

## **‘Shall I Apologize Translation?’**

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The answer is no. It is an easy answer to give, because it is not mine. In fact, the question ‘Shall I apologize translation?’ is not mine either, hence the quotation marks framing it.

The question is John Florio’s, ‘resolute John Florio’ as this most self-conscious of Renaissance translators used to sign his name. ‘Shall I apologize translation?’ is the opening sentence of Florio’s address ‘To the Courteous Reader’ with which he prefaced his two-volume translation into English of the essays of Michel de Montaigne. The book was entered in the Stationers’ Register in London in 1600, but not published until 1603. It became one of the most influential translations of the age. Shakespeare drew on Florio’s version of Montaigne’s celebrated essay on cannibals for *The Tempest*.

More about Florio and his Montaigne in a moment. Let me first indicate how he handles his own question: ‘Shall I apologize translation?’. He does not actually answer it with a straight ‘no’. Florio would never use one word when half a dozen or more would do. Instead of a simple negation he presents us with a whole list of possible objections to the noble task of translation, only to nip each objection in the bud with such speed and such ferocious wit that the objections look petty and crude. Here is a taste of how Florio overpowers the opposition:

Shall I apologize translation? Why but some hold (as for their freehold) that such conversion is the subversion of universities. God hold with them, and withhold them from impeach or impair. It were an ill turn, the turning of books should be the overturning of libraries. Yea but my old friend Nolano [i.e. Giordano Bruno] told me, and taught publicly, that from translation all science had its offspring. ...

The Greeks drew their baptizing water from the conduit pipes of the Egyptians, and they from the well-springs of the Hebrews or Chaldees. And can the well-springs be so sweet and deep; and will the well-drawn water be so sour and smell? ...

Why but the vulgar should not know all. No, they cannot for all this; nor even scholars for much more: I would, both could and knew much more than either does or can. Why but all would not be known of all. No, nor can; much more we know not than we know; all know something, none know all. Would all know all? They must break ere they be so big.

(Montaigne, 1969:n.p.)

He carries on in this vein for several more pages. The joyous wordplay and the rhetorical flourishes are hard to miss. My main reason for choosing Florio’s opening sentence as my title, and for quoting the passage above, is that I want to explore some of the implications of Florio’s obvious delight in exuberant wit and verbal ostentation. I also have a further reason, which will become clear as we go along.

First, however, a word about John Florio himself. His father, Michael Angelo Florio, left his native Italy after becoming a Protestant. Giovanni, or John, Florio, born in 1553, grew up in Oxford and on the Continent, frequented aristocratic circles in London, found himself in the service of the French Ambassador for a time, acted as Italian tutor to Queen Anne, compiled an Italian-English dictionary, translated from both Italian and French into English, and died of the plague in 1625. We possess an excellent modern biography of him by Frances Yates (1934).

John Florio was perfectly conscious, and inordinately proud, of his linguistic skills. His first book, appropriately called *First fruites* and published in 1578, contains a miscellaneous collection of poems, dialogues and other such pieces. One dialogue shows how ill-mannered the English are towards strangers, laments their lack of knowledge of foreign tongues (‘When I arrived first in London, I could not speak English, and I met above five hundred persons, afore I could find one that could tell me in Italian, or French, where the Post dwelt’) and proposes the death penalty for parents who fail to teach their children more than one language (‘I would there were such a Law, that if one should bring up his children without teaching them something, and especially to read, write and speak diverse languages,

that he should be beheaded'; Matthiessen 1931:112).

Florio, clearly, delighted in robust opinions every bit as much as he enjoyed languages, words, style, wit and rhetoric. Indeed his translation of Montaigne is remarkable for the way it consistently elaborates, expands, dramatizes, rewrites and boldly *overwrites* Montaigne's own measured, speculative and often angular style. Florio's stylistic idiolect infects his translation. Where Montaigne gives rather sparing descriptions, Florio freely adds intensifiers. Let me quote a couple of typical instances taken from a long list. In each case I have italicised Florio's additions. Where Montaigne speaks of 'l'autorité de son visage & la fierté de ses paroles' ['the authority of his countenance and fierceness of his words'], Florio has: 'the *mind-quelling* authority of his countenance and *awe-moving* fierceness of his words'. For Montaigne's 'Les dix mille Grecs, en leur longue et fameuse retraite' ['The ten thousand Greeks in their long and famous retreat'], Florio gives: 'The ten thousand Graecians in their *long-lingering* and *far-famous* retreat'. Montaigne's 'tels fatras de livres' ['such trash of books'] becomes 'such *idle time consuming, and wit-besotting* trash of books' (Matthiessen 1931:122; Yates 1934: 233, 235).

