Free Verse and the Translation of Rhythm

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This piece is a reflection on the translation of rhythm. It is not about the translation of metre, which, it argues, must be counted an unproductive distraction. Rhythm is a fruitful and conciliatory resource for the translator in a way that metre is not. To work through these arguments requires a broader exploration of certain prosodic characteristics of the languages involved in my chosen translational transactions, French and English.[1] I should also make clear, from the outset, that literary translation makes no sense to me if the reader of the target text (TT) is ignorant of the source language and source text (ST). My approach to translation always presupposes that the reader of the TT is familiar with the ST. This presupposition makes the act of translation a linguistically dialectical act, and an act of textual comparison. Acculturating the rhythm of the ST to the target language will mean *creating* the rhythm of the ST, since nobody else, including the metrical analyst, will do that for us.

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[1] This broader exploration is to a significant degree prompted by the recent publication of two very considerable studies of French verse: Michel Murat's *Le Vers libre* (Paris: Champion, 2008) and Guillaume Peureux's *La Fabrique du vers* (Paris: Seuil, 2009).

The world of metrical analysis is a world animated by disagreement. One would like to think that this disagreement stems from the natural multiplicity of readerly practices, but it is not so: it grows, instead, from a competitive need to find a holy grail, the definitive solution to the nature of the workings of metre and rhythm. This singleness of purpose has something fraudulent about: it supposes that metrico-rhythmic perception is not historicized, that Marvell does not write with one conception of what is metrico-rhythmically desirable or permissible, while Tennyson writes with another. The modern solution is homogenising and anachronistic. Alternatively, it is claimed that all previous treatises on versification are misguided, of *only* historical interest, because linguistics has schooled us correctly in the facts of language. But we do not inhabit language as a set of facts, but as a set of perceptions, and those perceptions involve idiosyncrasies, preferences, whims, the historicity of speaking at any particular moment.

Thus, we still face the simplest of questions: how do we achieve an account of the metrico-rhythmic nature of verse which does not merely describe what the language of the printed text makes available, but which takes into consideration the readerly experience of text? The simple answer is to pass the text through a process of translation, itself understood as an account of readerly consciousness. To date, metrical analysis has been little interested in reading; indeed, metrical analysis has tended to imply that the reader *reads off* what the metrist has already identified as the metrico-rhythmic givens. However, the real question is not what is there on the page to be read, but what is *activated by reading*, what resources the reader brings into play. And the task of the translator is, equally, a participatory one: actively to read the source text into another language.

Metrical analysis tends to equalize values because its underlying interest is quantitative, and because it is driven by the iso-principle (isochrony, isosyllabicity, isoaccentuality); thus the relative relationships of weakness/strength of stress are converted into absolute ones, to ensure a binary contrast. If metrical analysis were to take the reader into account, what changes of approach would be involved?

First, and most fundamentally, such an analysis would acknowledge that rhythm is a negotiation of dialectical inputs between text and reader, between the linguistic and the paralinguistic,[2] between the metrical and the rhythmic, between chronometric time and the inner duration of reading, and that, in performance, this negotiation of dialectical inputs will tend to supersede the metrical givens, however much it might initially be guided by them. Readerly input into the construction of the metrico-rhythmic being of a line concerns the infusion of the qualitative and the relative (i.e. the breaking of the iso-principle) and the valorisation of paralinguistic features, the features of voice and reading. When one speaks of the 'qualitativisation' of accent/stress, one does not merely mean the activation of qualities of accent/stress other than intensity (i.e. duration, pitch), which are difficult to evaluate without technical aids; one means the quality of accent/stress—and indeed of syllable—more generally, what they mean *in perception*, as an instrument or object of perception. Hopkins had begun to think about this in positing a stress driven by 'instress':

> Since, though he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
>   His mystery must be instressed, stressed
>   ('The Wreck of the Deutschland', ll. 38-9)

As Storey explains,[3] 'instress' has two senses: '(1) the energy or stress that "upholds" an object's inscape [selfhood, quiddity], that gives it its being […]; and (2) the force which the inscape exerts on the minds or feelings of the perceiver'. Instress is thus as much in nature as it is in verse; in a wood of bluebells, Hopkins speaks of 'the blue colour / of light beating up from so many glassy heads, which

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[2] By 'the paralinguistic' we mean both the verbal paralinguistic (all elements of vocal input into a text: intonation, tempo, loudness, pausing, tone, degrees of emphasis) and the visual paralinguistic (all those visual cues and triggers which inflect our perception and/or reading of a text: typeface, layout, letter-
shape, margins, the graphisms of calligraphy, space, elements of book-design, paratext, the posture and gestures of a performer).

[3] Graham Storey, *A Preface to Hopkins* (Harlow: Longman, 1981), p. 61.

like water is good to float their deeper instress in upon the mind'.[4] Rarely does the metrist think of stress or accent as the vehicle of specific expressive energies acting in the word or through the word; and more rarely still does the metrist think of stress or accent as the fusional meeting-point of those energies and the touch—in a pianistic sense—of the reader's voice. Once we adopt a scansional or paralinguistic approach to stress or accent or syllable, we naturally treat these things more inclusively, that is to say that the experience of them is not only connected with intensity and pitch and duration, but with grouping and pausing and tempo and loudness and vocal timbre, and what these features contribute to the phonetic quality of the language.

This latter must be emphasized, simply because the greatest involuntary crime of metrical analysis—if one can call it that—is the wedge it has driven between the raw, phonetic data of particular poems and abstract patterns, whether of weak and strong syllables, where 'weak' and 'strong' tell us about the enunciatory intensity of syllables and nothing about what they sound like; or, as in French, of the number of syllables, rather than of the sequence of sounds. Even where the device is explicitly acoustic, the same process of de-acoustification takes place: an interest in rhyme resolves itself into an interest in rhyme-pairs as semantic conjunctions, or as manifestations of rhyme-degree or rhyme-gender, or as the source of stanzaic structure, in which case, equally:

> En effet, les rimes structurent les strophes par leur récurrence, non pas du point de vue de leurs timbres, accidentels et non-périodiques, mais de celui de la structure qu'elles rendent perceptible[5]

> [In fact, rhymes structure stanzas by their recurrence, not from the standpoint of their timbres, which are accidental and non-periodic, but from that of the structure they make perceptible].

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[4] Catherine Phillips (ed.), *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 215.
[5] Peureux, *La Fabrique du vers*, p. 234.

A newly conceived metrical analysis, or scansion, must find a way of doing justice to the acoustic particulars of any given poem, not just the repetition of sounds but the dynamic of the relationships of sounds: open/closed; front/back; voiced/voiceless; rounded/ spread, so that, as with accent, sounds are treated as colour-values.

