would disappear in translation. The circulation of novels between all the vehicular languages of the world and their incontestable conversations with each other demonstrate without a shadow of doubt that style does survive translation. The means that translators use to ensure this are no more than the common skills used in all translation tasks.

In sum, the widespread notion that style is untranslatable

is just a variant of the folkish nostrum that a translation is no substitute for the original. There is no more truth to it than there is in the idea that humour can't be preserved by rephrasing in the same or another tongue.

There is a difference between translating jokes and translating style, however. The first is typically done by concentrated effort; the second is better done by taking a slight distance from the text and allowing its underlying patterns to emerge by their own force in the process of rewriting in a second tongue. What they have in common is this: finding a match for a joke and a match for a style are both instances of a more general ability that may best be called a pattern-matching skill.

We're still short of an answer to the question of what we mean by match, but we're getting closer still.

27. *Translating* Literary *Texts*

In the English-speaking world, there are no job postings for literary translators, and few openings for beginners. Insofar as it is remunerated at all, literary translation is paid at piece rates equivalent to a baby-sitter's hourly charge. It is mainly pursued by people who have other sources of income to pay the rent and the grocer. There are a few exceptions, but literary translation into English is for the most part done by amateurs.

Yet it plays a central part in the international circulation of new literary work. The disparity between global role and local recognition is perhaps the greatest curiosity of the whole trade. Literary translation into any language has features that mark it off from most other kinds of language work. To begin with, it usually has liberal time constraints compared to work in commercial, legal or technical fields. It also engages the translator's responsibility in less daunting ways. Translation mistakes in court, in hospitals and maintenance manuals may cause immediate harm to others. Making a mess of a masterpiece certainly has consequences, but they don't threaten the translator or the client in comparable ways. Producing fluent prose to stand in place of a story told in German or Spanish is also more entertaining than writing an English-language summary of a Russian document on border issues in the Barents Sea. All these things make sense of the fact that the rewriters of foreign novels in English translation have low pay and low profiles. They don't have too hard a time.

It could hardly be more different in Japan. Shibata Motoyuki is without question the most famous translator from English in the country: his publisher puts out 'The Shibata Motoyuki Translation Collection' and bookshops set aside whole sections for it. His name does not just appear on the dust-jacket but is printed in the same type size as the author's name.

Japanese literary translators have much the same status as authors do in Britain and America. Many author-translators are household names, and there's even a celebrity-gossip book about them: *Honyakuka Retsuden 101*, 'The Lives of the Translators 101'.

Many other countries give translators greater symbolic and material rewards than America or Britain. In Germany, literary translators are usually granted a significant royalty on the books they translate; French literary translators too are better paid than their American counterparts. In the English-speaking world almost all literary translators have a day job to support their avocation, but in France, Germany, Japan and elsewhere you can use translating as your day job to finance a second calling – such as writing fiction of your own.

These discrepancies in the social and economic context of literary translation between the Far East, Continental Europe and the anglophone world reflect the asymmetry in the global flow of translations. The situational contexts of literary translation are so different when translating UP and translating DOWN – towards the centre, or towards the periphery, in Pascale Casanova's terms[1] – that they cannot fail to have broad effects on the way the task is done.

In cultures that lie on the periphery of the global circulation of literary works, what is wanted is access to the centre. The cultural standing of literary works in translation is determined in the first place by the simple fact that they give access to the

foreign. In central languages, on the other hand, the foreignness of a new book is of no special importance. New writing from abroad has to win its place in the culture by other means. But as there is only one central language at the moment, the gulf in translation practice lies between English, and the rest.

Translating the new into English nearly always uses a fluent and relatively invisible translation style. This is obviously related to the fact that, like budding authors, literary translators of previously unknown work have a hard struggle finding a publisher to take them on. But, in practice, few books arrive in English as the direct result of a translator's efforts. Most international literature that is published has been picked by commissioning editors whose opinions are formed by pitches from international literary scouts, foreign publishers and gossip at book fairs around the world. Literary translators almost always get to hear about their next book when a publisher is already committed to bringing it out.

There aren't many publishing executives in Britain and the USA who read foreign languages other than French. One result of this almost embarrassing situation is that translation into French is, if not quite a precondition, then a very useful introduction for a work in any other language seeking entry to world literature.[2] The international careers of writers like Ismail Kadare and Javier Marías, for example, hinged at the start on their works being read in French translation by publishers in America and Britain. But many works are acquired for translation by editors relying exclusively on reports and 'buzz', and the English translator is often the only person in the chain who really knows very much about the book or its author at all. It's a daunting position, with responsibilities going far beyond the already difficult business of producing an acceptable and effective translation.