Montaigne is known to have preferred a style that was, as he put it, 'simple and direct, ... far removed from affectation and artifice' ('Le parler que j'aime, c'est un parler simple et naïf ... esloigné d'affectation et d'artifice'; Yates 1934: 228). Florio's manner is the exact opposite. It strains after rhetorical effect at every opportunity, and transforms Montaigne's style in the process - so much so that Frances Yates says of Florio that '[h]e made, in fact, such a bad translation that it is nearly an original work' (1934: 228). She condemns him for being

... the least self-effacing of translators ... standing fussily at the great man's side, not behind him, 'improving' his style and not infrequently punctuating the argument with perfectly audible asides (1934: 234).

Of course, most of Florio's attempts to inject rhetoric into Montaigne's style are 'audible asides' only if we put the French original alongside the English version. Readers perusing nothing but the English text will not be able to spot Florio's additions.

Every now and then the translator's presence does make itself felt in the translation. Among these asides are innocuous interventions intended for the benefit of the English reader, as when Florio expands a reference to 'le Louvre' into the more explanatory 'the Louvre, the palace of our Kings' (Matthiessen 1931: 135). In this instance the translator's discursive presence is detectable in the English text through the sheer redundancy of the information, an oddity which leaves the reader wondering who is actually speaking here. Would Montaigne, writing towards the end of the sixteenth century, have needed to explain to his readers in France that the Louvre, which was built only a few decades earlier, in the 1550s, was the palace of 'our Kings'?

A similar case occurs in a passage where Montaigne says that just as we cannot understand the animals, 'aussi ne faisons nous les Basques et les Troglodytes' ['neither do we understand Basques and Troglodytes'], which Florio renders as: 'no more do we the Cornish, the Welsh or Irish' (Matthiessen 1931: 154; Yates 1934: 236-7). Here we can wonder if the inclusive 'we' still refers to Montaigne and his French readers, as it does in most other instances in the essays; for English readers, the 'we' here comes to include *them*, but this is out of key with the subject-position created in the rest of Montaigne's work, in which a Frenchman speaks to French readers.

Both examples are 'audible asides': we can hear the translator's voice alongside the author's. There is also a much more insidious and more ominous kind of intervention, not an 'audible aside' at all but a shift detectable only if we go back to compare the French with the English. In speaking of the controversial fifteenth-century English Bible translator John Wycliffe, Montaigne at one point refers to 'les erreurs de Wyclef' ['Wycliffe's errors']; in Florio's version however we read of 'Wickliff's opinions' (Matthiessen 1931: 139; Yates 1934: 234). In transforming the source text's judgmental reference to 'errors' into neutral 'opinions,' Florio is expressing a deliberate view, and one that differs significantly from Montaigne's. The matter is of some gravity, not only because of the nature of the disagreement, religious beliefs deemed heretical in one case and unobjectionable in the other, but also

because, unless we are in a position to consult the French text and double-check the translation (and therefore have no need of a translation in the first place!), we cannot detect the gap that Florio opens up here between Montaigne and himself.

We had perhaps assumed that the translation, despite its stylistic bravado, remained 'faithful' to the substance of the original text. Our trust turns out to be misplaced. Florio is here caught being wilfully disloyal to his author and pursuing an agenda of his own. The gap between the original and its translation is real, insidious and significant, and has ethical and ideological dimensions. It is not really a matter of rhetoric or style, of expressive means or idiolect. Rather, it is a matter of voice and value, of a speaking subject positioning itself in relation to, and at a critical distance from, even in direct opposition to the source text.