It seems possible, on the above evidence and adopting the currently orthodox French view, to argue that a syllabic metre like French has, metrically, periodicity but no rhythmicity.[6] It lacks rhythmicity, because syllabism reflects the fact that French is an accentuable language but not an accented one. Accents are created by syntactic configurations, processes of phrasing and grouping (linguistic), and by paralinguistic and vocal input (*accent oratoire*, *accent d'insistance*, etc.). But agreement about the principles of application of accent is so difficult to achieve that no metrical rule can be based upon it. Some would say that French verse is numeric-syllabic and would have nothing to do with accent (accent is either an unavoidable concomitant of the end of a syllabic sequence, or an accidental and uncontrollable accompaniment of the speaking of verse). Others might say that accents at the end of numerical sequences are metrical, while other accents are not (i.e. group-terminal accents *within* the line or hemistich are not metrical, but are dictional or rhythmic, in the same way that word-internal and phrase-internal accents are). However, to say that French verse is non-rhythmical, even though rhythm is not part of its metricality (periodicity is), would clearly be false. How to put this anomaly right should be a central preoccupation of metrical analysis; but like early attempts to install a quantitative metric of *vers mesurés* (late sixteenth century, with resurgences of interest in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and despite the practice of *vers mêlés*, subsequent proposals for accentual models of the French

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[6] 'Periodicity' I would define as the recurrence of linguistic units of the same length and the same structuring principle. Because it can only be ascertained in retrospect, at the end of the unit, periodicity belongs to the spatial rather than temporal, to units immobilized and juxtaposed. 'Rhythmicity', on the other hand, is a principle of modulation in time, the way in which a sequence characterizes itself in movement, constructs a particular dynamic for itself.

line have failed; French metrical analysis is left to nurse a profound unease with its rhythm-generating non-rhythmic syllabism.[7]

The standard translational policy in verse, particularly for the reader ignorant of the source language, is, regrettably, one of preservation: to preserve as much of the original as possible within a certain play of equivalences and compensations. But if rhythm is not textually there, or perhaps *is* there, but not reliably so, then it cannot be preserved/translated. If metre is there, on the other hand, and demonstrably so, then it should be translated, even if its translation prevents us from moving the text forward in terms of its rhythmic possibilities. The policy of preservation has other disqualifying drawbacks:

(i)   It necessitates a sub-policy of sacrifices and priorities: if one chooses to answer rhyme with rhyme, then some other factor, semantic perhaps, or syntactic, must be correspondingly sacrificed. This separation of constitutive elements is what Bonnefoy attacks in his defence of free-verse translations (see below).

(ii)   It makes the assumption that constitutive elements are the same from language to language, if adjusted by a touch of equivalence. The iambic pentameter is metrical in the same way that the alexandrine is metrical (though this is clearly untrue). Rhyme in English is the same as rhyme in French, even though rhyme in French recognizes different degrees of rhyme, makes alternating rhyme-gender a principle of construction, and

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[7] The only accents in French which might be said to be metrically motivated are the accents at the ends of syllabic sequences whether of line or hemistich. However, in a sequence of octosyllables, for example:

$$- - - - - - - /$$
$$- - - - - - - /$$
$$- - - - - - - / \quad \text{etc.}$$

it would be foolish to say that the line-terminal metrical accents do any more than endorse periodicity. They do not create a rhythm. But see Roger Pensom, 'Accent et syllabe dans les vers français: Une synthèse possible?', *Journal of French Language Studies*, 19/3 (2009), pp. 335-61, for a recent argument that accent is metrically constitutive of French verse.

rhymes on endings and suffixes, which necessitates a certain practice of avoidances, all features unknown to English rhyming. To encourage readers to think of French and English rhymes as equivalent is seriously and irresponsibly to mislead them.

(iii)   To translate alliteration by alliteration, or assonance by assonance usually entails two second-bests: (a) one does not alliterate the same sounds (i.e. alliteration is more linguistic mechanism, indifferent to the phoneme that constitutes it, than anything to do with phonosemantics); (b) one cannot alliterate in quite the same textual location. This again implies that alliteration is more an isolatable rhetorical figure than a location-specific psycho-phonetic drive or physio-acoustic imperative. It encourages the view that a poem is a sum of particular devices and figures, and if these can be satisfactorily ticked off on a list of translational obligations, then the 'literary' is saved.

(iv)   Unless one actively resists it, the natural trend in translation is to translate towards the signified. It is easy to forget that translation is not a translation of the signifier into the signified, but of the signifier into another signifier. 'Rouge' only *means* 'red' within certain conventions of the bilingual dictionary; otherwise they are two independent signifiers which relate to each other in approximate ways, in different voices. By the same token, we should not fall to thinking that, in translating signifier into signifier, these signifiers conjure up a signified *independent* of the two languages. Meaning is not 'stood for' by a signifier, however arbitrary the relationship. Meaning is a *project* of the signifier which is never properly completed because it cannot be predicted how many other signifiers, and of what kind, will contribute to it. Reading a text is an active making sense, but *in a spirit of improvisation*.

To date I have canvassed two broad directions for the translation of verse: first, following Yves Bonnefoy, to translate verse, whether regular or free, into free verse.[8] As translators, we are constantly invited to re-imagine ourselves, and equally to re-discover ourselves; we need the kind of medium responsive to the multidimensionality of the translational experience; as Bonnefoy puts it:

> Free verse is poetry, in its necessary freedom of expression and research. And one of the consequences of this […] is that it is as such the only place where the contemporary poet can define and solve the problems he meets in his existential or cultural condition: for instance, in his relationship with the poets of the past and his task of translating them.[9]

And not only with the poets of the past, one might add. And, ironically enough, it may be free verse, more than regular verse which can re-establish the textual integratedness of the target text. One can broadly agree with another of Bonnefoy's propositions, that translation too often involves a process whereby form and content become divorced from each other:

> We must understand that writing, the act of writing, is in itself an unbreakable unity whose formal operations are conceived and executed in constant interaction with, for example, the invention of images and the elaboration of meaning. […] But this necessary freedom is not, unfortunately, within reach of the translator. In his case, meaning, the whole meaning of the poem, is already determined; he cannot invent anything about it without betraying the intent of the author. Consequently, were he to adopt the alexandrine or the pentameter, this regular pattern would be for him nothing but a frame to which the meaning would have to adjust itself, obliging him to pure virtuosity.[10]

We would say that the translator, with each translation, re-invents the act of writing; that the translator is not bound by the intent of the author, since (a)

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[8] Clive Scott, *Translating Baudelaire* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).
[9] Yves Bonnefoy, 'On the Translation of Form in Poetry', *World Literature Today*, 53/3 (1979), p. 378.

