

## Beginning the Translation

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I shall soon be quite finished at last in spite of all. Perhaps next month. And then I shall begin again. And so, *comment c'est, commencer?* What is it like to begin (with)? *Dis, Joe, comment c'est?* Eh, Joe, what's it like?

It has already begun before I begin the translation. I have been contacted by a commissioning editor I will probably never meet, and spoken to a desk editor with whom I will have a curiously intense relationship at a distance. The intensity is of course illusory and partly transferential. I will forget that she or he will be dealing with many other projects too, and will be piqued when my letters are not answered immediately. I know, but.... We've discussed terms and I have signed a contract. I have received an advance. I am unlikely to have any direct contact with the author unless serious problems arise. Authors vary. Some insist on seeing the translation before publication, others seem not to care too much, perhaps because they are simply too busy. And contacting an author over a translation can be both frustrating and disappointing. Some have good English and can make useful suggestions; others have no English and therefore no suggestions to make. The worst are those who think their English is better than it is. It is always not easy to explain, ever so politely, that they are wrong. My own experience of being translated – the translator translated – was odd but left me fairly cool about the actual translation.<sup>1</sup> Obviously I was delighted that the book had been translated, but could not bring myself to read much of the French (not that there was enough time to do so properly). I had done my job, and Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat did his. He's good at it. There was only one difficulty: his translation of my acknowledgement accidentally (?) transformed the gender of my partner and, by implication, my sexual orientation. That did have to be corrected; the sexual politics of writing a biography of Foucault are bad enough without such complications.

I have read the book I am about to begin. Obviously, you might say. Yes, but it is surprisingly difficult to read a book you are about to translate and to bracket out what lies ahead. The temptation is to concentrate on potential difficulties, to begin to formulate a rough version, to begin what I call the game of hunt the quotation. It is hard to concentrate on just reading, on not beginning, on not anticipating the familiarity that will develop, on just reading as though this were any other book. A related problem is that it eventually becomes difficult to read anything written in French without wondering about how I would begin to translate it. Being a translator can seriously interfere with the pleasure of the text, but it affords pleasures of its

own. In the long term, being a translator also distorts your perception of time. I work outside the academic timescape of terms, semesters and years. I may not remember *when* something happened; I will remember *what* I was translating.

I have worked as a translator for a long time. I have done this so often. I have begun the translation of the book twenty-six times now, and another seventy-six translations if I include all the essays and articles in the body-count. I work from French to English, and never in the opposite direction though I do on occasion write in French. Translating into a language that is not your own is potentially dangerous. No matter how good your French or German, you will not have a full native competence and the translation is unlikely to read well. It may well be the case that language is the house of being but the claim is so general as to be at once unverifiable and unfalsifiable. Perhaps it would be truer to say that we live in different rooms of the same house. In practice, poetically dwelt Heidegger in German and Greek. For me, French is a familiar and desirable second home, but I work at home and live in English.

I work mainly in the human sciences (sociology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, art history, literary theory), and this makes me a ‘literary’ translator, as opposed to a ‘technical’ translator who works on reports on pre-stressed concrete and such delights (and who is much more highly paid). I do not know who invented this distinction, but it was obviously someone who never tried to come to grips with the technicalities of psychoanalytic terminology, or to remember the distinction between an ideal ego and an ego-ideal.

Working from home has both advantages and disadvantages. This is one of the few jobs that allows you to listen to Miles Davis and Dusty Springfield while you work. It is comfortable, but my study can feel like a prison house of language. It can seem that the books are the only reality. A walk to the shops can become a rare treat. I will be paid a flat fee, which is probably for the best as no one will ever grow rich on the royalties from translations of academic works on, say, sociology. The work is precarious and so irregular that it is difficult to plan ahead. An unexpected call or letter, and it begins again. And like anyone who works freelance, I work with the deep fear that, one day, it will not begin again. The other risk is that there will be too much work at once. Translating one book can be difficult; trying to translate two at once borders on the suicidal. But it is *so* hard to say ‘No.’ The fear of beginning is matched only by the fear that I will never begin again.