The question that interests me here is what happens when translators, or interpreters for that matter, consciously exploit this gap. What is the nature of the interstice between original and translation, and under what circumstances can that margin be prised open? At this point I should like to bring in Sherlock Holmes. But before I do that, I need a brief digression to Plato. By switching from Florio to Plato and then to Sherlock Holmes, we are guaranteed diversity. We can worry later about how to piece it all together again.

In *The Republic*, Book 3, Chapter 6, Plato discusses two different ways of presenting a story. He distinguishes between 'pure narration' and 'a narrative that is effected through imitation'; for 'narration' he uses the term 'diegesis', while 'imitation' is also called 'mimesis' (1994: 224-31). The exposition takes the form of a dialogue. As the interlocutor does not quite grasp the distinction between diegesis and mimesis, the speaker provides a fuller account. In 'pure' or 'diegetic' narration, he explains, 'the poet himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but himself is speaking' (1994: 227). In 'mimetic narration', on the other hand, 'he delivers a speech as if he were someone else, ... assimilating his diction as far as possible to that of the person whom he announces as about to speak' (ibid.). When, in a narrative, a character's words have to be reported, 'mimetic' narration will use direct speech, quoting the character verbatim, as it were; 'diegetic' narration employs indirect discourse, in which we continually hear the poet's own voice.

Plato's interlocutor eventually gets the point, and concludes correctly that 'diegetic' narration is what we have in narrative poems, and 'mimetic' narration is what happens in plays. Actors enact the actions and speak the words of the characters as if those characters were real people whose words the actors borrow; the actors' speaking imitates the words of the characters.

However when Plato says that the poet 'assimilates his diction *as far as possible* to that of the person whom he announces as about to speak', he is admitting at the same time that there will always remain a margin between the two, however small. For the English 'as far as possible' Plato's Greek text has ο τι μάλιστα ('ho ti málista'): 'to the greatest extent, far and away, mostly' - and therefore not quite wholly.

If this is the case, if mimetic speaking still leaves a differential margin, an interstice between itself and the speech being imitated, what happens if we think of translators as mimicking their author's words, like actors, assimilating their own words 'as far as possible' to their authors' words, but always leaving a gap between the two - and the gap is not one of language but of voice, of a speaking subject? And what if translators and interpreters set out to exploit this gap? Let us look at a striking, if fictional, instance.

It occurs in the Sherlock Holmes story 'The Greek Interpreter,' by Arthur Conan Doyle. The plot of this story runs as follows. Melas, a Greek interpreter living in London, tells Sherlock Holmes how two days ago he was kidnapped, blindfolded and taken to a house on the outskirts of the city. There two Englishmen forced him to interpret for them. They produced someone they were holding prisoner, a Greek man who did not speak a word of English. The Englishmen did not understand Greek. Melas had to interpret between the two parties. At the end of the session he was taken away and set free. Later on in the story it becomes clear that the prisoner, named Kratides, was the brother of a Greek girl whom one of the English villains had carried off and wanted to marry for her money. Kratides, the trustee of his sister's fortune, had inadvertently fallen into the villains' hands. He refused to sign his sister's money over to them, and to compel him they were starving him to death. Despite

Sherlock Holmes' best efforts the story ends with Kratides dead and the villains fleeing abroad, taking the girl with them. Poetic justice is done when some months later a report arrives which tells of the two villains killing each other after a quarrel, although Holmes prefers to believe that the girl probably killed both her captors.

The interpretation scene in the story is most peculiar. Melas, interpreting under duress, stands between the English criminals and the Greek prisoner. However, he quickly realizes that, since the villains do not understand Greek, they cannot check on his words in that language. So he starts playing a dangerous game, tagging questions of his own to the translated words he addresses to the prisoner, eventually engaging in a private monolingual conversation with him, entirely in the margin of the bilingual spoken-and-written exchange. This allows him to collect vital information without the English kidnappers being aware of it. As Melas recounts it to Sherlock Holmes afterwards, the conversation ran like this:

[Melas:] 'You can do no good by this obstinacy. *Who are you?*'

[Kratides:] 'I care not. *I am a stranger in London.*'