[10] Bonnefoy, 'On the Translation of Form in Poetry', p. 377.

authorial intent does not survive beyond the time and place of the ST's writing, and (b) the translator's obligation to what the ST makes possible in the way of a new text is greater than his obligation to the ST's author. As Bonnefoy suggests, in these circumstances, the translation of metrical form is an empty gesture. To translate the numero-syllabic alexandrine into an accentual-syllabic pentameter is to confirm a cultural separation, a border to be crossed by the good offices of systematised equivalence, but at the expense of the dialogue of rhythmicity, at the expense of the idea that translation is not a spatial juxtaposing of texts (ST and TT), but the temporal and existential progression of one text to another. In a translational policy which believes that this progression is best conceived of as a progression from the linguistic to the paralinguistic and performative, from the metrical to the rhythmic, metrical translation would be a step backwards, a stalling of onwardness. It is by translating the metric into the rhythmic that the text is opened up to readerly input. What the translator is attempting to do is not so much to translate a text, but to translate/transform the way a text lives, has its being, in the consciousness of a reader.

There is a sense, anyway, in which metrical analysis, as presently practised, is obsoletist: it insists on linguistic inherency as a value, and thus implies not only that paralinguistic accidentals are without value, but that value of any kind—literary, aesthetic—must be demonstrably *already* inherent in text, rather than ever-renewable, bestowed by performance.[11] Metrical analysis will not venture into speculation, is descriptive, analeptic, casts its poems as documents. And thus gives the reader no help in making the most of variables, possibilities, the fund of vocal resource.

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[11] Writing about the poetics of performance, Jerome Rothenberg notes: '[…] the value of a work isn't inherent in its formal or aesthetic characteristics – its shape or its complexity or simplicity as an object – but in what it does, or what the artist or his surrogate does with it, how he performs it in a given context' ('New Models, New Visions: Some Notes Toward a Poetics of Performance', in Paul Hoover (ed.), *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), p. 642).

We may have felt, from time to time, the push towards a new foundation for metrics, a metrics based perhaps on breath (Charles Olson's 'projective verse',[12] the Allen Ginsberg of *Howl*),[13] or on patterns of intonation.[14] Denis Roche suspects that metrical rhythm is no more than a support mechanism, of purely practical and limited interest; instead, rhythmic analysis should attend to the pulsional dynamic of the verse:

> déroulement de l'écriture, rythme d'arrivée des enchaînements métaphoriques et des ellipses, rythme de déroulement de la lecture, rythme des thèmes, de leur apparition et de leur destruction, rythme des structures du discours, de leur arrivée et de leur disparition, rythme de disposition, d'étalement, d'enserrement, d'écoulement des textes imprimés, rythme de succession des pages et de leur imbrication possible et de leur succession comme autant d'*empreintes* (au sens biologique)[15]

> [unfolding of the writing, rhythm of arrival of metaphoric series and ellipses, rhythm of the unfolding of reading, rhythm of themes, of their appearance and undoing, rhythm of the structures of discourse, of their emergence and disappearance, rhythm of layout, of spreading and compression, of the flow of printed texts, rhythm of the sequence of pages and their possible overlaps and of their sequencing as so many *fingerprints* (in the biological/genetic sense)].

Correspondingly, according to Roche, scansion should cease to have as its business the evaluation of verse measures, whether quantitative or syllabic, and should, rather, trace the pulsions (units of energy) propelling the verse, or what he calls the '*bousculade pulsionnelle*' [*pulsional jostling*].[16] Translation might take upon itself not only the reinstatement and the elaboration of the art of scansion, but might advance

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[12] Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', in Robert Creeley (ed), *Selected Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 15-26.

[13] Ginsberg, Allen, 'Notes for *Howl and Other Poems*', in Hoover (ed.), *Postmodern American Poetry*, pp. 635-7

[14] See G. Burns Cooper, *Mysterious Music: Rhythm and Free Verse* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[15] Denis Roche, 'Leçons sur la vacance poétique (*fragments*)', *Éros énergumène suivi du Poème du 29 avril 62* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 13.

[16] Roche, 'Leçons sur la vacance poétique', p. 16.

scansion-based kinds of metricity, maximalist rather than minimalist, and thus be ready to incorporate a higher degree of elasticity into the description and notation of what constitutes the measurement of verse.

But there are other reasons for opting for free verse as the medium for the translation of verse:

1. Free verse has a versatility, a polymorphousness, which increases its cultural range, its capacity to create multi-metrico-rhythmic landscapes. Translation's aim is not perhaps so much to transport a text wholesale into the modern age, but rather actively to measure the distance between then and now, there and here, acting out that distance with its mass of intertexts. Translation should perhaps, in limited fashion, enact the temporal mutability of the work it translates. Free verse offers an inclusive medium with a great deal of formal and generical flexibility.

2. Another way of putting this is to say that free verse is a coming to form which never, quite, comes to form. It thus allows the translator to work in the very medium of the problematic, of that which does not quite declare itself, or cannot be quite declared.

3. Free verse makes visible, in the dispositional and typographic options it offers, the sense in which translation is linguistic and formal engineering.

4. Free verse has the ability to identify and express its author (the translator) in the singularity of its layout and rhythmic configurations, without necessitating radical transformations of the existing textual material.

5. Free verse changes the temporality of text. Where regular verse may seem to wish to dam up time, to hold it suspended, free verse keeps time with temporal flow. Free-verse translation draws a text into the present of the translational act. We remember D.H. Lawrence's words: 'But in free verse

we look for the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment'.[17] We would argue, however, that this 'instant moment' is interwoven with Bergsonian (inner) duration.

Secondly, I have argued for both an extremer and more general version of free verse translation: the translation of the linear into the tabular.[18] There is not space here to outline that argument in detail: in my rough tally, the shift from linear to tabular entails some 20 corresponding shifts of readerly mindset.[19] But from that argument I would like to rescue three points for present purposes:

(i) The shift from linear to tabular text produces a cinematisation of discourse. Verse sacrifices the articulation of discursive syntax to the splicing together of cuts, to 'editing' by 'shot'. The tabular introduces the ethos of montage: anything can enter, can be montaged into its self-adapting structure (expanding text). This rhythm of adjustment, this preparedness to re-orientate structural and emotional drives is the essence of this kind of reading. Rhythm lies not in syntagmatic continuities, but in the enchained discontinuities of shot. We shall further explore below this shift from enjambement to *découpage*.

(ii) The tabular pushes time almost exclusively in the Bergsonian direction. Time is no longer teleological, forward-driven, but is made up of digression, distraction, unresolvability. The unicursal labyrinth of the linear gives way to the multicursal labyrinth of the tabular. The linear page is the page we pass through; the tabular page is the page we spend time in.

