Two Attempts at Translating Poetry : Baudelaire's "L'Albatros" and R.S. Thomas' "Evans"

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On n'achève pas un poème, on l'abandonne.
(Paul Valéry)

This article has very remote origins: years and years ago, so long ago that I would be utterly unable to date the event (all I remember is that it happened during my student years, which does not make anyone any younger), I chanced upon an English version of some of *Les Fleurs du Mal* poems. Baudelaire had always been one of my (indeed my only) favourite "poète." My curiosity thus aroused, I perused the book. Among the translated poems was "L'albatros," or rather, "The Albatross" — a piece I knew by heart from my high school days. The "translator" (may he burn in the fire and brimstone of Hell for such blasphemy!) had litera(ril)ly massacred the poem, using a ballad rhyme-pattern (abcb defe, and so on), in the process dumping most of the original imagery and rhythm. As for the metre he used, I cannot exactly remember how he had managed to botch that too, but it was certainly not the original alexandrine. In short, the result was downright appalling. I put down the book in disgust and strove to forget the whole sorry business.

A few years later still, I discovered, in the *Cahiers de l'Herne* issue devoted to him, what Samuel Beckett (I was then working on a thesis about his prose texts) had achieved in translating various poems, from English into French as well as, if my memory serves me well, the

other way round. The results were simply mind-boggling — there and then did I discover what translation *could* yield, an experience that whetted my appetite for it tremendously.

Then, about six years ago, I met (sheer serendipity, or call it Fate — who can tell) a British person who was as crazy as myself about words and translation, and who eventually became my co-translator (as well as the official English translator for the world-famous painter Georges Yatridès, better known as the "anti-Picasso"). I soon got the idea of attempting, with her kind help, a *decent* translation of "L'albatros." Which we did — the reader is left to judge the value of our efforts (completed some time in 1993, so the date accompanying our English version tells me). Two things are for certain: the undertaking was most exhilarating for both of us, and yet, neither of us would have been able to do the work single-handedly. Which confirms, if needs be, that two brains work better than one. A few years later we translated "Evans" together again — my co-translator wanted to use it with her Erasmus students in her translation class.

So that the two transposed versions of the poems presented and discussed here (one classical in form, and from French into English — the other in "modern" shape, and from English into French) are the products of a collaboration. I also owe my co-translator a certain amount of precious information concerning the "welshness" of "Evans" — but more of that later.

Poetry is (rightly) considered as the form of writing hardest to transpose into another language. The reasons for this are obvious: prosody, metre, rhyme-patterns, imagery, rhythm, sounds, all of these elements tend to make a poem basically untranslatable, a lot more so, we would suggest, than a prose piece. When attempting to "translate" a poem, humility and patience are *de rigueur*. The aim of this article is less to show off some skills (whatever they may be worth) than to contribute modestly, perhaps, a few pertinent reflections (drawn from personal

experience) regarding the (still relatively young) field of traductology. We shall proceed logically, that is chrono-logically: we shall then deal first with "L'albatros," and subsequently with "Evans."

One last word, concerning our approach. As in so many other fields (such as grammar), various attempts have been made to "codify" the translating operations involved in passing from the source language to the target one. But these "methods" generally suffer from all the failings and shortcomings of a descriptive approach — and descriptive grammar certainly offers the archetype of such problems (the "rules" they derive from a superficial examination of structures often verge on the ridiculous — we might here give examples, but the list could be long, if not interminable). For the basic defect of these "methods" is, precisely, that they merely describe various operations, giving them "tags" in passing (such as "étoffement," "réduction," "chassé-croisé" and so on and so forth, in the translation field), but they contribute little in analysing or explaining the wherefore and why of such or such manipulation, shift or change, short of implicitly owning that it pertains to the specific structures of the languages involved: in other words, this pseudo-mechanistic approach usually ends up in pure tautology. I should know what I am talking about: I had to teach such rubbish (let us call a spade a spade) for one year, without any great profit, since my students (not surprisingly) had very little to show for it at the end of the day (or rather, the final examination). Besides, if translation were a mere mechanistic process, the translating machine so fiercely dreamed of and eagerly sought after, and frantically worked on in the computer industry, should be by now a solid reality. Yet, as we all know, it is still a far cry from being so.