'Your fate will be on your own head. *How long have you been here?*'

'Let it be so. *Three weeks.*'

'The property can never be yours. *What ails you?*'

'It shall not go to villains. *They are starving me.*'

'You shall go free if you sign. *What house is this?*'

'I will never sign. *I do not know.*'

'You are not doing her any service. *What is your name?*'

'Let me hear her say so. *Kratides.*'

'You shall see her if you sign. *Where are you from?*'

'Then I shall never see her. *Athens.*' (Conan Doyle 1951: 316)

The italicized words are exchanged between the two Greek-speakers only and remain intelligible only to them. The first part of every line, in roman font, takes on bilingual form (even though we read all this in English, as Melas relates it to Holmes) and represents the exchange, as mediated by Melas, between the Greek prisoner and the Englishmen.

It will be clear that, from an ethical point of view, Melas is flouting all the deontic principles of the interpreting profession. Like John Florio deliberately covering up Montaigne's qualification of Wycliffe as a heretic, Melas here pursues his own private agenda, which runs counter to that of his employers. He abuses his linguistic monopoly to gain information that is of benefit to himself - except, of course, that in the circumstances he is perfectly justified in doing so because his employers are criminals and Melas, having been taken there against his will, is attempting to assist an innocent fellow prisoner.

The interpretation scene in Conan Doyle's 'The Greek Interpreter' is of interest because it raises the issue of the interpreter's ideological and personal loyalty, and of ways of controlling interpreters, especially when they may be in a position to pursue their own agenda and insert their own divergent subject positions into their supposedly 'mimetic' discourse. The step from the fictional Sherlock Holmes story to historical examples is readily made. Let us briefly review some well-known instances, more or less at random. In each case we will see it is the interpreter's loyalty which is at stake, and the need for the powers that be to assure themselves of that loyalty.

Christopher Columbus lands on the Caribbean island of Guanahani on 12 October 1492. Barely six weeks later, when he is exploring other islands in the area and has to rely on native interpreters he has taken from Guanahani, he writes in his diary (or the modern reconstruction of it, as the original is lost):

I do not know the language; the people do not understand me, nor I them, nor any of my company. I often misunderstand what these Indians I have on board tell me, and I do not trust them, for they have tried repeatedly to escape. But now, God willing, I shall see whatever I

can, understanding and learning gradually, and I shall have all the language taught to one of my people. (27 November 1492; Cummins 1992: 84)

And again, ten days later, as the interpreters grow increasingly restless in their desire to return to their own island:

The Indians I have brought with me from the small islands are so eager to return home that I think I shall have to take them back when we leave here. They now distrust me so much for not making for their homeland that I have no faith in what they tell me; I cannot understand them clearly, nor they me... (6 December 1492, Cummins 1992: 89)

In the end, as we know, Columbus left behind a group of his own men when he returned to Spain to report on his discovery.

A similar case occurred a few years later in Brazil. After Vasco da Gama's return from India, a second Portuguese fleet was sent out under Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1500. Sailing south along the African coast they followed a more westerly course and stumbled on the Brazilian coastline. We have an account of their brief stay in Brazil in a letter to the Portuguese king written by Pedro Vaz de Caminha. At one point the Portuguese are deliberating whether to take by force a couple of natives and ship them back to Portugal to have them learn Portuguese, or instead leave behind some of their own men - who happened to be convicts. They agree

... that it was not necessary to take men by force, since it was the general custom that those taken away by force to another place said that everything about which they were asked was there; and that these two convicts whom we should leave would give far better information about the land than would be given by those carried away by us ... (Parry 1979: 89)