And so to begin at last, again. The book sits on my desk: almost four hundred pages of quite densely printed French, still smelling of new paper. That will not last. I estimate the length to be one hundred and forty thousand words. This is important; my unit of payment is one thousand words, and yes at last I shall be paid. In the meantime, the almost four hundred pages will eventually become a pile of print-out – probably almost five hundred sheets. They will become pages of proofs, and finally about four hundred pages of English book. There is very little difference between the length of a French original and an English translation. (Matters are very different where German is concerned; all those compounds). I have done this so often that beginning ought to be easy – routine. And in a sense it is routine, but never easy.

It is not simply that there are no easy translations (though that is axiomatic). Every time I begin a new translation, it is the length of what is to come that frightens me, makes me afraid to begin. And every time I complete a book-translation, I know that I was right to be afraid. No course in translation studies can communicate that fear. I have four months, perhaps six if the publisher's schedule is not too tight. That schedule is itself determined by the contract with the French publisher, which may specify that the translation must appear within a given time limit. Production schedules are already being drawn up, and someone somewhere is no doubt already playing with ideas for the jacket design, the typeface, the paper, the advance notice for the catalogue. The publicity and sales departments will be gearing up. I work alone, but also as part of the machine that will publish one hundred thousand titles a year, and it is already in motion. Time to begin.

My relationship with the text will be one of truly, deeply, madly Kleinian ambivalence. I will love it and hate it, make it into a good book and a bad book, identify with it and loathe it. This will be the best book on its subject, and the worst. And I will live alone with it. This is a loneliness of which long-distance runners know nothing. Hence the transference relationship with the desk-editor: I am alone with this, but there has to be someone out there. Obviously, I will talk about the translation endlessly, no doubt to the irritation of my partner. I will discuss some of the problems with her – she too is a French specialist. It can help, but unless you are actually collaborating with someone on a translation, discussions tend to be so fragmentary that they are not a great help. Translators do collaborate, but I have never understood how they avoid coming to blows. When it comes to the tense endgame of the final draft, all the decisions and responsibilities will be mine, all mine, and mine alone. The basic problem is that of the unit of translation: not the word, not the sentence, nor even the paragraph. Rather like the world that is all that is the case, the unit of translation is all that is the book. My response to suggestions as to what something 'means' tends to be: 'Yes, but you don't see; thirty pages later, it "means" not quite the same.' I am not beginning to translate a series of words or discrete units, but the unity of the book. And yet, as Iser remarks of the phenomenology of reading, that extended unity is impossible to grasp or possess in its entirety; reading is a matter of renegotiating a relationship with a book that changes as it is read.<sup>2</sup> The unit of translation is the book, but it is quite impossible to translate it as a unit; it has to be translated as a sequence of sub-units. Perhaps that is why it is so difficult to begin (with) knowing how long it is.

So *commencer*, to begin. It begins not with an invocation of St Jerome and nor yet with a perusal of the now-mountainous literature on translation theory. I will not think much today about the signifier or about Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, and I will not reread Benjamin on the task of the translator. There is no time. Four months, six months. In my more romantic moments, I think of the great pianist Cecil Taylor (who, in his capacity as Professor of Performing Arts in an American university, once suspended all his students for lack of seriousness). Taylor walks on to the platform looking like a cross between a rapper and a pirate. Dreadlocks flapping, he circles the piano, singing softly, almost dancing and seeming strangely apprehensive. Eventually he will sit and attack it in a pyrotechnic and percussive display of improvisation that will last for up to an hour. I am no pianist,

but I think I know what he feels as he begins to begin. And when I begin, it will last much longer than Taylor's performance. As a fragment of translation-time, an hour is so short as to be non-existent. Translation-time is measured in words and pages, not hours and minutes.