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[17] D.H. Lawrence, 'Introduction to *New Poems*', *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 88.
[18] Clive Scott, 'From Linearity to Tabularity: Translating Modes of Reading', *CTIS Occasional Papers*, 4 (2009), pp. 37-52.
[19] Scott, 'From Linearity to Tabularity', pp. 42-7.

> (iii)   There is no accepted way of either writing or reading the tabular; we do not know how to do either. Each time we have to reinvent our perceptual behaviours, our itineraries through language. Translating into the tabular is translating away from the interpretative and towards the phenomenological, away from the gathering of meaning and towards the palpation of language.

Additionally, in order to institute what I have called 'the dialogue of rhythmicity', and to explore the ST in all its genetic phases and variant options, verse-translation needs to draw on prose-versions, as a pre-textual ground in which all is still possible, virtual, latent, awaiting the multitude of readerly/speakerly self-explorations and their rhythmic realisations. We shall see prose in action as a re-geneticisation of text below.

Armed with these initial reflections and resolutions, let us begin to imagine what new styles of notation might reveal within a translational process. I take the first line of Baudelaire's 'Chant d'automne', accompanied by a standard metrical notation:

Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres   2+4+3+3

(Baudelaire : 'Chant d'automne', l.1)

The plus signs between the syllabic groups suggest recuperative stasis, measures marked off and juxtaposed with each other, a process of adding units together to make the desired number, 12. This anti-Bergsonian, spatialist view of verse-structure is reinforced by the terminological habits that have come to us from linguistics: Peureux does not speak of the phonemes which *precede* or *follow* the rhyming vowel, but of the phonemes 'à la gauche et à la droite de la dernière voyelle masculine'[20] [to the left and right of the last accentuable vowel]. But if,

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[20] Peureux, *La Fabrique du vers*, p. 244.

instead, I write 2>4>3>3, I am already suggesting that sequence is not a process of addition but of metamorphosis (including morphing into something numerically the same but constitutionally different), an ongoing dynamic of measures finding their way, of verbal decisions on the wing.

> Soon we will plunge into the cold shadows   / x x / x x x / / x

One might think of this line as an act of simultaneous interpreting, which is only interested in the words and their meanings, not in the rhythm. But we can become interested in the rhythm:

> Soon……we will plunge/intothe *cold shadows* 3….214/311431

And then turning back to the twelve syllables of the French:

> Soon…↑   plunge/>deep↑   into
>
>   soon we will   *chilly sha-*
>
>   *dows* ↓ 431134114132
>
>   / / x x / | / x x / x / x

In these two re-writings, the minimal diacritical notations are: suspension marks = drawl and pause; ↑↓ = rise and fall in pitch; reduction to 10-point = recession of voice; /> = caesura (/) with syncopation (>) (and silent off-beat) + thrust forward on to following word; *scriptio continua* = accelerando; italics = rallentando; numerical notation = different degrees of stress on a rising scale of 1-4. The diacritical marks, it should be emphasized, are not designed as *accurate* notations of

pitch, speed and so on, but an indication that these features are *in action* at these points and are an invitation to the reader to exercise him/herself in them.

This view, where translation operates as a process of rhythmicisation, or enrhythming, of the text (not *necessarily* at the expense of the metrical background), naturally attracts back-translation as the mapping out, by intertextual dialogue, of a widening rhythmic field, in which a continual process of metamorphosis expands the rhythmic parameters of the 'shared' text. When I first asked the computer for a translation, I left in the diacritical marks, and it replied with a linguistic hybrid, bilingual and sharply fragmented:

Bientôt… ↑   deep↑> de plongeon   dans

       bientôt nous   *sha- frais*

                                    dows ↓

For me, this hybrid is powerfully telling: it acts out a hand-to-hand collision of languages, unresolved, unresolvable, and yet bespeaks the self-insinuative capacity of language; it acts out, too, a writerly predicament: undecided, caught between languages, the writing shudders forward, through a sequence of false starts. In short, the line has taken a genetic step backwards, towards the stuttering rhythms of the pre-articulate. Translation has this capacity to investigate the ways in which a text finds its rhythmical way. In Kristevan terms, this might involve a journey back into the semiotic and perhaps to the further side of it, where language is more about contact than communication, more a form of acoustic doodling, more a lingual tactility, more a possibility of language, than a language. Here the signifier resists the signified, not in the name of a deferred meaning, but in the name of its own urgency, an indexicality which invokes a referent without knowing what the referent is. In this sense, translation is a process of textual becoming, of text

coming to itself, *as the psychologisation or existentialisation of the reader.* But this becoming is not a teleological process; it is, rather, the creation of a field situation.

In my second back-translation, I removed the diacritical marks and re-aligned the text on a single level. What emerged was a 17-syllable line:

> Bientôt bientôt nous plongerons profondément
> dans les ombres fraîches

Its measures, for me, run: 4>4>4>3>2. So I have printed it as a 'tailed' *alexandrin trimètre*, where the tail describes a movement of syllabic diminution. 'Bientôt'/ 'soon' now has a new impulsiveness: where my English version has an 'inflated' first 'soon' which then recedes, here we have a first 'Bientôt' reaching impatiently for the second, in which an accented pitch-peak is reached. And now the acoustic range is dominated by the nasal /ɔ̃/ and the shifts between voiced and voiceless (/b/ : /p/, /d/ : /t/, /ʒ/ : /ʃ/), as if the conflict between heat and cold, light and dark, were playing itself out in the throat.

The final back-translation appeared without my quite knowing where from or how:

> Profondément nous de plongerons de bientôt de Bientôt
> fraîches d'ombres de les de dans

This line, punctuated by 'de', gradually undoes syntax and disappears into the sand. This is a line heading towards glossolalia. As we have seen, translation is a naturally self-polarising enterprise: it must institute a productive interaction between languages, whereby the expressive range of the languages involved is reciprocally extended and refined; but, at the same time, translation re-investigates language as a medium, challenges its acoustic and syntactic assumptions, tests its limits, explores its pathologies. This 'variant' is the Baudelairean line seen as the divagation of a disturbed mind, the step-by-step descent into the inarticulate, the

gradual evacuation of language's semanticity. But it may equally be translation into a new language, a new syntax, a twelve-tone music of syntax, in which words live different lives and come into perception from unfamiliar angles.