The case of La Malinche, or Doña Marina, or Malintzin, the woman who became Hernán Cortés' mistress and interpreter during the Spanish conquest of Mexico in 1519-21, is too well known to require much comment. Although La Malinche was Aztec by birth, she appears to have been given away, or sold, to the Maya, and may have been passed on several more times before being presented, along with another twenty slaves, to Cortés. She learned Spanish, became Cortés' mistress and transferred her loyalty to the Spanish invaders. She played a crucial role in passing on information to Cortés at critical moments, for example during the events that led to the massacre at Cholula, when she apparently discovered a conspiracy against the Spaniards, informed Cortés of the danger and allowed the Spanish army to strike first (there are conflicting accounts of the events); and again during the final hours of the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtémoc, who was also accused of conspiring against his Spanish captors and summarily hanged. Small wonder that the Aztec chronicles, or those that have survived the systematic attempts by the Spanish victors to destroy them, often speak of her not as Malintzin but as Malin, leaving out the honorific suffix in an expression of contempt; in Mexican folklore La Malinche is reviled as a whore and a traitor to this day (Delisle & Woodsworth 1992: 260ff; Karttunen 1994; Van Zantwijk 1992).

Throughout the European discovery of America the reliability of interpreters remained a major concern. It is not primarily a matter of linguistic competence, but of political loyalty and trustworthiness, of whose side the interpreter is on and whose interests he or she ultimately serves. Studying the history of these early contacts and the role of interpreters in them makes it abundantly clear that interpreters, far from being neutral, are involved - personally, economically, socially and politically - in the transactions they help to shape. The fewer interpreters there are, the harder it is to supervise their work and the more they are in a position to exploit, if they so wish, their unique access to information reaching them from both sides of the linguistic divide. As soon as their employers become aware of this, they also realize the need to impose tight controls on interpreters or assure themselves of their intermediaries' loyalty by other means.

On his first voyage to Canada, in 1534, the French explorer Jacques Cartier abducted two

Iroquois natives, brought them to France and later used them as interpreters. Having found however that he could trust them only up to a point and that they were prepared to betray him if the interests of their own people were threatened, he eventually set up a different system, sending young Frenchmen to live among the natives for a time to learn the language (Delisle 1993; Delisle & Woodsworth 1995: 256ff.). Ethnic belonging served to secure loyalty and therefore trustworthiness.

In November 1556, in the port of Honfleur in Normandy, the Frenchman Jean de Léry, a Calvinist minister, boarded one of three ships bound for Brazil to set up a colony and establish a mission there. Among the three hundred or so passengers, Léry tells us in his *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, were ‘ten young boys, whom we took along to learn the language of the savages’ (Léry 1990: 7). Although Léry does not subsequently say any more about them, the plan must have been to train them as interpreters. Because the boys were presumably French and the circumstances of their learning the language of the Tupinamba would be closely monitored, their loyalty could be trusted.

A very similar operation, on a larger and more official scale, was set in motion in Paris a hundred years later. On 18 November 1669 the French Council of State issued a decree ordering the establishment of a training institute for interpreters between French and Turkish, to facilitate trade and diplomatic links between France and the Ottoman empire. The text of the decree, signed by Louis XIV’s minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert, stipulates that the interpreters, who were to be trained from the age of nine or ten (and would become known as ‘language children’), had to be French nationals and would be in the care of French Capuchin friars in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) and Smyrna, • so that in future we can be assured of the fidelity of the interpreters and dragomans’ (‘afin qu’à l’avenir on puisse être assuré de la fidélité des drogmans et interprètes’; *Enfants de langue* 1995: 20).

The use of the word ‘*fidélité*’ in the decree throws interesting light on the concept of ‘fidelity’ in translation history. We traditionally think of it as in terms of ‘faithfulness’ as a criterion of accuracy: fidelity to the source text, or to its ‘truth’ or ‘meaning’ or some such notion. Here, clearly, we have fidelity with a difference, as the term now gestures towards political reliability in a context of competing interests. The faithful interpreter is the one who is on our side and serves our interests. The term was used in very much the same way another hundred years later, in a different part of the world, when William Jones, a high-court judge in the British colonial administration in India, published his *Grammar of the Persian Language* (1771). In his preface he stressed the need for British East India Company officials to learn the languages of Asia because ‘it was found highly dangerous to employ the natives as interpreters, upon whose fidelity they could not depend’ (Niranjana 1992: 16; Jones 1969: xxiv).