Whilst the text is the unit of translation, it is not a self-contained monad. For any translator, intertextuality is no theoretical concept, but the stuff of day to day work. It needs no Kristeva to tell a translator that any text opens on to an infinity. Or rather, more than one infinity. As the game of hunt the quotation will show, there are other texts involved here. At any given moment, at least two languages are in play and I am playing with both. Paradoxically, the source language is less of a problem than the target language. Any translator is expected to understand the French; the problem is bringing it across – literally *translating* it – the Channel into English. This is partly because all writing works largely through connotation and because, as Barthes has it, connotations are all the meanings that are not in the dictionary or the grammar of the language in which a text is written.<sup>3</sup> Lexicographers are fallible, and so are their dictionaries. They never capture all the words, all the meanings. Dictionaries are inevitably out of date, often out of touch with shifts of register. A French author who worries about *insécurité* is not, *pace* my battered *Collins-Robert*, likely to be worried about an abstract 'insecurity'. Depending on his politics, he may be worrying about the break down of law and order in the suburbs, or about the number of Arabs and blacks in the métro, but not about something as vague as insecurity. How to translate his feeling or perception of *insécurité* is something else. That a translator is expected to understand the source language goes without saying. I have near-native competence in French, which is to say that a Parisian will take me for a provincial, and a provincial for a Parisian. As the saying goes, 'I learned French' at school, at university, in France, from teachers, books and girlfriends, in bars and in shops. I suspect that the only way to learn that 'a bobble' is '*un chouchou*' is to read the packaging when you buy one for your daughter to wear in her hair (and unless you have a young daughter, you are unlikely to know or need to know what a bobble/*chouchou* is in the first place). The past tense is deceptive. No one 'has' learned a language. Learning a language never ends. A dictionary will tell you that '*le bogue*' (or sometimes '*la bogue*') is French for 'bug',<sup>4</sup> but not that it has come to be the Gallic variety of the millennium bug itself, or that *bugger* is what computers might do when it strikes. And when some dictionary does record the usage, it will be too late (and much too early) to use it. An advert in the daily *Libération* memorably asked: '*Big Ben va-t-elle bugger en l'an 2000?*'. *Traducteur, traduisez*, if you can ('Will Big Ben crash in the year 2000?'. Pity to lose the alliteration)<sup>5</sup> It would have to be *Libération*. The arcane and neologistic vocabulary of that paper's rock reviews taxes the competence of anyone – native and near-native alike – over the age of twenty and makes *New Musical Express* look like a tract from the Campaign for Plain English. It is English that is the problem here; the signifier 'millennium bug' has yet to generate a verb and when it does, it will surely not be 'to bugger'. Of course dictionaries are useful, even indispensable but they are neither infallible nor complete. They tend to be poor on just those technical vocabularies I have to work on. No one will ever learn much from a dictionary about translating a discussion of 'the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall'. A dictionary is unlikely to explain that *plus-valeur* is 'surplus value' and not 'plus-value' or 'value-added', that *force de travail*

is 'labour-power' and not 'the work force'; there is no alternative to reading Marx. And that is not the *raison d'être* of a dictionary. A dictionary serves mainly as a memory bank, as a tool that reminds me of what I have forgotten or cannot remember. Much of the time, I have to work beyond the dictionary, with the meanings it does not record.

Like any reader, I learn and I forget. Part of the task of the translator is to master whole lexical areas such as psychoanalytic French, marxist French, literary-critical French, and so on, and to recall that psychoanalytic French and marxist French (and English) roam through very different semantic fields when they speak of 'repression'. In order to translate a book on the Soviet military system (which argued in passing that the GDR's army would be with us for a long time to come, and was published just as the GDR itself passed away; never trust a military planner), I acquired a working knowledge of the vocabulary of weapons systems and once even knew the French for 'sabot-discarding armour-piercing rounds' – a particularly gruesome form of anti-tank ordnance. I no longer know the term and could not use it in conversation should I ever visit a French tank regiment, but I would recognize it anywhere. Translating a book on Taylorism and industrialization gave me an unexpected apprenticeship in the lexicon pertaining to the innards of power-looms ('non-technical', indeed). I no longer have the active knowledge that would allow me to discuss them in French, but I could reactivate the passive knowledge of recognition. In a way, it is the same with the books. Immediately after finishing a translation, I feel that I could recite the text word for word, but the memory of it will fade until I have almost forgotten working on it. But I will still recognize a quotation from it, even/especially an unacknowledged quotation. The unconscious is not structured like a language. It is a hard disk.

And so to begin, at last, again. And to do so at the obvious place. The first sentence is always a problem, but there is no point in lingering over it. No point, and no time. My first version of the translation will go down quickly, probably too quickly. I will leave difficult passages in French, ignore most of the quotations and references. I need words on paper, crude, approximate words. On a good day, five thousand words of rough. It is tiring. Anyone who thinks that this is a leisurely occupation should spend six or more hours at a word processor with their fingers and back aching. When I read the draft, I can *see* when the concentration went and the tiredness set in. This first version will no doubt look almost unreadable to anyone else. It will be full of typos, sentences that do not end and have no verbs, paragraphs that shift languages half-way through, and will resemble a language which, in its natural state, is spoken only on the Goodwin Sands at low tide. This will become a palimpsest of hand-written additions, corrections and cross-references, plus the odd marginal obscenity.