This set of translational moves is instructive. It is not just that a single line can be read in many ways; it is that translation compels text constantly to re-imagine itself from its putative conception to any number of alternative realisations, so that a complex rhythmic portrait develops, a gradual rhythmic sedimentation, or sedimentation of rhythms, rhythmic impulses, rhythmic re-configurations.[21] A perusal of Cocteau's poetry, for example, tells us that what may have been conceived initially as regular verse, a sonnet even, can easily morph into free verse (*poèmes scindés, poèmes éclatés, poèmes démontés*) or prose.[22] Here is part of the attempt, by redistribution, by devices of *emboîtement*, of imbrication, to overcome the inevitable partnership of linearity, monotemporality and chronometricity, and to internalise rhymes. Correspondingly, in translation, the TT is what the ST might have found its way to, if it had taken a slightly different route through language. The translator's task is to restore the ST to activity in the activity of translation, and to translate rhythm, because rhythm is the way in which the reading of the ST registers *its* activity.

As we move on from the translation of a single alexandrine to the translation of free verse itself, we should first explore the French analytical predicament when confronting free verse. Simply put, it is bound up with the habit of reading free

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[21] At this point, it would be as well to remember the words of Pierre Joris: 'In my years spent in the practice of poetry, both writing and translating it, a sense has gropingly emerged suggesting that a poem is not only the one version printed in a book or magazine, but is also all its other (possible) printed versions, plus all the possible oral and/or visual performances as well as the totality of translations it allows. The printed poem thus functions only as a score for all subsequent readings (private or public) and performative transformations, be they through music, dance, painting or linguistic translation. Such a view is bound to destabilize a concept of the poem as fixed, absolute artefact, readable (understandable, interpretable) once and for all. Celan says as much in the Meridian: "The absolute poem—no, it certainly does not, cannot exist"' (*Paul Celan: 'Breathturn'* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1995), pp. 34-5).

[22] See Gérald Purnelle, 'Camouflage et dislocation : De l'alexandrin au vers libre chez Breton et Cocteau', and David Gullentops, 'Présences de l'alexandrin dans *Embarcadères*', in Monique Bourdin (ed.), *Jean Cocteau 4: Poésie critique et critique de la poésie* (Paris/Caen: Minard, 2003), pp. 113-53, 155-82.

verse retrospectively rather than projectively, apparently because past metrical habits provide the only solid footing for the analysis of free verse. One finds commentators denying the appropriateness of counting syllables, or of using notions like 'foot' or 'measure', but processes or terms equivalent to them seep back—rough quantifications of syllables per line, for example.[23] However much Murat protests that 'le nombre syllabique n'est pas pertinent' [the number of syllables is not significant],[24] he counts, because his investigation of free-verse structure is still guided by traditional notions of equivalence and contrast. These backslidings derive from a larger capitulation: the description of free verse from a position outside the verse, a recuperative position, a position which treats the text as immobilised and stable. In many senses the epithet 'free' itself is unfortunate, since it is so often treated definitionally rather than qualitatively.

It may well be justified to trace the emergence of free verse to a certain relationship with syllabic metricity and to claim that 'le rejet de la versification se fondait sur elle'[25] [the rejection of versification was based upon it (syllabic metricity)]; but to read free verse as an 'objet-limite pour l'étude métrique'[26] [outer-extreme/outer-limit object for metrical study] encourages not only this retrospective reading of *vers libre*, but also a reading of it which inevitably casts it as the negative or transgression of a certain perceptual system. Free verse certainly needed to find its way out of metrical assumptions, but only to establish itself as a real perceptual alternative, not as an absence of rhythm, or as a *subversive* rhythmicity, but as a *relocated* rhythmicity.[27]

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[23] Murat, *Le Vers libre*, pp. 46-8.

[24] Murat, *Le Vers libre*, p. 50.

[25] Peureux, *La Fabrique du vers*, p. 25.

[26] Peureux, *La Fabrique du vers*, p. 26.

[27] Jacques Roubaud puts it thus: 'Free verse, as written in French by the Surrealists and their followers, was still far too dependent on the history of French verse, defiantly standing against the memory of alexandrine verse' ('Prelude: Poetry and Orality', trans. Jean-Jacques Poucel, in Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (eds.), *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 21).

In fact, there is no need to outlaw number (and then let it in through the back door); one only has to treat it differently, not as metre-giving but as rhythm-making, not as something to be adhered to, but as something which emerges as the text unfolds, not as a monopolizing consideration, but as one aspect among many in an inclusive view of verse-constituents (accent, acoustic landscape, intonation, tempo, pausing, etc.). Laforgue may, famously, have forgotten to count syllables,[28] but syllabic numbers are an inevitable concomitant of the lexicon and syntax he chose, a property of his texts. And the argument that counting is unreliable because of doubts about the status of the *e atone* (syncope, apocope), and about synaeresis and diaeresis, is not disqualifying, when one is experimenting with reading rather than trying to establish a metre; one reads the text now one way, now another, to explore its rhythmic possibilities and to discover what kind of reading does best justice to one's own textual perceptions at a particular moment.

In his treatment of Valery Larbaud's *Barnabooth* poems (1908),[29] Murat initiates his study with this affirmation:

> il s'agit bien chez Larbaud d'un vrai vers libre, non compté et non rimé. Bien que les poèmes contiennent un grand nombre de mètres virtuels, le principe d'équivalence en nombre syllabique cesse de s'appliquer; la périodicité, c'est-à-dire la récurrence systématique et exhaustive des formes, est abandonnée.[30]

> [with Larbaud, it is a matter of true free verse, not counted and not rhymed. Although the poems contain a large number of potential metres, the principle of equivalence in syllabic number ceases to apply; periodicity, that is to say the systematic and exhaustive recurrence of forms, is abandoned.]

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[28] Laforgue made this declaration in a letter to Gustave Kahn in July 1886: 'J'oublie de rimer, j'oublie le nombre de syllabes, j'oublie la distribution des strophes, mes lignes commencent à la marge comme de la prose' (*Lettres à un ami 1880-1886*, ed. G. Jean-Aubry (Paris : Mercure de France, 1941), p. 193) [I forget to rhyme, I forget the number of syllables, I forget the distribution of stanzas, my lines begin at the margin like prose].
[29] Murat, *Le Vers libre*, pp. 215-34.
[30] Murat, *Le Vers libre*, p. 223.

One might immediately object that the notion of a 'true' *vers libre* is as chimaeric as it is undesirable, just as Murat's construction of a 'forme standard' of *vers libre* takes it into platonic realms which are alien to its ontological relativity and elasticity. Additionally, one should say that the importance of rhyme to the definition of free verse is negligible, while the definition of free verse is crucial to rhyme. The absence of rhyme does not help to install *vers libre*, even in France; *vers libre* simply changes the function of rhyme: its role is no longer structural/structuring, but psycho-physiological. And this reveals the more fundamental burden of my argument: *vers libre* has certain prosodic characteristics by which it is customarily defined; but their significance is no longer prosodic so much as cognitive, perceptual and psychological.