Having now moved from America via Turkey to India, let us migrate further east. Japan closed itself off from the outside world for some two hundred years, from around 1640 until the middle of the nineteenth century. During this period, apart from a Chinese settlement, only the Dutch were allowed a tiny trading post on the small artificial island of Deshima in the Bay of Nagasaki. All the interpreters were Japanese government officials, and their work was strictly regulated and monitored. Not only were the Dutch effectively prevented from learning Japanese, but virtually the entire information flow went in one direction only, from the foreigners to the Japanese, and not the other way round (Engels 1998: 25ff). When as late as 1828 a German doctor at Deshima was found in possession of ‘forbidden items’, i.e. things he was not supposed to have access to, the Japanese interpreter who had helped him was severely punished.

All these examples point to tight controls on translators and interpreters to guarantee their trustworthiness, to ensure that they speak exclusively with their masters’ voice, to try and close the gap that continually threatens to open up in translation. To the extent that translation is, in Plato’s terms, ‘mimetic’ speech, the translator never wholly disappears behind the speech being mimicked. From the point of view of those who depend on translation to obtain information, that margin of visibility constitutes a risk. The gap that can open between original and translation may be stylistic, or religious, or political, or ideological, or a mixture of these. It is partly structural, the consequence of linguistic, cultural and historical difference. It may be the manifestation of barely conscious idiolectal preferences. But it also creates an opportunity for translators and interpreters to insert or at least to

insinuate their own agenda into the texts they are producing. To that extent the gap is a matter of voice, of the discursive presence and the subject-position that inevitably enters translation, as it enters every form of speaking, from the moment text production begins.

We know this gap is there. Already Plato recognized that mimetic speaking, as representation, can approximate but remains necessarily different from that which it re-presents. Today too we acknowledge the translator as text producer. Without the active intervention of translators we would not have translations in the first place. And yet, in most conventional thinking about translation we require translators to be, as Frances Yates had it in her comment about Florio, 'self-effacing', to stand not at the original author's side but 'behind him', hidden, out of view, transparent, incorporeal, disembodied and disenfranchised. We need translators as purveyors of otherwise inaccessible data, but we don't want their intervention to leave any traces of their own, and therefore we persist in trying to constrain, control, regulate and ultimately to negate the translator's labour. The 'true interpreter' norm, as Brian Harris (1990) once phrased it, requires interpreters and translators to re-state the original exactly, without omission, addition or interference.

It seems to me that in this anxiety, this repressed knowledge, lies one of the enduring and intriguing paradoxes of translation. We would like to be able to take translation for granted, to see right through it, make it transparent, possess and dominate it. We know we cannot. Despite this knowledge we keep trying to annul the tendency of translation to leave traces of the translator's intervention and textual presence behind, so we may rest secure in the belief that the 'pure' translation's close fit between itself and its original leaves no room for the translator's separate agenda.

The translator's textual presence cannot be neutral, located nowhere in particular. The way a translation overwrites its original may be deliberate and calculated on the translator's part but as often as not it is unconscious, or barely conscious, dictated by values, preferences, presuppositions and perceptions built into the individual and social beings that we are.

It follows, I think, that just as the idea of a 'pure' translation, a translation that reproduces the original, the whole original and nothing but the original, is metaphysical and not of this world, the question of the 'faithful' translation is ultimately irrelevant. Faithfulness, fidelity, as we saw, is as much a matter of political loyalty and trustworthiness as of relations between texts. Much more relevant and interesting is what translation tells us about the way translators and their clients perceive and handle their material, and whose interests are being served, directly or indirectly. To my mind, the significance of translation as a cultural and historical phenomenon lies precisely in the slant, the presuppositions, the selectivity and the value judgements it reveals. Translation is of interest not despite but *because* of the way it prises open the ever-present interstices between originals and translations, between donor and receptor texts.

Let me close with two points, the first one very short, the other slightly longer.

The first point follows immediately from what has been said so far. The historical interest in translation is not only that, as Florio says his old friend Giordano Bruno told him and taught publicly, 'from translation all science had its offspring', or that it produces long-term cultural effects, as in Shakespeare's harking back to Florio's Montaigne in *The Tempest*. Its significance *also* lies in the particular cultural, ideological, political and other filters of understanding and manipulation that translation makes visible - whether they result from calculated distortion or from inevitably prejudiced, localized perception.

