

Translating Latin Prose¹

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I

SOMEONE wrote in 1922 that the perfect period for translation had not yet come, but that it was expected in about 1970. Since there can obviously be no such thing as perfect translation, the expectation has not been fulfilled. Yet people are repeating quite freely that this is a Golden Age of Translation,² a second and better Elizabethan Age. And there is some reason for them to do so.

But this applies mainly to translators of poetry. Translators of prose works are usually left in a more vague situation, a sort of indefinite limbo. The remark of F. L. Lucas in 1953 was rather typical: 'in dealing with literature — above all with poetry — pitfalls lurk at every step.' But even in 1968 Patrick Cruttwell was able to write that in prose 'it was assumed (rightly?) less was lost through translation than is lost in poetry'. He was talking of Russian fiction, and in the case of modern languages like Russian, which are relatively little known in the west, translation has been something of a necessity, and the ways of doing it therefore have attracted some attention. But on the whole, as the remarks of Lucas and Cruttwell suggest, translation from prose has been largely ignored, as a theoretical problem, in favour of translation from poetry which has been treated as the norm. 'The problem of translating poetry has been taken somehow as the model for all translation problems, both because of particular pitfalls and a general hopelessness.'³ And this tendency is above all apparent in regard to the classics. That is why T. H. Savory, in the first edition of his book *The Art of Translation*

¹ A Review of *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus* (translated by Betty Radice), Loeb edition, William Heinemann Ltd and Harvard University Press, 1969, 2 volumes, £1.25 each; and Seneca: *Letters from a Stoic* (translated by Robin Campbell), Penguin Classics, 1969, 35p.

² The title of George Steiner's article in *The Sunday Times*, 20 January 1963.

³ John Hollander in *On Translation* (Ed. Reuben A. Brower), 1959 (quotation from Galaxy Edition, 1966, p. 209).

(1957), wrote a chapter 'Translating The Classics' in which only four out of sixteen pages were devoted to prose; and they dealt with it in a somewhat desultory fashion.

The same bias was apparent in a questionnaire on 'The State of Translation' which the periodical *Delos* (National Translation Center, Austin, Texas) circulated to translators and published in 1968. It was encouraging that the thirteen questions included one asking 'is there a difference between translating poetry and prose?' But the replies on the whole showed that little thought had been given to the problem. Twenty of the thirty translators who were interrogated did not answer the question at all. Four said, yes, there is a difference; Mary Renault added that good prose should always be translatable. Three more pointed out the particular difficulties of poetry. Only two said anything worth saying about prose translations. One was Robert Lowell, who saw that they could, on occasion, raise quite special problems. 'For some reason, a faithful, lucid prose translation seems to come nearer to being satisfactory than the same thing in verse. Not always; I would imagine *The Waste Land* might be easier to do than Cicero or Rimbaud's *Saison*, or the end of *Moby Dick*.'¹

This is in line with the summing up of B. Q. Morgan nine years earlier.²

On the whole, criticism of translations of prose centres on accuracy, which is, in theory attainable (Lanier, 1897). Yet even here there are pitfalls, particularly when the great writers of Greece and Rome are to be interpreted (Jowett, 1871), or when differences in folkways (Smith, 1925, Astrof, 1946, Ervin, 1952) offer verbal or spiritual difficulties.³

D. S. Carne Ross, who is the editor of *Delos* and editor-in-chief of *Arion*, brings prose translation much more to the fore, though, in one passage at least, his approach does not perhaps rank the activity quite as high as it might.

In a sense (in *one* sense, not perhaps the most interesting sense) prose translation matters more than verse translation. Although it is in

¹ *Delos*, II, 1968, pp. 46 f.

² *On Translation*, p. 272.

³ e.g. (to quote E. A. Nida) to beat one's breast, like the repentant publican, would be the equivalent, in Chokwe, of patting oneself on the back. 'Truly, truly, I say unto you' would not be much good in Hiligaynon, in which repetition has a weakening effect.

poetry that language is and means more intensely, we read poetry infrequently and then in a special Sunday way that limits its effects on us. This is an age of prose, and it is on prose that our feeling for language is formed — not so much the *Kunstprosa* of the higher fiction, which we must study as though it were poetry, but the everyday stuff on the labels of soup cans and the pages of the dailies and the weeklies and the quarterlies and the paperbacks. And on the translated prose that we read every day.¹

As someone else remarked, this sort of prose has ‘mainly inert figures of daily speech’ which are usually lacking in poetry and present special problems.