Murat's investigation into Larbaud's free verse closes with the following conclusion: Larbaud has developed the first coherent French collection of modern free verse, in the transition ('passage') from Symbolism to Modernism; but:

> ce passage s'accomplit sans rupture, puisque le vers libre de Larbaud est fondé sur une articulation précise avec la langue traditionnelle des vers, dont il s'incorpore les principales propriétés. Il illustre une conception continuiste de l'histoire des formes, selon laquelle le vers libre est 'sorti, né de la perfection de l'alexandrin'[31]

> [this transition occurs without rupture, since Larbaud's free verse is founded upon a precise articulation with the traditional language of verse, whose principal properties it incorporates into itself. It illustrates a 'continuist' conception of the history of forms, according to which *vers libre* 'emerged, born of the perfection of the alexandrine'].

This set of observations seems oddly ill at ease with the initial affirmation, contradictory even; the unsteadily and challengingly polymorphous slips back reassuringly into straight-line historical continuity.

In his account of the first stanza of Larbaud's 'Ode':

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[31] Murat, *Le Vers libre*, p. 233.

1.   Prête-moi ton grand bruit, ta grande allure si douce,

2.   Ton glissement nocturne à travers l'Europe illuminée,

3.   Ô train de luxe ! et l'angoissante musique

4.   Qui bruit le long de tes couloirs de cuir doré,

5.   Tandis que derrière les portes laquées, aux loquets de cuivre

      lourd,

6.   Dorment les millionnaires.

Murat provides a standard notation of syllabic values, with indications of caesuras or structural *coupes*: 6-7, 6-8, 4-7, 4-4-4, 10-7, 6.[32] We might disagree with such a notation on two grounds: (a) some of the numbers are mistaken: l. 2 = 6-9, not 6-8; l. 4 is more like 2-6-4; l. 5 = 11-7, not 10-7 (Murat seems to be counting the *e atone* in the traditional way); (b) it continues to suppose that these are *vers composés*, pivoting around a structural juncture; first hemistichs of 4 and 6 thus identified condition reading towards a recognition of 'virtual' metres, blurred by the syllabic 'débordement' of their second hemistichs.[33] But there is no obligation to read in this fashion, no obligation to make that kind of choice. I read these lines with this rhythmic disposition:

$$3>3>4>3$$
$$4>2>5>4$$
$$4>4>3$$
$$2>6>4$$
$$8(2>6)>3>3>4$$
$$1>5 \qquad\qquad = 75$$

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[32] Murat, *Le Vers libre*, p. 226.
[33] Murat, *Le Vers libre*, p. 227.

which, in turn and leaving aside consonants, produces a foregrounding of the
following vocalic elements:

$$/a/ > /i/ > /y/ > /u/$$

$$/\hat{a}/ > /y/ > /ɔ/ > /e/$$

$$/y/ > /\hat{a}/ > /i/$$

$$/i/ > /a/ > /e/$$

$$(/i/ > /ɔ/) > /e/ > /ɛ/ > /u/$$

$$/ɔ/ > /ɛ/$$

Even though, technically speaking, the poem is not rhymed, line-terminal
acousticity helps to project and shape the phonic manifestations of accent; as Eliot
puts it: 'Rhyme removed, much ethereal music leaps from the word, music which
has hitherto chirped unnoticed in the expanse of prose'.[34] Rhyme no longer
generates repetitive structures and does not therefore establish particular kinds of
intonational pattern. It does not have a role independent of other acoustic
structures in the verse.[35] It does not endorse metrical structure, although it may
endorse the line-ending. Above all, it is not the agent of memory/reflection, but
the instrument of the association of ideas, propulsive rather than recursive, but
propulsive *without anticipation.* Put another way, one might say that it is involuntary,

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[34] T.S. Eliot, 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*', *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (London: Faber and
Faber, 1978), p. 189.

[35] In the words of Albert Mockel: '[…] car si sa position en évidence la doue d'une importance
spéciale, la rime n'a pourtant pas, dans le vers moderne, un rôle indépendant du rôle des autres
sons. Elle doit, pour acquérir toute sa valeur, s'allier avec les tons syllabiques voisins ou se fondre
en leur rumeur qu'elle peut alors synthétiser par sa note vive' ('Propos de littérature', *Esthétique du
symbolisme*, ed. Michel Otten (Brussels : Palais des Académies, 1962), p. 129) [[…] for if its
prominent position endows it with a special importance, rhyme does not however enjoy, in
modern verse, a role independent of the role of the other sounds. It must, to acquire a maximal
value, ally itself with adjacent syllabic tones or blend into their music, which it can then synthesize
by the vividness of its note].

a linguistic compulsion, not listened for but recognized. It is an element of verbal psychology rather than of aesthetic structure.

To use a prose version of the ST as an initial relay-station on the way to translations is to return to the inchoate of language, to rhythmicity as a shape-shifting miasma, where all is yet to be conceived, drawn out, where the multiplicity of virtual verbal trajectories, expressive configurations, segmentations and groupings, is at a maximum, where vision is unprejudiced by the already-arrived-at:

> prête-moi ton grand bruit ta grande allure si douce ton glissement nocturne à travers l'Europe illuminée ô train de luxe et l'angoissante musique qui bruit le long de tes couloirs de cuir doré tandis que derrière les portes laquées aux loquets de cuivre lourd dorment les millionnaires

Once folded into prose and re-virtualized, verse can be folded out again, but in many re-configured forms. Prose is a medium which multiplies verse; it asks us to see the possible patterns in the carpet, to make varieties of choice, and varieties of choice about literary value. That is why prose itself needs always to be re-translated. Sadly, our sensitivity to prose's multiformity is little developed, and this we might blame on prose's inexorable linearity, which, in the mind's eye at least, levels out expressive asperity and implies a uniform mode of consumption. From this prose I take:

prête-moi ton grand		3>2
	bruit	1
ta grande		2
	allure	2
	si douce	2
ton glissement nocturne		4>2
	à travers	3
	l'Europe illuminée	2>4

ô train de luxe	4/2>2	
et l'angoiss-	3	
ante musique qui bruit	4>3	
le long de tes couloirs de cuir	2>4>2	
doré	2	
tandis que	3	
derrière	2	
les portes laquées aux	2>4	
loquets de cuivre	2>2	
lourd	1	
dorment	1	
les millionnaires	4	= 70