Even worse than that. For I had ample occasion to notice that, not seldom, students working on an MA in traductology tend (consciously or not) to invert the process: they choose a certain way of translating a segment of text (be their choice accurate or not — and, I have to say, more often the latter) and *then* justify it with the descriptive "method" they are meant to use. Which, in the very least, renders the whole enterprise ultimately totally useless, if not downright preposterous. But no wonder there: in such times as these, we should be used to it all. And after all,

some do profit by it, forcing their grand lucubrations on hapless students and teachers alike. (The preceding remarks do not, it goes without saying, in any way apply to the latest research in theoretical linguistics, which have yielded the most rich results and prospects.)

Therefore, in this article we shall try to avoid that kind of trap and, as far as is feasible, comment upon and explain our choices, with the ultimate aim of, as we have already proposed, pointing to (perhaps) useful reflections regarding translation processes. But now to work, and to our chosen corpus, that is, firstly, Baudelaire's "L'albatros."

1 — "L'albatros"

L'albatros

Souvent pour s'amuser les hommes d'équipage
Prennent des albatros, vastes oiseaux des mers,
Qui suivent, indolents compagnons de voyage,
Le navire glissant sur les gouffres amers.

A peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,
Que ces rois de l'azur, maladroits et honteux,
Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes blanches
Comme des avirons traîner à côté d'eux.

Ce voyageur ailé, comme il est gauche et veule !
Lui naguère si beau, qu'il est comique et laid !
L'un agace son bec avec un brûle-gueule,
L'autre mime, en boitant, l'infirme qui volait !

Le Poète est pareil au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer ;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.

This poem's classical form (stanzas, metre, rhymes, rhythm, sounds) entails both several constraints and choices when it comes to transposing it into English. The trickiest part was the rhyming pattern: English is well known for its (comparative) paucity in rhymes in respect to French. Therefore it was decided from the start to drop the rhymes in order to save as many as possible of the other features. Then there is the fact that English is, generally speaking, at once a more "concrete" and "pithy" language than French — features that also had to be taken into account, so that certain definite changes (shifts of a lexical nature or in syntax, padding — among others) would be called for — while at the same time retaining the lexical "colour" of the original. Not to mention more secondary aspects, such as caesura (a feature pertaining to rhythm) and punctuation. Here is the end result, which shall subsequently be analysed and commented upon in respect to the original, each stanza at a time: indeed, it will have been noted that each of the latter constitutes a "closed" unit ending with a full stop.

The Albatross

Often, in search of sport, the idle mariners
Capture an albatross, giant bird of the sea,
That languorously follows as fellow traveller
The ship gliding over the vast and bitter deep.

1— ***pour s'amuser*** → **in search of sport.** Co-translator found this one. Same number of syllables (*pieds*), which is all the better for it. The verb "s'amuser" was a tricky one to translate, considering the constraints of metre. Moreover, "sport" carries this old flavour, this connotation dating back to Shakespeare at least, with a hint of violence — which suits the general atmosphere of the poem. Also, a double alliteration ("search" - "sport") emerges.

les hommes d'équipage → **the idle mariners.** No literal translation possible here. So, the old-flavoured "mariners" was retained, which however left open the question of metre: padding was obviously needed here. So "idle" was chosen, since it semantically reinforces the notion of searching for "sport": if the tars had been busy attending to the

ship and its navigation, they would not have had time to torture some poor bird.

2— ***des albatros*** → **an albatross**. French plural (an echo of the opening "Often") against English singular: a question of rhythm and sounds. The same change will be observed in all subsequent lines dealing with this feature.

vastes oiseaux des mers → **giant bird of the sea**. "Vast" for "vastes" clearly would not do (semantically as well as metrically): therefore the choice of "giant," close enough to the original, and most fitting with the general context to boot. "Des mers": typical French poetical licence, which would not do with the more concrete demanding English. Therefore, here also the English singular replaces the French plural.