But the second of the two substantial replies to the *Delos* questionnaire makes a pointed contribution on a more literary level. This comes from Michael Hamburger, who says: ‘The few prose works that I have translated have been as difficult to render — if not more so — than verse, because their style is highly idiosyncratic. (I am thinking of Baudelaire’s prose poems, of Büchner’s story *Lenz*, and of Hoffmannsthal’s play *The Tower*.)’²

With regard to this more literary type of prose, I judge that the time has now come to offer a blurb for what I have written on the subject (and translated) myself:

In general, the difficulties encountered by translators of prose have received much less attention lately than those faced by translators of poetry, though the two sets of problems are different and equally absorbing. Each activity, for example, is faced with its own peculiar difficulties created by the Latin word order. In prose and poetry this obeys different rules and customs.³

Subsequently I have enlarged on the same point:

The gulfs of time make the task harder still. Scarcely a single ancient Greek word can be matched in English; the emotions and the sounds are an immeasurable distance away. Latin is more deceptive. We recognize words and moods, but they are rarely reliable equivalents. The problem particularly applies to prose translations, an exacting art of which the theory is gravely neglected; there are a thousand words written about verse translation to every one about prose. Yet it is worth considering, for example, how Cicero’s rhetoric slides with

¹ *Delos*, I, 1968, p. 213.

² *Delos*, II, 1968, p. 39.

³ *Cicero: Selected Works* (Penguin Classics), 1960, p. 22.

catastrophic ease into an out-dated English which, being unreadable, cannot be called a suitable rendering.¹

At greater length, my point about Cicero was this: neither in prose nor in poetry can the Latin word-order be rendered into English without extensive transpositions. And the translator of Cicero, in particular, is faced by quite another problem as well. That is to say, he is easily lulled into an entirely misplaced confidence by the superficial resemblance of Cicero's language to a certain outworn kind of English:

*that easy Ciceronian style,
So Latin, yet so English all the while.*

When Alexander Pope wrote that, and even a good deal later, Cicero's abundant and rhythmical prose was by no means alien to contemporary fashion. Now the situation has changed. The translator is still insidiously tempted to utilize these analogies with the English that used to be, and to produce a Ciceronian English. But this is unquestionably not the sort of English which is, or should be, written today. On the contrary, if contemporary readable English is to be written, these blandishments must be resisted and sentences cast in an entirely different mould; to take a single example out of many, a row of rhetorical questions is nowadays scarcely acceptable. In view of the strong temptation which constantly invites the translator to ignore the steady widening of such divergences during the past century and a half, it is in certain respects harder to attempt a version of Cicero than to translate from some language so alien that no such misleading analogies suggest themselves, such as Turkish.²

And there are not only dated or out-dated English versions of Cicero, there are also dateless versions: not in the grand sense of timeless, but in the deplorable sense of *translatorese*. 'In translating from modern languages', says B. Q. Morgan, 'a common failing is "*translatorese*", that queer language-of-the-study that counts words but misses their living force'. But why limit this phenomenon to modern languages? Latin lends itself with appalling facility to *translatorese*.

¹ *Roman Readings* (Pelican), 2nd ed., 1967, p. vii.

² *Cicero: Selected Works*, op. cit., pp. 22 f.

II

The two books I chiefly want to consider in this article are the Loeb *Letters* and *Panegyricus*, of Pliny the Younger, translated by Betty Radice, and the Penguin Classic of Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius*, translated by Robin Campbell. Both of these Latin writers differ very substantially from Cicero in style, but both of them resemble him closely in one respect. That is to say, their Silver Latin is just as difficult as his Golden Age prose to turn into English. Mrs Radice gave some idea of her problem in the Penguin edition of the *Letters*, which is reproduced, with some changes, in the new Loeb volumes.

— Pliny can be elegantly formal, colloquial and conversational, analytically critical or tersely descriptive. He draws on legal language for his jokes with professional friends, quotes the poets in Greek as well as in Latin, and sets himself to describe a scene or a scientific problem in precise terms. No translator can hope to convey such versatility successfully, but a fresh approach can perhaps give a better idea of Pliny's gifts of accurate observation and clear description which put him high among the prose writers of any period.¹

Pliny, says Gareth Morgan, 'is more of a poet than we have been prepared to realize . . . That he is also an antiquarian, a scientist and an administrator alternately optimistic and querulous (I suspect an ulcer) makes him a fiendish problem for a translator.'²

As for Seneca, he is, of course famous, or in these times one should perhaps say notorious, for his rhetorical Point, the model for more than one sort of Elizabethan English style. His letters are crammed with all those incessant, restless, hard-hitting tricks and devices of word and sound which were intended to ward off boredom at all costs but caused Macaulay to break with centuries of admiration and speak of the resemblance of this style to anchovy sauce. What is more, the *Letters* or Epistles of Seneca and Pliny are in each case *literary*: they are barely disguised Essays. And what, to use a classical rhetorical question, could be more alien from the spirit of our times than an Essay? Except a Literary Letter.

So the tasks set themselves by Mrs Radice and Robin Campbell are very substantial and difficult ones. And in my opinion they

¹ *The Letters Of The Younger Pliny*, Penguin Classics, 1963, p. 30.

² *Arion*, vii, 3, 1968, p. 477.

have both handled them well. Obviously, something has been lost. We all know the numerous epigrams indicating that this is inevitable in all translations. Total translations, as George Steiner remarked, are impossible because each represents a complex, historically and collectively determined aggregate of values, proceedings of social conduct, conjectures on life. So translators have to decide what they are going to try and keep, and what they are going to be willing to lose.