In regular verse, there is much difference in the significance that enjambement has in French and English. Being a 'foot' prosody (recurrence of metrical unit) rather than a line prosody, being a motor-metre rather than a metre of boundaries, English regular verse has few inhibitions about enjambement; it may produce marked expressive effects, effects which grow from the kind of syntactic rupture, or from the kind of loading of juncture, which it produces, but it is not *metrically* subversive. In French regular verse, on the other hand, where the line-ending is a boundary reinforced by rhyme which establishes the line's numericity and is thus 'naturally' the location of a tonic accent, enjambement threatens to undo that metrical order. Enjambement may provide the same expressive effects as in English, but here there is potentially a metrical price to pay and correspondingly a nuance of transgression in the effect. In free verse, on the other hand, where the line in both languages is not a metrical product so much as a typographical one, and possibly even a bibliographical one, enjambement, by its arbitrary intervention, establishes the formal imperativity of the line; or, alternatively, it defines the line as a palpation of junctures: the line comes to an end when it has identified the

juncture most apposite for its expressive agenda; or, alternatively, it helps to generate the meaning of margins. As we move further into these new functions, the notion of enjambement becomes increasingly inappropriate: no metrical boundary is being straddled by a syntactical unit whose very integrity is crucial to the force of the enjambement. In the new dispensation, syntactic integrity is not at stake; language's raison d'être is its fragmentation, its denaturalisation of syntax and parts of speech, its promotion of the morphemic and phonetic at the expensive of discursive continuity. Line-endings are no longer the sites of completion, but rather of rupture and dislocation. Enjambement cedes its place to *découpage*.

In my re-writing of the Larbaud stanza, *découpage* clearly has an overall rhythmic significance: instead of long lines imitating the expanding trajectory of the train, gliding smoothly across measures, we have a choppier, staccato movement, as if the train's impulsiveness were being dammed up, frustrated, only periodically released in rather longer measures, or combinations of measure. In this process, by virtue of being line-group-terminal, some syllables attract degrees of accentuation they would not normally enjoy; and the increase in line-group-terminal *e atones* means that this version of the stanza has only 70 counting syllables, where the original has 75, which itself impairs the stanza's pronunciatory flexibility and fluency. In the end, the train is almost immobilised by the inertia of its heavy fittings ('lourd') and the sleep ('dorment') of its millionaires.

This *découpage* also creates a pattern of margins in which the fourth margin attracts post-posed adjectives, the third nouns, and the second, not surprisingly, prepositions and pre-posed adjectives. It is as if the train were passing through a sifting device, its progress along the lines disaggregated and scattered across grammatical categories. This pulverisation of the train journey leaves the translator thinking of the entropic rhythms of energy-dispersal rather than the purposeful ones of unidirectional momentum.

As I turn to an English rendering, I return to the bath of prose, reflecting upon the process of re-writing I have just passed through:

> lend me your great noise your great so soothing motion your nocturnal glide across Europe in lights o train de luxe and the harrowing music which reverberates along your gilt leather corridors while behind the lacquered doors with their heavy copper latches the millionaires slumber on

From this emerges:

LEND↑ me….

your **GREAT↑**   //   **NOISE↓**

your **GREAT**   **MOTION↓**

        so soothing

your noc**TURN**al →   ≈   ***GLIDE****→*

across €UR↑Ope

      in ʟɪGHTS↓

       O train de ʟUX€→

      and

     the HARrowing MU↑**sic**

which

*re***VERBerates** →

along

your GILT LEAther

COrridors →

While be**HIND**↑ the LACquered DOORS↓

With their HEAvy↓ COpper↓ LAtches↓

The million**AIRES** →

SLUM↓*ber*

ON↓

[Additional diacritics: // = a resistance to the voice, which holds the voice up and requires an effort of the voice to overcome; ≈ = an undulation in the train's glide, a wiggle of the vocal hips].

At first glance, regular verse is made up of units whose raison d'être is independent of any typographical disposition, but for which typographical disposition serves the function of making formally visible: layout makes rhyme patterns easy to recuperate; indentation facilitates the identification of heterosyllabicity. In free verse the relation between typographic disposition and inherent (linguistic) feature is much more crucial and problematic. What we can claim, in very general terms, is that metrists have continued to look for the answers of free verse in the linguistic givens, what we have called the 'inherency' of the verse, and thus correspondingly insufficient attention has been paid to typographic disposition as verse-constitutive—lines define the relation of margins as much as vice-versa; language releases the play of fonts, of bold, of roman and italic, as much as vice versa. One might argue that, in adopting this particular disposition of Larbaud's lines, we are enhancing the cosmopolitan spirit of his verse, and, in the process, subscribing to the view, expressed by Murat, that the arts of typography and layout promise an international verse-language:

> D'autre part, le découpage et la mise en page du vers libre sont des processus indépendants de la langue du poème (de sa phonologie, de sa prosodie et de sa syntaxe) ainsi que de la tradition métrique qui s'est développée dans cette langue. Ils peuvent être adoptés pratiquement sans apprentissage, transposés d'une langue à une autre.[36]

> [On the other hand, the line-divisions and layout of vers libre are processes independent of the poem's language (of its phonology, its prosody, its syntax) as of the metrical tradition which has evolved in that language. They can be adopted almost without any need for initiation, transposed from one language into another].

But in fact our view is very different. While typography and layout may be international as a language, as a resource, they reach*, in every particular application,*

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[36] Murat, *Le Vers libre*, p. 216.

deep into the phonology, prosody and syntax of the particular language concerned, multiply their aspects, and exercise, and perhaps extend, their expressive range. Typographical disposition is important precisely because it is able to embody those paralinguistic features which metrical inherency leaves totally out of account, and to act, if need be, as a visual prosthetic, to create 'signs' which push the voice either in the direction of the non-vocal, infra-vocal or ultra-vocal, or in the direction of the conceptual (the mental-acoustic). Because of these capacities, a set of typographical and dispositional features cannot simply be transposed from one language to another, as Murat suggests, but on the contrary, must be translated into different forms of themselves in order to capture the rhythmic, acoustic and syntactic shifts which occur as one morphs from one language into another.[37] And because of these capacities, we are reminded that typographical and dispositional change is the device by which a text can constantly be called back into time, into the time of its making and of its being read anew, and the infinity of possible typographical and dispositional permutations brings home to us that translation, no less than writing or reading, is an activity continually at work on itself. How much unexercised choice still inhabits every inch of this mutable text? It is translation's task never, by simply confirming the structure it already has, to let a text drift off into the timeless. In order to survive as active and energy-producing, a text must constantly and firmly be relocated in time.