3— ***Qui*** → **That**. The French is there without any ambiguity, simply because it does not possess the same variety as the English regarding relative pronouns. The choice in the latter language was between "who," "which" and "that." Again considering the general context, "who" would hardly do (at least at this point): the tars consider the bird as an *object* of derision. "Which" is hardly better: a matter of context again — the final comparison between the bird and the "Poète" (note the capital "P"). Hence "that," with its rich and (here) very convenient polysemy, or ambiguity if one prefers to call it so.

indolents → **languorously**. Again a question of semantics. Somehow (considering once again the general context) "indolent" did not fit very nicely. Another insurmountable problem was that of prosody (and more especially rhythm): so the original adjective became (for better or worse) an adverb, and coming before the verb, for a question of rhythm — with the hope that there would not be too much of a semantic loss — or, for that matter, addition.

4— ***sur les gouffres amers*** → **over the vast and bitter deep**. First remark: the caesura suffered in the process of transposition — but this is not too tragic. The main problem was rather one of metre — yet

again. So "vast" was added, as (so we thought) semantically suited (vastness being connoted in the term "gouffres"). The transposition "gouffres" into "deep" was not too much of a headache, since it too did not violate semantics — with again the suppression of the French plural.

We can already derive a few reflections from this study of the transposition of the first stanza. Generally speaking the overall rhythm (which is meant to evoke the rolling and swaying of a sailing ship) did not disappear altogether. The images have been retained too -- due to the sacrifice of that damning rhyme problem. But at the same time a new sound pattern emerged, which may not be entirely faithful to the original. Meaning, for instance, new alliterations: indeed "search of sport" remains fairly close to the original "Souvent pour s'amuser." Similarly, "That follows languorously as fellow traveller" does not betray too badly the original — and anyway is somewhat compensated by the closeness of "follow" and "fellow" — sheerly due to an English language feature, which, needless to say, has nothing, or at least very little, to do with the translators' efforts. But on the other hand we get, for instance "languorously" / "follows" / fellow" / "traveller", or "over" and "vast". Or the (most fortunate) similarity "glissant" / "gliding". But more of that later, since this (mostly involuntary, nay — uncontrollable) process in the end turns out to be of paramount importance, since, let us not forget, we are dealing with poetry.

As far as line 4 is concerned, what is really important is rhythm and sounds. Indeed, one may notice the contrast between soft and harsh sounds in French, which we tried to reproduce more or less in English (and which then would prolong the semantic dimension of the line: majestic ship riding perilous sea), but then again, the merit (if such there is) must be attributed to the structure of English much more than to the skills of the translators. Another way of envisaging things is to suppose that the translators were aware of the sound structures of English, and their possibilities, and tried to use them to best effect. In all modesty.

Scarcely has he been laid upon the briny deck
6 Than this lord of the sky, ungainly and abased,

Will let his great white wings hang piteously down
8 Like a pair of paddles abandoned at his sides.

5— ***planches*** → **briny deck**. "Planches" here as metonymy for "pont" — hence the English more prosaic "deck." But then, another metric problem, requiring padding. "Briny" fits the semantic context of a sailing ship navigating the (salty) sea, without betraying the lexical "colour" of the whole.

6— ***ces rois de l'azur*** → **this lord of the sky.** First, change to the singular, as discussed above. "King" here would have sounded awkward, "lord" somehow carries more nobility about it. "Azur": yet another metonymy for (blue) "sky." The metric constraint dictated the change back to the more mundane term.

maladroits et honteux → **ungainly and abased**. Singular again. Apart from that, a difficult segment. The semantic as well as the metric demand guided our choice of "ungainly." "Abased" was a slightly different matter: here the semantic aspect was paramount. Indeed, "honteux" refers not really to the bird's actual feeling, but to its perception by the poet. "Abased" was a long time coming, but I think it is the best choice here, perhaps more explicit and accurate than the French original: let us not forget that Baudelaire is also guided by the rhyme — forced might be a more judicious term, as I have been able to notice (a translation of "Le voyage"did but confirm this) so that he at times sacrifices accuracy on the altar of rhyme, which was certainly no dilemma of ours in this enterprise.