The reason for working so fast at this stage is that I need to have a version to work on: a good translation will not necessarily result from a long meditation on the first paragraph, and then the second, and then.... I need to have a hold, even a loose hold, on as much of the text as possible. It is of course impossible to do that. Iser is quite right. A reader negotiates and renegotiates with the possibilities that are opened up and closed off by the narrative. And, given that any text is something that unfolds

through time, translators do something very similar. They read, so closely that the intimacy with the text borders on the erotic.

Problems begin to emerge at a very early stage, and sometimes there is no solution to them. *'Le sujet... il'* is quite banal. 'The subject... he' is also banal, and offensive in some quarters. In some contexts, 'The subject... she' might be possible, but not in all. 'S/he' or 'she/he' might work once, but is so cumbersome that it cannot be used again and again. This time, the problem is the French, a language in which the 'rights of man' (*'droits de l'homme'*) are constitutionally guaranteed and linguistically acceptable, and in which the expression *droits humains* does not exist. It was, after all, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen that was adopted during the Revolution. In historical context, it has to be 'rights of man'; elsewhere, 'human rights' is appropriate. Which leaves the problem of 'the subject... he'. A feminist copy-editor might object to this. A French author might object to any changes and complain: 'American feminism... has taken political correctness so far that if you send an article in English to most American journals, they will systematically correct your text (even if it deals with facts dating from the eighteenth century) so as to remove any trace of so-called grammatical sexism.'<sup>6</sup> He goes on to express surprise that he receives communications on headed paper which refers to the 'chair' of a department and avoids the sexist 'chairman'. French philosophers, sociologists and psychoanalysts, many of whom take the view that political correctness is an anti-democratic plot hatched by demonic American feminists, continue to use 'man' in its so-called universalist sense, and do not take kindly to being told that this does not conform to current English usage. It is obviously possible to use the paraphrastic 'human beings' or 'people', but not in all contexts, and it is probably wise not to signal the quiet changes to some authors (or not until it is too late). All of which leaves the problem of 'the subject... he' unresolved. Grammatical gender creates problems of a different order. The availability in French of gender-inflected demonstratives means that whole sentences and even paragraphs can be constructed around oppositions between *ceux-ci*, *celles-là*, *celui-ci* and *celle-ci*. Constructing such sentences is a minor art form, and so is reading them. Translating them is a good way to get a headache. 'The former/the latter' will work in a simple sentence, but too many former/latters quickly become tiresome, not to say unreadable. With longer sentences, the solution is to break them up and reinstate the nouns. The sentence is not the unit of translation, and parts of speech do not always remain the same when they cross the linguistic Channel. Nor do tenses. French can use the present indicative in a past sense (*'en 1914, il va à'* for 'In 1914, he went to'; a typical example might be the chronology appended to an exhibition catalogue), but not English. And there is of course – and sadly – no equivalent to the delicious French conditional, which can be used to insinuate that a Government Minister is (*serait*) an adulterous thief who beats his children without constituting grounds for legal action.

Once I have completed a first draft, I will begin again: *fin*, again. The work now becomes much harder, the concentration more intense, and so too the pleasures. Everything has to be checked against the original. It is alarmingly easy to miss something, especially when the paragraphs are long. The eye slips as you look from screen to text and back again and you've skipped five lines or more. Footnotes get out of order. Names have been misspelled or confused. Sentences may have to be

taken apart and reassembled with their clauses in a different order. I correct the text and myself again and again. This is the stage when the dictionaries come into their own: French dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, English dictionaries, sometimes a pictorial dictionary for the names of physical objects. This is the time for trying to remember how to spell 'Nietzsche', and to remember that the Pope is called 'John Paul' and not 'Jean Paul'. This is the time to recall the distinction between *la politique* and *le politique* (politics or policy, and the political, respectively), and, should the need arise, to negotiate the slippery differences between French and English transliterations of Russian (Yeltsin is known to the French as 'Elstine', and Russian place names are the stuff of nightmares). Acronyms have to be sorted out to ensure that it is the UN and NATO that are going to intervene in wherever it is this time, and not 'L'ONU' and OTAN. Again, the unit of translation is the whole text and I will not concentrate on completely finishing one sentence, paragraph or chapter at a time; I will do that in the endgame. I may not be able to hold the entire text, but I can hold enough of it to know that the end may alter the sense of the beginning, that the obscurities of an early chapter may be explained by a later one. At this stage, I am working *in* the translation, inside it, moving within it and almost totally obsessed with it. Constantly moving between two (or more) languages, I work on both, in both, understanding and reading one, and almost-writing the other. Translating is reading, but it is not really writing as it means working under quite strict constraints. All translators take liberties at some point, but they are not at liberty to do anything. The satisfaction is not the same as that afforded by free writing; this is an almost-writing.