One thing that Mrs Radice and Campbell are not willing to lose is readable English.

At the Graduate School of the University of Texas, the editors of *Arion* dismiss the notions of 'accuracy' or 'readability' as 'simple minded'.¹ They are right in one way: the term 'accuracy' needs looking at very closely indeed. But the other half of the antithesis (if that is what it has to be) remains clear-cut — though one could, of course, refine it by asking, readable *by whom*, an investigation which, in regard to translations, has hardly begun. Anyway, readable today.

One interesting question is whether contemporary works and classics ought not, on principle, to be translated into *different* sorts of language — whether, for example, Latin should not be made to sound 'harder and more bronze-like' and more antique than the resources of our own language normally permit. Certainly, as far as atmosphere goes, we must respect the spirit of the work, and the effect it exercised on people living at the time (though this is very often a fairly wide open question), but *not* if it means torturing the English until it is English no longer.

For nearly three hundred years translators have been anxiously asking themselves the question: 'If Pliny (etc.) had been living today, how would he have expressed himself?' This sort of enquiry has the authority of Dryden (Ovid's *Epistles*), though for poetry, and for imitation rather than translation:

I take imitation of an author . . . to be an endeavour of a later poet to write like one who has written before him on the same subject, that is, not to translate his words, or to be confined to his sense, but only to set as a pattern, and to write, as he supposes that author would have done, had he lived in our age, and in our country.

¹ Op. cit., p. 397.

Since then the same yard-stick has been employed, in so far as it can be, for translation as well as for imitation. Possibly this 'if so-and-so were living today' business may sometimes become a little fatuous. 'If my aunt had balls', comments Adam Parry,¹ using a style of controversy which probably has some psychological link with the campaign in favour of more uninhibited and unbowdlerized translations, though that is really quite a different matter. Personally I still prefer the no doubt stuffer tone of my own comment on the same subject: 'such a question has the unreality of other historical has-beens.' Which gives me an opportunity to quote myself yet again. 'Nevertheless, any translator — since he wants people to read what he writes — has to ask himself this question and even attempt, in his own way, to answer it.'²

Robin Campbell defines explicitly the concessions he is prepared to make in order to satisfy this criterion of contemporary readability:

— Reproduction of the style presents, except with ordinary conversational or colloquial prose, formidable problems. The practitioner feels that the attempt is one which should be made . . . Yet the result must never be so unnatural and contrived (unless the original itself clearly set out to obtain such effects) that the reader cannot stomach it. And this consideration has tempered my feeling that the brevity or rhetoric or other elements of Seneca's manner should be closely imitated. . . . In this field of style it is never possible to claim that a translation 'loses nothing' of the original.³

In other words, as Jowett remarked, an English translation has to be in English.

This is very much the attitude that I attempted to defend in 1956.

— In translating in this (Penguin) series the fantastic Apuleius, Robert Graves remarked: 'paradoxically, the effect of oddness is best achieved in convulsed times like the present by writing in as easy and sedate English as is possible'. 'Sedate' is surely not an ambitious enough epithet for a good rendering of Apuleius or Tacitus — or for Graves' own excellent style; but his reminder that twentieth-century English has to be plain is still relevant. No amount of colourful or fanciful

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 412.

² *Tacitus: The Annals of Imperial Rome* (Penguin Classics), 1st ed., 1956, p. 24.

³ Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, pp. 26 f.

language will make the strange personality of Tacitus understandable to contemporary readers, who find rhetoric and the grand style unnatural and unreadable. Today the only faint hope of rendering his complexity lies in as trenchant and astringent a simplicity as the translator can achieve.¹

III

As for Mrs Radice's *Pliny*, she does not explicitly define the stylistic principles on which she has been working. She would probably not quite feel that the epithet 'astringent' which I used for Tacitus is the right word to sum up the peculiar complications of Pliny, any more than it sums up Seneca's various fireworks. But apart from that, she might well find herself in a fair measure of agreement with the sort of ideas I was expressing. Anyway, she, like they, has now come under criticism in *Arion's* survey 'Penguin Classics: a report on two decades'. Gareth Morgan writes as follows:

— The last chapters of the late Mr. de Selincourt's *War with Hannibal* were completed by Mrs. Radice with enough skill and sympathy to make it difficult to recognize the break; so there is no doubt of her competence as a translator. The question raised by her *Letters of The Younger Pliny* is of a different order. A sentence from a famous letter may illuminate the difficulty: — *Ab altero latere nubes atra et horrenda, ignei spiritus tortis vibratisque discursibus rupta, in longas flammaram figuras debiscibat.* At first level, the translation can hardly be faulted. 'On the landward side a fearful black cloud was rent by forked and quivering bursts of flame, and parted to reveal great tongues of fire.' What it does not suggest is that the Latin, though perfectly equipped with the grammar of prose, is more readily intelligible with the visual grammar of poetry. A series of impressions, each haloing its neighbours, has the conventional imposed upon it by an act of syntax. Pliny is more of a poet than we have been prepared to realise (the light-dark, black-gold patterns of these letters repay analysis).²

I referred earlier to Morgan's allusion to the many-sidedness of Pliny. But this 'fiendish problem', he concludes, 'cannot be solved by the current Penguin "evenness", "equability", "sedateness", or what-you-will'. I cannot, obviously, be expected to agree entirely with his assessment, since, not altogether surprisingly in view of my emphasis on readability, my own *Tacitus* is one of the books accused of displaying an excess of the same qualities.