7— ***Laissent*** → **Will let**. A question of padding yet again. "Will" fits in reference to the opening "Often" in the first stanza: the notion of repetition (but also of what linguistic grammar describes as "inherence") bringing a more explicit connotation.

piteusement → **piteously**. The place of this adverb has been changed, in the name of the line's rhythm. Consequently the same happens (conversely) to "his great white wings" — with a passage to the singular ("his" for "leurs") to boot.

8— ***Comme des avirons*** → **Like a pair of paddles**. Padding again — just short of "paddling." "A pair of" is logical enough not to require any further comment. "Paddles" (French "pagaie") does not have exactly the same meaning as "avirons" ("oars"), but then rhythm, rhythm again... Not to mention the emergence of a fresh alliteration: "pair of paddles" — see comment above concerning this serendipitous happening.

traîner à côté d'eux → **abandoned at his side**. Singular again (see comment above). "Abandoned" is not too far removed, semantically, from "traîner": "laisser traîner" indeed means "leave behind," "abandon." Except for the change of tense (from infinitive to past participle, with adjectival value — or, in other terms, from active to passive), semantics here do not suffer too much.

This wingèd voyager, how limp and graceless now!
Grotesque and risible — his beauty now all gone!
One of the tars teases his beak with his clay pipe,
Another, limping, apes the cripple that once flew!

9— ***wingèd*** → **ailé.** *Licence poétique*, a privilege of the English poet's — and a matter of rhythm again.

comme il est gauche et veule ! → **how limp and graceless now!** Another difficult segment: first because of the demands of rhythm, hence the suppression of the verb (nominal sentence), the same occurring at the next line ("his beauty now all gone"). "Gauche" was quite a headache — and required quite a spot of semantic and contextual analysis to reach the English "graceless" (the two terms now being inverted, because of the rhythm). "Veule" is even more of a devil of a term: the *Robert et Collins* dictionary will merely give "spineless" for this word which has many more denotations and connotations in French. Another long and arduous brainstorming, semantics-wise, session was needed to finally arrive at "limp" (my co-translator's contribution, this one). Considering that once again it is not a matter of birdly quality, but of birdly behaviour (so, not moral but physical), as witnessed by the poet. The final "now" is, once more, a matter of padding, but not only, for it takes up the contextual opposition (before "rois de l'azur," henceforth "gauche et

veule"). Also, it might be considered that it somehow replaces the suppressed verb "est."

10— ***Lui naguère si beau*** → **his beauty now all gone!** Probably the segment most disrupted by the transposition process. Indeed, its position in the line is here radically inverted. Then "naguère" (referring to the past) has been replaced by (yet another) "now" (a reference to the present), reinforced by the subsequent "all gone". "Beau" (adjective) becomes "beauty" (noun). And finally the "si" ("so," enhancing the notion of "beau") simply disappears (unless one considers it is taken up, negatively, by "all" — rhythm here again). Yet it might be argued that "beauty" is semantically stronger than the mere French "beau" — a way, however feeble, to compensate for the partial loss of "si."

Qu'il est comique et laid ! → **Grotesque and risible.** Inversion again, a consequence (and logical continuation) of the previous one. Also, another nominal sentence — rhythm demanding it. "Comique" becomes the stronger English "risible," while "laid" turns out as "grotesque" (with a new inversion to boot): yet again the product of another brainstorming — of course, in the original, "laid" is meant to contrast "beau." But here again rhythm is imperative. Still, if we yet again accept the weight of the general context (which will be later more explicitly tackled by Baudelaire in the last stanza), "grotesque" becomes quite acceptable: the bird's beauty resides more in its capacity as "lord of the sky" than in its mere shape as a bird (here reduced to the role of buffoon) — as the last stanza, again, will take great pains to stress. Finally, a change of punctuation: from a comma in French to a hyphen in English: a matter of syntax, but not only so — for somehow the hyphen tends to enhance, and strengthen, the general meaning of the line.

11— ***L'un*** → **One of the tars**. Yet again a matter of rhythm, hence the padding. "One" translates "l'un," "of the tars" makes "one" explicit: the semantic field fits. Moreover, "tar" has a certain negative connotation which perfectly suits the general context.