It is now time to begin playing hunt the quotation. A minor clause in my contract requires me to 'supply cross-references to, and quotations from, any English edition of works cited'. 'Any' means 'any existing', and not 'any available'. It sounds so simple, but a quotation proves to be every bit as queer as Marx's commodity. 'Any English edition....'. Finding out whether there is or is not any English edition is a task in itself. There is no standard data-base dealing with translations. No one catalogues them. That is how unimportant translations are deemed to be, even though, for most of us, there would no Bible, no Homer, no Tolstoy without translators. The *TLS* can review translations without mentioning the translator; translations are still sometimes published without the translator being named. That is a different problem, a different story (and a long one, to be told another day). For the moment, the problem is to find that any English edition. UNESCO does publish an international index of translations, but it is not complete and is always years out of date; its compilers must lead frustrating lives. And so the game of hunt the quotation begins, the problem being just where to begin it. With library catalogues, publishers' catalogues, bibliographies, footnotes to biographies... Having found 'any English edition', I can begin the game proper by trying to match the French quotation to the English. The obvious way to do so is the reference supplied by the author. If there *is* a reference; the real problems begin when you are faced with a quotation attributed simply to 'Freud'. The Standard Edition of Freud runs to twenty-four volumes. And I have particularly fond memories of the psychoanalyst who attributed a quotation to 'Proust' (thirteen volumes). When I asked if he could possibly be more specific, he 'couldn't remember' (*sic*: this *was* a psychoanalyst, after all) where it was from. Actually, finding that one was easier than it sounds. There are only so many passages in Proust that describe young girls in summer dresses running along a dyke.

Fine, this time it is a biblical quotation and the author has given the reference as 'John XIII: 36': 'Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now'. It does not match the French original. The quotation is in fact Matthew XVI: 24: 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself'. There are, it would seem, advantages in having been taught at school by Methodists and even Primitive Methodists (who have, I believed, either evolved or died out). Who'd have thought it? Everyone who writes sometimes gets a quotation or a reference wrong. Part of the task of the translator is to get them right. And so, I settle down to scan the pages of Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (again) in the hope of finding half a sentence that looks at least vaguely like half a French sentence. It has been worse. Once it was Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers*. Playing hunt the quotation involves a form of reading like no other, unless it is the nightmare that is proof reading. I have read long sections of *Joseph and his Brothers* literally word by word, and know nothing about it because that is how I read it. Read for meaning when you are playing hunt the quotation, and you will not win the game. Assuming that I can find the reference in 'any English edition', it may have to be modified to fit the rest of the context. A lot of differences can creep in between the original German, the French translation and the French author's interpretation of the 'any French edition' he or she has used. And if I can't find it? The quotation is from an essay on fascism by Ian Kershaw, published in translation in a French journal which has seen fit to supply no 'original' reference. Back to the library. No such title in any of the books I can find by Kershaw. Bibliographical patience eventually turns up a reference to an article with the right title in Volume 23 of the *Tel Aviv Jahrbuch für deutsch Geschichte*. And no, the library has no holdings of that journal. Panic, but I am not going to go to Tel Aviv. The only real solution is to paraphrase the quotation, delete the quotation marks and give as accurate a reference as possible. It is not a happy solution and it does not make for a happy translator, but as Wittgenstein almost puts it in the *Tractatus*, 'The limits of the library mean the limits...'. And unlike the Library of Babel, the Brotherton Library of the University of Leeds is not coextensive with the universe.