¹ Tacitus, *op. cit.*, p. 24: in the 1971 edition, p. 26, I have preferred 'pungent'.

² *Arion*, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

Certainly, if we are going to be too equable, etc. (let us get away from the word *sedate*), this method is not perfect. Like every other method, it loses something. But let us just imagine that Mrs Radice had produced a considerably pepped-up version of Pliny's admittedly poetic phrase. In English, though not in Pliny's sort of Latin, there would have been a danger of this standing out too jaggedly and rebarbatively from the whole, so that the reader would be stopped short rather than stimulated. Incidentally, such passages are not so common in Pliny, and to call attention to this point and say nothing else about Mrs Radice's translations of him really does not do justice to her general excellence (leaving aside the possibly pedantic objection that Morgan's comment is for some reason tacked on a discussion of Roman *History*).

It may be interesting, however, just to glance at her rendering of this particular passage against two earlier translations. The fine eighteenth-century version by William Melmoth (1746), published in a previous Loeb edition with compressions by W. M. C. Hutchinson (1915) (a disastrous form of collaboration), read as follows: 'On the other side, a black and dreadful cloud bursting out in gusts of igneous serpentine vapour now and again yawned open to reveal long and fantastic flames, resembling flashes of lightning but much larger.'

And this is the translation of J. P. Hieronimus in P. Mackendrick and H. M. Howe's *Classics in Translation* (1952):

On the other side a black and frightful cloud, rent by quivering and twisting paths of fire, gaped open in huge patterns of flames.

Both these versions are about as poetical or unpoetical as Mrs Radice's. The point is that Morgan seems to be asking for something quite new. I think the only constructive way of considering the merits or demerits of the more poetical method which he recommends would be for someone to try it out. It would not be at all easy. After all, as he agrees, a conventional element has been imposed on the original by 'an act of syntax'. Certainly, sacrifice this prose element if you like. As we know, something has got to go, and what he is saying, if I understand him rightly, is that this is one of the things we should throw away. But, as far as I am aware, no one has tried this with

Pliny.¹ Perhaps it might be an impossible task, without making the whole thing *too* uneven.

IV

That is why I have certain reservations about the procedure suggested by Carne-Ross:

I wonder if we are not putting verse and prose too much in different categories, demanding inspiration from the one and accepting mere competence — 'accuracy' — in the other. The verse translator is allowed to take certain liberties in order to get his text off the ground, but the prose translator is still stuck with this 'word-for-word thing' . . .

We have somehow come to assume that if a translator renders the 'sense', a novel will look after itself. In this field the criterion is still what schoolmasters call accuracy, and if a new Florio turned up, the chances are that his manuscript would be sent to a professor of French and rejected. 'Mr. Florio's rendition is idiosyncratic; he seems to be writing a new work based on Montaigne.'²

This is all very welcome in that it takes prose translation seriously, but I am not sure that it leads in exactly the direction we ought to go. Do we really, at this stage, want more Florios and Amyots and Norths? Certainly we want them, very much indeed, in one way. That is to say we need translators who will make a real substantial impact on the general culture of our epoch — indeed that is one of our prime requirements, and it is one that has been conspicuously lacking, at least until the very latest times. But in order to achieve this, in our day and age with its heightened standards of translation, I doubt whether it is necessary for prose translators to take all the liberties which Amyot etc. took and which Carne-Ross seems to want us to bring back. Of course we do not want to be stuck with word-for-word translation. When Dryden was pronouncing his canonical distinction between metaphrase (word-for-word), paraphrase (translation with latitude), and imitation, he declared: 'Tis almost impossible to translate verbally, and well, at the same time. . . . The verbal copier is encumbered with so many difficulties at once that he can never disentangle himself from all.'

¹ Morgan, *Arion*, op. cit., p. 476, suggests that, for Tacitus, K. Wellesley's Penguin *Histories* (1964) have got away from 'all that blessed evenness'.

² *Delos*, I, 1968, pp. 173, 212 f.

Unless we are prepared to take a terribly humble view of the function of translation, we must accept this standpoint and reject Vladimir Nabokov's assertion that 'the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase' — and the doctrine of Edwin and Willa Muir that even to change word order, however unavoidable this may be, is to 'commit an irremediable injury'. Surely not.

So much for the one untenable extreme. At the other end of the spectrum comes imitation, which is outside the scope of this discussion. We are left with paraphrase. As Novalis said, successful translations simply cannot help being *verändernde*, metamorphic. Or as Sir John Denham declared to Sir Richard Fanshaw,

— that servile path thou nobly dost decline
Of tracing word for word, and line for line. —

The question that remains, then, is *how far* from the servile path one ought to be allowed to stray — how loose the paraphrase can legitimately be.