Retranslation of ancient and modern 'classics' takes place under a quite different set of real-world constraints. It gives rise to arguments about the translator's responsibilities that are distinct from those that rule the translation of new work.

Just after the end of the Second World War, Penguin brought out a new translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, by E. V. Rieu. It was an unexpected success. As the company's website records, the liveliness of Rieu's style 'proclaimed that this was a book that anyone – everyone – could, and should, read'. The classics were no longer restricted to the privileged few.

'Classic' here means Greek and Roman literature. Earlier translations had been done mostly to accompany the learning of Latin and Greek in the classier kind of schools, and so Rieu's colloquial version was a revelation for less privileged folk. Its success and the long series that followed also reflected an important social aspiration of post-war Britain – to give much greater educational opportunities to the broad public than it had ever had before. The early Penguin Classics were mostly of ancient and medieval texts, including Neville Coghill's famous rendering of Chaucer, but the series soon came to include literature ranging from Ancient Egypt to the closing years of the nineteenth century. A collective enterprise of that kind was sustained by a conscious and explicit culture of translation. 'It is the editor's intention to commission translators who can emulate his own example and present the general reader with readable and attractive versions of the great books in modern English, shorn of the unnecessary difficulties and erudition, the archaic flavour and the foreign idiom that renders so many existing translations repellent to modern taste.' Rieu's marching orders point firmly towards an adaptive translation style. At the start, he tried to recruit academics, but found that very few of them could write English

of the kind he appreciated. He turned to professional writers like Robert Graves, Rex Warner and Dorothy L. Sayers, with personalities ranging from the scholarly to the idiosyncratic. But a stringent house style was imposed on these versions, and the result is that the first 200 Penguin Classics read as if they had all been written in the same language – fluent, unpretentious British English, circa 1950. It was a remarkable achievement. The series certainly did educate millions, and it is undoubtedly one of the historical sources of the strong preference in English-language translation for adaptive, normalizing or domesticating styles.

However, the social and cultural aspirations of these early retranslations are not necessarily those that motivate later retranslation projects. Save at special moments like 1945 (or the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution, when Maksim Gorky launched his 'World Literature' publishing house), retranslation is nearly always a strictly commercial affair.

Copyright is a modern invention, dating from 1708, but international copyright is even more recent. First sketched out in bilateral treaties in the 1850s, modern arrangements for the translation of literary works were first codified in the 1920s. The Berne Convention, which has since become the Universal Copyright Convention, doesn't allow a publisher to put out a translation without purchasing that right from the owner of the original text. But when a publisher does acquire the right to publish a foreign work in translation, he becomes the sole owner of the translated work for as long as the edition remains in print.[3] He has a monopoly in the target language – until the original work falls into the public domain.

International copyright protection is now set at seventy years from the author's death, or from first publication in the case of posthumous works. Marcel Proust died in 1922 and the

last volume of *A la recherche du temps perdu* was published in 1927. Franz Kafka died in 1924 and his most famous works came out in 1925 (*The Trial*), 1926 (*The Castle*) and 1927 (*America*). English-language publishers of these perennial works lost their monopoly towards the end of the last century. Freud died in 1939, and so his works are now also 'free of rights'. Publishers generally seek to retain some part of their market share in these hardy perennials by commissioning retranslations. That's why over the last twenty years there has been a steady output of 'new' Prousts, Kafkas and Freuds.

The legal constraints on the international circulation of literary texts explain why there is only one translation available for most works first published since the First World War. Retranslation is not a practice that has any application to most of world literature created after the birth of the last generation but two.

A retranslator, whether working with older texts or with ones that have just become available at the seventy-year limit of protection, has to cope with ambiguous and conflicting demands. If the new translation is to be copyrighted as a new text, then it has to be measurably different from any other translation. The easiest way to ensure originality is not even to look at earlier versions, since the chance of any two translators coming up blind with the same target formulation is nil. On the other hand, a retranslator also needs to be able to explain why the new translation is better than the existing one, and to do that you have to read what is already there. The older version may help – it may be very useful indeed – but it always gets in the way of inventing a fresh solution to the trickier parts of the text. I don't envy retranslators of modern classics one bit. They have to steer a cliff-top path between inadvertent plagiarism and gratuitous change.