Quotations come queerer than this. There is no Standard Edition of Freud in French and some texts, notably the 'Papers on Metapsychology' exist in numerous versions produced by numerous hands over many years.<sup>7</sup> It is often impossible to tell just which version is being used by, say Lacan (who also uses his own translations on occasion, and Lacan's German was not above suspicion). The French version is a translation. The meaning of whole sentences may depend on how a particular word has been rendered, and the French translator's lexical choices may not accord with those of his English counterpart. There is not really a set of strict equivalences between psychoanalytic terminology in French, English and German. A French quotation from Freud may include the terms *désir* and *pulsion*, which are equivalent to the German *Wunsch* and *Trieb*. A glance at the Standard Edition or the indispensable *Language of Psychoanalysis* immediately throws up problems.<sup>8</sup> Strachey has used 'Instinct', which blurs Freud's animal/human distinction between *Instinkt* and *Trieb*. I have to choose between using 'instinct' and 'drive'; 'drive' is true to Freud, but not to the Standard Edition. I also have to choose between 'desire' and 'wish', but here the choice is more heavily overdetermined: *désir* is closer to *Begierde*, a term not often used by Freud, but a central term in the Hegel-Kojève-Lacan line

of descent that has made '*désir* / desire' so familiar that we tend to forget its non-Freudian provenance and connotations. Here, it is largely a matter of following usage, and usage has swung in favour of 'drive' and 'desire', but a fundamentalist Freudian might insist that it be 'instinct' and 'drive'.

As the first (or sometimes the second or even third) revision ends, the endgame begins. This time, it is all deadly serious. This time it has to be right: no gaps, no French words overlooked, no typos, no spelling mistakes, every comma in place. Everything has to be translated now, and in sequence. I now have to decide about the undecidables, certain about the uncertainties, clear about the obscurities. There are, of course, no perfect translations, but the goal must now be an impossible perfection. If it is not, I accept my own failure in advance. At this stage, the good-enough is just not good enough. I am now moving between the original French, my tattered palimpsest and the final version I am correcting on screen. This is demanding and the level of concentration has to be intense. This is an almost timeless concentration: it will take as long as it takes. Any child who wanders in asking for money for an ice cream will get short shrift. In the evening, I will be tired, tired in the knowledge that I will begin again tired in the morning. Lonely long-distance runners do not stop. Musicians who play three hundred one-night gigs a year must feel like this, but they always go on stage again. That is what they *do*. This is what I *do*.

And I complain. Translators complain. They complain about the book, the author, the publisher, the difficulties, the isolation, the boredom and all sorts of other problems or pseudo-problems. Put two translators in a room together and they will grumble about their contracts and (quite rightly) the money. I complain. A lot. At some point I will say that I never want to do this again, that it is not worth the effort, that I'd be better off stacking shelves for Tesco, that I'm giving up. And I will mean it. And then I will begin again. I would hate to say that that was the last translation, that there will be no more. I don't think I will ever be able to say the words. Enough of the pain, what of the pleasures? Being commissioned to do a translation is always very flattering, and I like being asked to begin again. A commission entrusts me with something very precious and gives me a lot of responsibilities. Responsibilities to the author and the text (not necessarily the same thing), responsibilities to the publisher, responsibilities to the reader. And responsibilities to myself. Precisely what am I doing? I do not regard translation as a esoteric art form (this is almost-writing, not writing) or as an ersatz philosophy. It is a practice, a technique and, like any technician, I take great pleasure in using technical skills I have acquired over a long period of time; I am proud of my translations. The pleasure of translation is in some ways quite simple. It is the pleasure of satisfaction. A good session of hunt the quotation ends with the quiet pleasure of knowing 'it is so'; so does the trawl through the dictionary that tells me just what *la bogue* means. The timeless concentration of that final almost-writing is a lonely but intense pleasure: the pleasure of extreme tension. There is also the dangerous pleasure of knowing that I am always working at or near the limits of my own competence. And whilst it does feel that I do the same thing day after day, it is always different: a different text, a different sentence, a different set of problems. Translating a book

on psychoanalysis is not the same as translating an essay for an exhibition catalogue. Boredom is not an option. Oddly enough, I feel that translating does not get any easier with practice. It gets more difficult because it is only by and in doing it that you know how difficult it is. You don't know that when you begin for the first time. There is no room for complacency. Translating anything means learning anew how to translate a text on sociology or psychoanalysis, short entries for an catalogue or an article on political theory. I will never 'have learned' how to translate. I will always be learning. I know why the runner runs on. I know why soulman Junior Walker always picked up his saxophone and walked on stage again to play the three hundredth gig of the year. It was what he did. Runners run because that is what they do. This is what I do. And I enjoy being good at it.