About Scott-Moncrieff, the translator of Proust, Carne-Ross writes:

— People complain of him that he hasn't got this word right or the exact sense of that phrase. Only the worst kind of pedant approaches verse translation in this way now.¹

But surely one does not want to get the *wrong* sense of the word or phrase.

The difficulty arises in an acute form when you have an ancient writer who, although what he said is very important, often just wrote plain badly, like Polybius. The excellent translator who is, I hope, tackling him won't be able to avoid transfiguration altogether, but he will also have to bear in mind that it has been described as the more lasting betrayal even than traduction. However, that is a special case. What we mainly have to consider is the series of ancient writers whose writing varies from good to marvellous. And here the question, surely, is not of improving on their sense, but of knowing what it is. With these writers you can only take liberties if you are quite sure what the liberties are that you are taking. I agree that a good version might well, on occasion, be looser than anything that prose translators have

¹ *Delos*, op. cit., p. 173.

lately allowed themselves, or been allowed, but on one condition: that they *know* what the meaning is, and that they are translating according to a correct interpretation of what the original words signify, and not according to a meaning that they have understood imperfectly or wrongly.

To me, this is the crux of the matter. The recent contributors to *Arion* and *Delos* have made various points, some of them excellent. But too few of them, I feel, have paid much attention to the point I am trying to make here — probably because they want to get away from that over-simplified accuracy-readability controversy. A conspicuous exception is Thomas Gould, who, pointing out that reliable translations of Plato and Aristotle are an absolute cultural necessity for us today, goes to great lengths to discover exactly what they really said and meant.¹ He is a fortunate man. Fewer and fewer people are in a position to conduct rigorous enquiries of this kind. To say such a thing conveys a mellow whiff of hankering after bygone times, and sitting round the port exchanging Horatian tags. All the same, since we are discussing translation, it is painfully relevant. If a translator does not know Greek and Latin (both of which are extremely hard languages) really well, really thoroughly well, is he wasting his and our time altogether trying to translate them?

Delos, in its questionnaire, faced this problem in terms of the procedure which translators of Chinese, for example, are forced to adopt. What they do, evidently, is to work in pairs and collaborate, with one partner good at Chinese and the other good at English. Question nine asked, with regard to translations in general, (i) 'what exactly does a translator who does not know the language of the original offer?' (ii) What does his partner contribute except a trot [crib]? With regard to point (i), Pierre Gascar pointed out that Baudelaire translated Poe, and Nerval translated Goethe, without knowing the original languages very well. But the other recipients of the questionnaire, in so far as they paid any serious attention to this question at all, were predictably, and rightly, not very happy about translators who are not thoroughly familiar with their originals. Dudley Fitts, with certain qualifications about possible happy accidents,

¹ *Delos*, op. cit., pp. 62 ff.

concluded: 'A puritan streak in my make-up persuades me, against my more generous impulses, that a man ought to know something of the language he's translating from.'¹

Pierre Emmanuel was more definite: 'I do not think that a translator who does not know the original can really translate. He mimics in his own rhythm and sometimes with his own twists of language something which remains alien to him. If he has a good musical ear, he will come to the conclusion that the sounds of the original and his own language are worlds apart.'²

In the preceding number of the same periodical it had been concluded that translations of Chinese poetry generally fail because 'the translators, erudite though they may seem to be by virtue of owning a traditional commentary, have no real insight into the classical Chinese language and are *not up on modern linguistic research into it*'.³

Now the problems raised by Greek and Latin on the one hand, and Chinese on the other, are not identical, but they have something in common. Knowledge of ancient Greek is not yet quite as rare as Chinese, and knowledge of Latin still persists on a rather larger scale. But a *good* knowledge of both is obviously rare, and rapidly becoming rarer. I am not talking here about whether this is a good or bad thing for classical teaching in general, since the pros and cons have been discussed at vast length. But from the point of view of translation from the two languages, it does mean that a crisis is visible on the horizon — even in spite of the more fashionable appearance which the art of translation is so fortunately assuming.

The crisis is not yet here, because we still have people with the training of Betty Radice and Robin Campbell. But translators will be needed in the next generation as well, partly to tackle the works not yet done and partly to do what we have been all trying to do all over again — because, as will be clear from some examples collected at the end of this article, the old saw of each generation needing fresh versions is all too true.

The answers to the second part of the question nine in the *Delos* have a marked bearing on this problem. Translators were

¹ *Delos*, II, 1968, p. 35.

² *Delos*, op. cit., p. 34.

³ *Delos*, I, 1968, p. 202.

asked what they thought about the possibility and utility of collaboration between two people, one familiar with the original language and the other good at writing his own. Now this practice, although familiar enough to Sinologists, has hardly ever been tried for Greek and Latin. With a very few remarkable and much discussed exceptions such as Ezra Pound, good classical scholars have usually had the field to themselves, though they often wrote abominable English (in Roman history, until Handford's Penguin *Caesar* (1951), recalls Morgan¹). But nowadays the danger is that the people who take over may write good enough English (though not as good as Pound's) but will be very shaky on their Greek and Latin. So what about trying to marry these two sorts of mind, staggering innovation for the classics though it might be?