In some cases, a new translation is amply justified by the discovery or publication of the full or unexpurgated or corrected version of a text that had originally been brought out on the basis of a censored or imperfect manuscript (such is the case of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*). In the case of work that has been intensively studied over several decades, a new translation may be able to incorporate readings and interpretations that were not available to the first. But the general principle that old translations need redoing 'every generation or two' is not well supported by these individual cases. It is supported with arithmetical exactitude by the law of international copyright and the commercial interests it creates.

Yet despite these major differences between translating and retranslating and between translating into English and into other tongues, the translation of literary works of all kinds has a feature that distinguishes it from all other translation tasks. We like to believe that a literary work, insofar as it really belongs to literature, is unlike all others – it is unique, not routine, and essentially just itself. This creates a real problem.

Translating serious non-fiction calls on skills and knowledge that literary translators don't need (knowledge of the field, for a start), but there's no special problem about knowing what linguistic norms the target text should meet. You naturally want to make a book about archaeology resemble other well-regarded books about archaeology in the receiving culture. When translating UP, the norms for non-fiction are those of original work in the same field done by speakers of the receiving language.

But difficult questions arise when the specific field of a non-fiction work is new or not easy to classify. There is perhaps no better example of the uncertain borderline between literary

and informational translation than the works of Sigmund Freud.

Despite his worldwide fame Freud's complete works have been translated in full only into English, Italian, Spanish and Japanese. Based on the complete works published in German in London in 1942, James Strachey's English version is regarded by many as a masterwork of translation and by others as a betrayal of Freud. The long-running controversy over what kind of English should represent Freud's writing turns on the question of the genre to which Freud's writing should be attached. Does it belong to social science? Or is it more properly thought of as literary work?

Strachey took it for granted that psychoanalysis was a science. Scientific terminology in English traditionally relies on Latin and Greek roots to forge new words for new concepts. However, Freud himself wrote in a language that uses compounds of quite ordinary words in the natural and social sciences. Thus where in English we use bits of Greek for 'hydrogen' and 'oxygen', German uses only 'plain words': *Wasserstoff* is 'water-stuff', *Sauerstoff* is 'sour-stuff', but such terms are no less technical and precise than their Greek-based counterparts in English. Consequently, where Freud says *Anlehnung* ('leaning-on'), Strachey coins 'anaclisis', and for *Schaulust* ('see-pleasure') he invents 'scopophilia'. Many now common words of English – ego, id, superego, empathy and displacement, for example – were all first invented in James Strachey's translation of Freud, to replace the equally technical but less recondite neologisms of the original – *Ich*, *Es*, *Überich*, *Einfühlung* and *Verschiebung*.[4]

Strachey's approach is quite unexceptionable if Freud's writings are seen as contributions to social or medical science. We can test that in a back-translation exercise. What could Freud

have written had he wanted to coin a term in German for the English neologism 'scopophilia'? The norms of German-language science writing of his era would have led him inevitably towards a compound noun like *Schaulust*.

If on the other hand works like *The Interpretation of Dreams* are assimilated not to science but to literary creation, then Strachey's English, which gives a version that is tonally and stylistically distant from the original, could easily be seen as a misrepresentation.

In France, a large and coordinated team has been engaged since the 1980s in producing the first 'Complete Works' in French. The enterprise aims to restore the German specificity of Freud, treating him less as the inventor of a new science than as a writer of a particular (and rather strange) kind of literary prose. Indeed, the team's leaders have declared that Freud didn't write German at all, but 'Freudish', 'a dialect of German that is not German but a language invented by Freud'. The result is widely regarded as incomprehensible in French – but then, if 'Freudish' isn't German, it wouldn't have been easy to read in the original either . . .[5]

The tangled disputes over Freud in French and English would not arise if it were clear how to categorize the field to which his work belongs. In most social science translation, the problem does not arise. Because it is believed in many places that the best work in social science is done in the US, translation of social science from English typically retains some linguistic features of the original, to authenticate the quality of the work. But in literature, there is no such collective agreement about where the 'top model' lies. Should a new foreign novel in translation conform to the manner and style of some existing writer of English prose? Some would say, of course not: what we want is something different from the familiar

patterns of Philip Roth. Others say, of course it should! We want to read something that matches our existing conception of novelistic style in English prose. The book may have been written in Albanian or Chinese, but if it's a good novel, then it should sound like one – of the kind we know.

There is no resolution to this squabble. You could say that literary translation is easy because, in the last analysis, you can do what you like. Or you could say that literary translation is impossible, because whatever you do, serious objections can be raised. Literary translation *is* different from all other kinds. It serves readers in a quite special way. Modestly, often unwittingly, but inevitably, it teaches them on each occasion what translation is.