This account of theses lines draws on nine typefaces: Engravers MT, Copperplate Gothic, Bauhaus 93, Bernard MT Conder, Wide Latin, Broadway, Algerian, Stencil, with Times New Roman as its default position. It is easy to think that language in tabular texts has a greater power to act imitatively, iconically or transcriptively, and this is undoubtedly true. But more valuable perhaps is the new sense that language is not the secretary of another order of reality, but an investigative equipment, the instrument of a neurosurgical exploration, and the

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[37] See Clive Scott, 'Translating Free Verse: Jaccottet and Auden', *Channel Crossings: French and English Poetry in Dialogue 1550-2000* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), pp. 209-38.

sense that it is more diverse in its enunciability, in its range of function and expressiveness. The tabular page can explore the whole gamut that runs from the lyrically voiced to the non-vocal or non-vocalisable (i.e. noise), via the speakable (but devoiced) through the oral (sounds vocalized, but without vocal continuity). And these different degrees of vocalisation and non-vocalisability can be conveyed by variable fonts. Fonts can also suggest decorative, sculptural or architectural styles (Algerian, Bauhaus 93), life-styles (Broadway), spatial pressures, like the compression of Bernard MT Conder, or degrees of amplification, as in Wide Latin. The buccal cavity and the mechanisms of articulation add up to actualisations of the voice in shapes, volumes, intensities, structures. In the end, we may dream of the whole family of fonts as an intricate system of diacritics, conveying voice quality and phonetic values.

When we listen to language, we can listen phonetically or phonologically, that is to say, we can either listen to language as raw sounds, as *origins*, or we can listen to it as a string of phonemes, as determiners of meaning, as *destinations*. In our translation, typographic foregrounding helps to engineer this phoneticisation of the phonological, governed by no particular obligations to standard morphology, so that the text releases not only a suggestive new lexicon, but also the poet's song of himself, the 'borborygmes' [intestinal rumblings], the 'chuchotements irrépressibles des organes' [irrepressible whisperings of the organs], the 'inévitable chanson de l'œsophage' [unavoidable song of the oesophagus] ('Prologue').[38] And this organic symphony is wedded, as in Whitman's 'To a Locomotive in a Winter', by or to the 'lawless music' of the train:

> Mêlant ma voix à tes cent mille voix,

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[38] Larbaud's 'Prologue' was to be roughly echoed in Apollinaire's 'La Victoire' (*Calligrammes*, 1918; 1st pub. March 1917), in which the call for a new language includes the lines: 'Servez-vous du bruit sourd de celui qui mange sans civilité/ Le raclement aspiré du crachement ferait aussi une belle consonne// Les divers pets labiaux rendraient aussi vos discours claironnants/ Habituez-vous à roter à volonté' [Use the muffled sound of someone eating noisily/ The indrawn throat-clearing of someone about to spit would also make a good consonant//The variety of labial farts would also give your words resonance/ Get used to belching at will].

Ô Harmonika-Zug!
[…]
                              […] prêtez-moi
Vos miraculeux bruits sourds et
Vos vibrantes voix de chanterelle

[Mingling my voice with your hundred thousand voices,
O harmonica-train!
[…]
                              […] lend me
Your miraculous muffled noises and
Your vibrant chanterelle voices]

Accentuation brings these syllabic segments to prominence; any other motivator of attention might produce a different typographic landscape. The phrase that recurs in Larbaud's 1914 study of Whitman[39] is 'en (pleine) formation' [in (full) development]: Larbaud uses it in relation to American society (249), to America (256), but equally in relation to Whitman's poetry (252): Whitman writes a poetry of the pioneer, projected towards the future (256). This is the brand of translation/writing we wish to promote: ever 'en formation', with every decision made activating other possible decisions, an expanding, proliferating set of permutations.

Finally, and briefly, we should notice that in the translation of lines 3 and 4 of the original stanza, the lateral patterns based on the left-hand margin give way temporarily to a vertical, middle-axis sequence; that is to say, there is a point at which this stanza breaks away from the left-hand margin of authorial textual possession, of authorial enunciation, the place where the linear ever seeks to re-establish itself, and installs an alternative consciousness, a consciousness which sinks into the centre of experience, and which expands from the middle, spreading out in a movement of bi-lateral encompassment. This is a consciousness without a

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[39] Valery Larbaud, 'Walt Whitman', in Walt Whitman, *Poèmes : Feuilles d'herbe* (Paris : Gallimard, 1992), pp. 227-65.

psychology, driven forward by a pure receptivity to phenomena, but finally intruded upon and effaced by the sleeping millionaires.

It is usual to think of translation as the servant of prevailing critical circumstances and attitudes. Literary translation mirrors the situation which obtains in the critical market-place and gravitates towards those available approaches which best serve its purposes (postcolonial studies, cultural studies, cognitive poetics). If one supposes, however, that translation is designed as a critique of critical methods, if one assumes that translation, as a record of a particular kind of creative reading, is to be valued as a counterweight to interpretative reading, then one might call upon translation to re-orientate our thinking about the ways in which texts can be most fruitfully absorbed. In the case considered here, and supposing that translation is reading across languages, rather than converting one language into another, translation reveals what metre obstructs in the interchange of texts, in the reader's negotiation between texts, and what it discourages in the reciprocal, performative inhabitation of texts. As our knowledge of a poem deepens, so the centre of metrico-rhythmic interest and activity shifts, outwards, from processes of recognition and identification towards processes of diversification, differentiation, modulation. Rhythmic choices— choices with any number of visible and invisible motivations—individuate the reader; by that I do not mean individuate the reader's interpretation, but individuate the reader's consciousness as a consciousness-of-text, act as 'footprints' of a changing readerly metabolism.

All this implicitly argues that translation should, by definition, be a form of experimental writing: by definition (a) because its material, the paralinguistic, verbal and visual, is unstable, shifting, varied, metamorphic, multi-lingual and multi-sensory—that is to say, its parameters are difficult, if not impossible, to establish; and (b) because it is translation's business to put the ST at the cutting edge of its own progress through time, to open up for the ST its possible futures, its strategy of textual survival. And it might further be argued that experimental

writing in translation is richer than experimental writing *tout court*, simply because of its metatextual dimension, because it refers to another text, because it is as much an exploration of the genetics and expressive potentialities of a(nother) text as an exercise in the free expressive response of a readerly consciousness.

We lack a language able to capture the phenomenology of reading, and experimental writing offers us the best hope of finding one. Translation should thus have as its business the development of news kinds of rhythmic analysis, new languages of scansional notation. What we have yet fully to realise is that inasmuch as experimental writing is the art of typeface and layout, the poetics of the page, it seeks to activate in the eye and the ear degrees of awareness and responsiveness which the eye and ear only too readily fall short of. We have to re-imagine the participatory arts of the eye and ear and exercise them in our reading and writing with a physical immediacy we are unaccustomed to.[40] In a translational context at least, metre is a dulling of the senses, and a warrant for keeping one's senses dulled.

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[40] Unfortunately, it is only too easy to agree with Susan Howe, writing of Emily Dickinson: 'It takes a poet to see how urgent this subject of line breaks is. But then how often do critics consider poetry as a physical act? Do critics look at the print on the page, at the shapes of words, at the surface – the space of the paper itself?' (*The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), p. 157).

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