Speaking of translations in general, Robert Lowell is very hopeful about collaboration of that kind. He does not believe that one could tell the difference between refurbished trots or cribs and translations done from originals² (perhaps not, but the former type of work, having involved two processes, would need careful checking). W. H. Auden, too, is extremely receptive to this type of collaboration.³ Others are much less so. Still, it ought to be tried for Greek and Latin. Indeed it will *have* to be, since the odds against the same people knowing the dead languages really well and writing good English are going to become very small.

V

Meanwhile let us return to the translations of Pliny and Seneca which prompted this discussion. I should like to give just a few examples to show what they are like. These will also demonstrate that there has, in fact, been a good long move in the right direction during the past half century. I am not now, for the most part, speaking of accuracy. In so far as that is concerned, although difficult writers like Pliny and Seneca will obviously raise controversial problems, Mrs Radice and Campbell are, by and large, capable of holding their own. But the improvement I am referring to relates to style.

¹ *Arion*, op. cit., p. 472.

² *Delos*, II, 1968, p. 47.

³ *Delos*, op. cit., p. 30.

I mentioned Mrs Radice's version of Pliny's account of how the Vesuvius eruption seemed to him. Here is a passage from Pliny's other letter on the subject, describing the visit of his uncle, Pliny the elder, to the stricken area:

*Tum se quieti dedit et quievit verissimo quidem somno; nam meatus animae, qui illi propter amplitudinem corporis gravior et sonantior erat, ab iis qui limine obversabantur audiebatur.*¹

Mrs Radice renders this as follows:

Then he went to rest and certainly slept, for as he was a stout man his breathing was rather loud and heavy and could be heard by people coming and going outside his door.

Is 'stout' a little bit too direct for *amplitudo corporis*? I don't think so, current English being what it is — indeed some would prefer 'fat' — but J. P. Hieronimus (1952) and J. M. Todd (1955, but 'based on J. G. Frazer') preferred to speak of his 'bulk'. Anyway Canon Cruttwell's euphemism in his *History of Roman Literature* (1877) was inexcusable:

Then he retired to rest, and there can be no doubt that he slept, since the sound of his breathing (which a broad chest made deep and resonant) was clearly heard by those watching at the door.

The same translators, like many others, have had a go at Pliny's famous exchange of letters with Trajan. The emperor's reply about how to treat the Christians included the following passage:

*Sine auctore vero propositi libelli in nullo crimine locum habere debent. Nam et pessimi exempli nec nostri saeculi est.*²

This is Betty Radice's version:

But pamphlets circulated anonymously must play no part in any accusation. They create the worst sort of precedent and are quite out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

Here are L. A. and R. W. L. Wilding (1955) on the second sentence: 'That would be the worst of precedents and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.'

J. P. Hieronimus offered the following: 'It is of an abominable tendency, and not consonant with our enlightened age.' 'Consonant' sounds rather quirky for an imperial dispatch, though

¹ Pliny, *Letters*, vi, 16, 13.

² Pliny, *Letters*, x, 97, 2.

not quite so outdated as Melmoth's 'without the accuser's name subscribed'.

And here again is Cruttwell: 'No weight whatever should be attached to anonymous communications; they are no Roman way of dealing, and are altogether reprehensible.'

But what is he saying? Surely the second clause contains a double mistranslation. A few years later, when the need for an improved kind of translation was becoming more widely accepted, it is doubtful whether this could have happened. But perhaps the Canon, who after all was writing a history of Latin literature and not a complete translation, was quoting from memory.

However, back to style. Sometimes there are delicate questions of English sounds, about which tastes have changed and are still changing. When Pliny writes about his uncle's eagerness to make good use of every moment, he concludes: *tanta erat parsimonia temporis*. Cruttwell rendered 'so frugal was he of his time'. That sounds old-fashioned to us, but the Wildings' rendering 'such was his miserliness with time' also has an unnatural ring. Mrs Radice prefers 'to such lengths did he carry his passion for saving time'. That is longer, but the sentence reads better.

And here is Pliny writing to his friend Pompeius Saturninus:

Requiris quid agam. Quae nosti. Distingor officio, amicis deservio, studeo interdum, quod non interdum sed solum semperque facere, non audeo dicere rectius, certe beatius erat.¹

Betty Radice chooses to render the passage as follows:

You want my news, but there is nothing new to tell; I am involved in public duties, active on behalf of my friends, and occasionally doing some work of my own. If I could describe the work as exclusive and continuous I should certainly be happier, though I would not like to say my time would be better spent.

Here, on the other hand, is the translation of the same passage by Professor J. Wight Duff:

What am I doing, you ask. What you wot of. I'm hard pressed with official duty; I've friends to attend to; sometimes I study, the thing to do which, not 'sometimes' but solely and continuously, would be, I don't dare to say more virtuous, but surely more welcome.

¹ Pliny, *Letters*, vii, 15.