When the endgame is over, something else begins. We are now in production. My final script may go to a reader for comments, though this is unusual. It will definitely go to a copy-editor who will, it is to be hoped, find anything I have missed. Most copy-editors are freelances (though some of the big academic presses still have in-house copy-editors) and they tend to work fast. And I am expected to respond quickly, to fit in with someone else's schedule. A good copy-editor is an indispensable friend. Mistakes do get made, it being in the nature of mistakes to get made. With a text of one hundred and forty thousand words to cope with, I will make slips even though an impossible perfection has to be the goal. A good copy-editor will help me correct them. But copy-editors can also create problems. It sometimes feels that I am being asked to do work that should have been done by a French copy-editor prior to publication. I am not in fact convinced of the existence of French copy-editors. The cycle of French publishing is much faster than that of the British industry, and it sometimes seems to me that French books travel from the author's desk to the bookshop of their own accord, and quite untouched by human hand or brain. British publishers do tend to work to higher bibliographical standards, and do sometimes expect me to find references not given by the author. I have dealt with some of these problems, the copy-editor will deal with others (as well as some of my own making). She – and it is usually a she – will send me a set of queries and proposed corrections, such as the rewording or reorganizing sentences. She will check that Nietzsche is spelled correctly and that John Paul is the Pope. The queries are usually reasonable, and I deal with them as best I can, but there does come a point where obscurities may have to be left obscure. Some questions and requests can, on the other hand, be plain irritating. I was once asked by a copy-editor to supply a translation of *merguez*. I can explain what a *merguez* is (a spicy mutton sausage from North African, very good with beer and chips; don't buy the imitations made from turkey and beef), but I can't translate the word any more than I can translate 'ciabatta'. A *merguez* is a *merguez* is a *merguez*. You can buy them in Soho, and they're called *merguez*. Once all these problems have been sorted out (or left unsorted out), I wait for the proofs. What typesetters can do to a clean script has to be seen to be believed, and it all has to be corrected, 'blue for my errors', 'red for printers' errors'. And so it begins again. At last it is quite over at last in spite of it all. I've read the proofs, packed them up securely and put them in the post. Eventually I will receive my copies of the translation. One for the library, one for Margaret, one for me (sometimes, but not always, more). I won't read it.

<sup>1</sup> My *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Hutchinson, 1993) appeared in French as *Michel Foucault* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p.15.

<sup>4</sup> *Le bogue* is obviously *calqued* on ‘bug’, but usage appears to have been influenced by *la bogue* – the spiny *cupule* of a chestnut. Hence the confusion as to its gender.

<sup>5</sup> *Libération* (17 December 1998). The advert was for a free radio station that was making a special broadcast about *le british* direct from London.

<sup>6</sup> Marc Fumaroli, ‘La Querelle du neutre’, *Le Monde* (31 July 1998), p.10. The context is a discussion of the long-standing issue of whether or not professional titles should be ‘feminized’. Should a woman teacher be ‘*la professeur*’ or ‘*la professeuse*’? Whilst the issue continues to preoccupy ageing academics and leader writers, most school students

have no compunction about using the eminently incorrect ‘*Madame la professeur*.’

<sup>7</sup> A standard edition is the process of being published under the general editorship of Jean Laplanche. It is too early to tell if the lexical changes it proposes will gain general acceptance, but even if they do, the English translator’s task will not become any easier: it may well be the case that the neologism *le désaide* (‘un-aid’? – neologisms are always difficult) captures the sense of Freud’s *Hilflosigkeit*, but until such time as an immovable psychoanalytic establishment revises the Standard Edition, the English will still be ‘helplessness’. Cf. André Bourguignon, Pierre Cotot, Jean Laplanche and François Robert, *Traduire Freud* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), p.94.

<sup>8</sup> J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.) (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1973).

**David Macey** recently completed a translation of Alain Touraine’s *Can We Live Together?* for Polity Press and will soon begin translations of Touraine’s *Comment sortir du libéralisme?* and of Michel Foucault’s *Il faut défendre la société*. In the meantime, he is completing a biography of Frantz Fanon for Granta and a dictionary of critical theory for Penguin. David Macey is very tired.