In other words, translation *matters*, historically and culturally, because it allows us to glimpse the self-positioning of individuals and communities with regard to 'others'. And because translation leaves in its wake dual texts, and often even multiple versions of original texts perceived differently again and again, it offers a privileged window on these various and changing self-definitions. That is why translation does not need an apology.

As I suggested at the beginning, I had a further reason for picking Florio as my starting point. In the dedication of his Montaigne, Florio gives us one of the earliest 'gendered' metaphors to characterize translation. When, using a conventional modesty topos, he speaks of his book as 'this defective edition' and adds between brackets: '(since all translations are reputed females, delivered at second hand...)', he initiates what will become a long line of metaphorical descriptions of translation in

terms of inferiority, subordination and matrimonial fidelity, a line which casts translation as • maidservant • to a patriarchal master-original, 'belle infidèle' (translations, like women, can be either beautiful or faithful but not both), as the weaker, reproductive vessel compared with original writing or speaking, and so on.

Metaphors like these show that translation is continually being defined and put in its place by means of a series of oppositions like those between strong and weak, creative and derivative, primary and secondary, unique and repeatable, art and craft, authority and obedience, freedom and constraint, speaking in one's own name and speaking for someone else. In each instance, of course, it is translation which is circumscribed, subordinated, contained, controlled.

Now, in case we should imagine that these are natural and necessary hierarchies which express the immutable essence of translation, we might pause to reflect that we have often construed gender distinctions by means of strikingly similar oppositions: creative versus reproductive, original versus derivative, active versus passive, dominant versus subservient, free versus confined, and so on.

The issue at stake here is not just a matter of the historical discourse on translation being sexist in that it casts translation in the role of maidservant, of doting and obedient wife, or of frivolous mistress. The sexist quality of much of the historical discourse on translation is beyond doubt and has been keenly documented in recent decades with reference to different cultural traditions.

The point I want to make concerns the obvious parallel between the construction of gender and the construction of translation. Both are cultural constructions, and they involve power differentials. Historically, that is, translation has been defined and hemmed in by means of hierarchies strongly reminiscent of those employed to maintain sexual power relations. It may be worth asking whose interests are being served by these hierarchies, and why it is that translation apparently needs to be so tightly controlled and regulated.

One reason, I suggest, may lie in what I called the anxiety of translation: the desire to ensure that source-language speaker and translator will speak with a single voice, the master's voice, and the knowledge, deep down and repressed, that the translator's own voice can never be wholly reduced, subsumed, or extinguished. Mimetic speech can mimic its model, but it cannot coincide with it; the actor will never be the character he or she represents. That margin of difference creates an opening for translators to insinuate their own agenda, their own discursive voices and subject positions into texts which they are forbidden to claim as their own. That is what, in their different ways, we saw Florio and Sherlock Holmes' Greek interpreter doing. The various examples from the history of interpreting illustrated the attempts on the part of those who have to rely on interpreters to reduce that differential margin by controlling the interpreters' fidelity and loyalty. Most of what we call the 'norms' of translation, it seems to me, are expressions of that same anxiety. Only if translation is regulated to the hilt and tightly locked in hierarchies can its clients be relatively assured that it will do as it is told, a willing, transparent tool. The very persistence of the anxiety however suggests that it never quite gets on top of its object. The assurance is never more than relative.

Allow me to round off these remarks with a minor but curious puzzle. Florio's gendered metaphor of translation and his actual practice are obviously at loggerheads. By resorting to the gendered metaphor he presents translation as a form of mimetic speaking which is also a submissive and insubstantial speaking. At the same time his practice, his own verbal histrionics, his boisterous rhetorical and ideological rewriting and overwriting of Montaigne, shatter any idea of submissiveness. I will not try to resolve Florio's contradiction. I don't think we can explain the gendered metaphor away by ranging it under the preface-writer's conventional self-denigration. One way of dealing with it may be to see it as another instance of the persistent anxiety of translation. If so, it constitutes one small case in a much larger series of paradoxes and puzzles that make translation endlessly intriguing, culturally and historically fascinating rather than merely important.

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