The last sentence flows much more naturally in Mrs Radice's version. But what is really quite extraordinary is that Professor Wight Duff used the glaring archaism 'wot'. Admittedly, like Cruttwell, he was not translating the works of Pliny seriously, and was only citing a few passages in his *Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age* (1927). All the same, I find it a chastening thought that I was already at school when a book could still be published in which 'wot' was considered a suitable word for a prose translation. After all, T. E. Brown, who indicated that God wots a garden to be a lovesome thing, died in 1897. It is sometimes said that things written in the English language only really begin to look queer when they are more than fifty years old. But Professor Wight Duff reveals that he had already started on his work before the first world war, so perhaps this was one of the earlier bits. Presumably, though misguidedly, he felt that Pliny's contraction *nosti* warranted the quaint touch. *But it is a great relief that this sort of thing has gone.*

A word or two must be added about what is quite new in Mrs Radice's Loeb volumes, namely her translation of the *Panegyricus*, which did not appear in the Penguin Pliny. This curious work sets the translator a terrific problem. It has been variously described as nauseously flattering, ludicrously artificial, obscure, over-long, a stupefying plethora of eulogistic verbiage tediously straining after antithesis, etc. Ought the translator to bring out these faults or try to make his or her version sound as appealing as possible? — since the original, in its way, was no doubt a success. Equally or even more serious is the fact that the whole conception of a panegyric is totally alien today. It is true that I have heard wildly eulogistic speeches in parts of the Middle East. But one cannot imagine anyone addressing Edward Heath in such terms. Here is Pliny praising Trajan:

For my part, I believe I have formed this impression of the Father of us all as much from the manner of his delivery as from the words he has said. Only consider the seriousness of his sentiments, the unaffected candour of his words, the assurance in his voice and decision in his countenance, and the complete sincerity of his gaze, pose and gestures, in fact of his entire person!

That was Betty Radice's version; and this is the original:

Equidem hunc parentis publici sensum cum ex oratione eius tum

pronuntiatione ipsa perspexisse videor. Quae enim illa gravitas sententiarum, quam inadfectata veritas verborum, quae adseveratio in voce, quae afirmatio in vultu, quanta in oculis habitu gestu, toto denique corpore fides!¹

All that can be said is that Mrs Radice has given us a useful and well-written translation, in as effective terms as possible, of this weird but historically important production. She has decided, in accordance with the principles announced above, not to be too epigrammatic with epigrams in order to avoid making the work more indigestible still. This is the sort of thing. 'Imperaturus omnibus eligi debet ex omnibus': 'If he is destined to rule the people, one and all, he must be chosen from among them all.'

'Haec arx inaccessa, hoc inexpugnabile munimentum non eger'; 'the sole citadel without access, the only defences which can never be breached, are — never to need them'.

'Te ad sidera tollit humus ista communis et confusa principis vestigia': 'You are lifted to the heavens by the very ground we all tread, where your imperial footsteps are mingled with our own.'

'Scis enim praecipuum esse indicium non magni principis magnos libertos': 'For you know that the chief indication of weakness in a ruler is the power of his freedmen.'

Here, incidentally, I am not sure that Wight Duff was not better, because he does not lose the antithesis:

'You know that greatness in freedmen is the chief mark of littleness in a prince.' But he was not translating the whole thing, and the Radice version of the entire speech will clearly hold the field for a long time.

VI

Much the same applies to Campbell's Seneca. Admittedly I don't feel that for 'O hominem calamitosum',² 'What a sorry wretch of a man!' is a great masterpiece, though it is less lifeless than Moses Hadas' 'Ah, a disaster of a man!' (1958).

And then Seneca says: 'Nonne tibi videbitur stultissimus omnium, qui flebit, quod ante annos mille non vixerit?'³

¹ Pliny, *Panegyricus*, LXVII, 1 f.

² Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, LXXXVI, 11.

³ Op. cit., LXXVII, 11.

Here is Campbell: 'Wouldn't you think a man a prize fool if he burst into tears because he didn't live a thousand years ago?'

The Wildings offered this version:

'Would you not consider that man to be the most foolish of all men, who weeps because he was not alive a thousand years ago?'

Again Campbell's 'prize fool' is not perhaps the happiest colloquialism, though it avoids the other version's dangerous approach towards *translatorese*.

Campbell's quality is shown to better effect in his treatment of Seneca's liberal attitude towards slaves.

Deinde eiusdem arrogantiae proverbium iactatur, totidem hostes esse quot servos. Non habemus illos hostes, sed facimus. Alia interim crudelia, inhumana praetereo, quod ne tamquam hominibus quidem, sed tanquam iumentis abutimur, quod cum ad cenandum discubimus, alius sputa deterget, alius reliquias temulentorum subditus colligit...¹

Campbell's translation runs as follows:

It is just this high-handed treatment which is responsible for the frequently heard saying, 'You've as many enemies as slaves'. They are not our enemies when we acquire them; we make them so. For the moment I pass over other instances of our harsh and inhuman behaviour, the way we abuse them as if they were beasts of burden instead of human beings, the way for example, from the time we take our places on the dinner couches, one of them mops up the spittle and another stationed at the foot of the couch collects up the 'leavings' of the drunken diners.

This was E. Phillips Barker (1932) on the same passage:

For the moment I waive all mention of other cruelties and inhumanities — of the fact that we treat them in ways which would be an abuse even of beasts of draught, let alone human beings. Whenever we take our place at table, should we drop saliva, there's a man to wipe it away; another goes down and gathers up the leavings of a drunken diner.

'Should we drop saliva' is a phrase well left behind, and there are other stiffnesses, too, which the more modern version has avoided. Perhaps Barker put them in on purpose, to give his versions a sort of literary and studious air? But he also went in sometimes for colloquialisms. These are justifiable in theory, because Seneca also uses them, but they do provide a warning against trying to be too much 'with it'. For example, Seneca is talking about the player of some ball game or other in a public

¹ *Op. cit.*, XLVII, 5.

bath. 'Si vero pilicrepus supervenit et numerare coepit pilas, actum est'.¹ Barker rendered this as follows: 'But if a tennis professional comes along and starts scoring the strokes, all's up.'

Incidentally, I doubt if a *pilicrepus* was very like any tennis professional I have ever seen; Campbell is wiser to talk just of a ball player. And does one 'score the strokes'? Possibly. But the main point is that nobody says, nowadays at any rate, 'all's up'. (Did one ever? To judge by many a bad translation of Plautus 'It's all up with me' was a commoner form). However, I foresee that Campbell's 'actum est' will also very soon be overtaken by time because he renders it by 'that's the end', which although belonging to a more recent vintage of slang has just as impermanent an air.

His version of Seneca's traditional meditations about the human body is more successful:

. . . Corporis mei, quod equidem non aliter adspicio quam vinculum aliquod libertati meae circumdatum: hoc itaque oppono fortunae, in quo resistant, nec per illud ad me ullum transire vulnus sino. Quicquid in me potest iniuriam pati, hoc est. In hoc obnoxio domicilio animus liber habitat. Numquam me caro ista compellet ad metum, numquam ad indignam bono simulationem.²

This is Campbell's interpretation:

So far as I am concerned my body is nothing more or less than a fetter on my freedom. I place it squarely in the path of fortune, letting her expend her onslaught on it, not allowing any blow to get through it to my actual self. For that body is all that is vulnerable about me: within this dwelling so liable to injury there lives a spirit that is free. Never shall that flesh compel me to feel fear, never shall it drive me to any pretence unworthy of a good man; never shall I tell a lie out of consideration for this petty body.

Here, on the other hand, was the version quoted in Francis Holland's *Seneca* (1920):

My body I regard but as a chain by which my liberty is fettered. I offer it therefore to Fortune as an object for her attacks; nor through this shield do I allow myself to be pierced. In this is all my vulnerable part; this frail and exposed house does my soul inhabit inviolate. This flesh shall never constrain me to fear or unworthy stimulation. Let me never lie for the sake of this poor carcase.

¹ *Op. cit.*, LVI, 2.

² *Op. cit.*, LXV, 21 f.

That is fairly exalted stuff, indeed too exalted for nowadays, especially in the middle reaches of the passage. The original is by no means pedestrian Latin, but delayed quasi-Victorian elevation is not the answer, for us anyway. And by the same token the quotation 'Non sum uni angulo natus, patria mea totus hic mundus est' is better translated by 'I wasn't born for one particular corner: the whole world's my home country' (Campbell) than by 'I am not born for a single cranny; this whole universe is my fatherland' (M. Hadas) or 'I am not born for any one corner of the universe; this whole world is my country' (R. M. Gummere, Loeb edition, 1917-25). Better because whatever the peculiarities of Seneca's Latin we do not want to say 'unto' or talk of crannies or fatherlands. Better, that is to say, because it is more natural English.

Certainly, by aiming at natural English something is lost. But it seems to me any alternative philosophy of Latin prose translation is going to lose even more. But perhaps someone will give a practical demonstration to the contrary, and show I am wrong. At least I very much hope they will try to.

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The July issue will be devoted to Scottish Literature and will contain 'The Four Winds of Love' by S. F. Sanderson. Other articles will mark the Scott bicentenary; they will include 'Scott: the ballad novelist' by G. S. Fraser; 'Scott's biographers' by Robert Speaight; 'The Great Reviser; or the Unknown Scott' by G. A. M. Wood; 'Feast and Structure in *The Bride of Lammermoor*' by Douglas Brooks; and 'Nicol, Scott and the Ballad Collectors' by David Buchan. A special feature of this issue will be the inclusion of new poems by Scottish poets. Among those whose work will be included are: D. M. Black; George Mackay Brown; George Bruce; Stewart Conn; W. S. Graham; Robin Hamilton; Alan Jackson; Maurice Lindsay; George MacBeth; Norman MacCaig; Alastair MacLean; Hugh McDiarmid; Edwin Morgan; Tom Scott; Iain Crichton Smith; Sydney Goodsir Smith; and Robert Garioch Sutherland.