***agace* → teases**. The English here may be slightly weaker than the French, though the overall meaning is retained. Also, combined with "tars," one obtains a new (double) alliteration, in "t" and "s," in replacement of the one in "agace son."

***un brûle-gueule* → his clay pipe**. The possessive "his" (absent from the original) is logical in English. A "brûle-gueule" is a pipe with a very short stem (hence the name, literally "mug-burner") and a favourite with seamen. "Clay pipe" may be weaker, and the alliteration "bec / brûle" lost — though it was not particularly meaningful in the first place (except perhaps in indirect association with "gueule"). Whereas the association "tars / teases" may be a (serendipitous) improvement.

12 ***L'autre* → Another**. The symmetry of the French ("l'un," "l'autre") is reproduced in English, though differently (from definite to indefinite — matter of linguistic demand, once again).

***mime, en boitant* → limping, apes**. Inversion of the two verbs in the English version: a question of sounds and rhythm. Also, "apes" is semantically stronger than "mime" — but then again, the negative connotation fits the context.

***qui volait* → that once flew!** Change from the French imperfect to the English simple past, as a demand of rhythm. Also padding with "once" — which however echoes the opposition past-present met earlier, and therefore is quite fitting here.

The Poet is akin to the prince of the clouds
Who dwells in the tempest and scoffs at the archer;
In exile on the earth, mocked by the jeering crowd,
His giant's mighty wings impede his every step.

13— ***pareil* → akin**. The English term may be stronger than the French original, thus reinforcing the kinship (and therefore the comparison) between poet and bird. But the (very meaningful) alliteration "Poète" / "pareil" / "prince" is unfortunately partially lost.

***des nuées* → of the clouds**. "Nuées" is much "nobler" than the more pedestrian "clouds," hence a partial semantic loss in the connotation.

14— ***Qui hante*** → **Who dwells**. Here the relative "who" is justified — is not the bird a "prince"? But the translation of "hante" by "dwells" is rather unsatisfying, the connotative richness of the French being here utterly lost. There was the question of rhythm: "haunts" would not fit. But also the matter of meaning: with "dwells" we tried (an echo of "prince of the clouds") to suggest the princely bird's "ownership" of the skies — as a prince, the latter form his "domain." There is also a connotation of ease: the bird rides the storm most easily.

15— ***Exilé sur le sol*** → **In exile on the earth**. The choice of "in exile" once again answers a question of metre. The one of "earth" instead of "ground" (apart from being a "nobler" term), we felt, did more justice to the opposition with the skies.

au milieu des huées → **mocked by the jeering crowd**. The original uses a metonymy ("huées"): we chose the more prosaic, but then more "English" "jeering crowd" — also for reasons of metre. "Mocked" instead of "among" (a term, however faintly, suggested by "crowd") reinforces the violence of the whole image. Also, two new alliterations appear: "mocked" / "crowd," "jeering" / "crowd."

16— ***Ses ailes de géant*** → **His giant's mighty wings**. Another problem of metre, hence the padding with "mighty" — which however fits nicely semantically, also suggesting the ironical contrast introduced by "giant," and somehow stressing the pathetic alien-ness of the bird / poet (both aristocratic beings) among gross, ordinary humanity.

l'empêchent de marcher → **impede his every step**. Yet again a metric problem, hence the need for padding: "marcher" is first nominalised ("step" — note the singular), then "every" is introduced for the sake of completing the line. But as a result the whole is stronger than the original. Also, new alliteration: "impede" / "step," replacing the one in French "empêchent" / "marcher".

From this first attempt we may already put forward a few remarks. Not surprisingly, a lot of padding went into the work — de-

manded by the classical metre of the original. Also, for questions of rhythm and sounds, syntax at times had to be tampered with. More interestingly, a good deal of interpretation had to guide the work, which tends to show that translation is much more about semantics (denotations and connotations) than dubious mechanistic and merely descriptive "operations." In some cases there was a fading of meaning, in others an addition of it. Also, in the process, new sound patterns emerged, mostly due, as we insisted before, to the specificities of the target language: which tends to suggest that not too much store should be automatically set on that dimension of a poem.

But all the preceding remarks tend to suggest something else: that it should be more accurate to speak of *transposition* than *translation* — the latter being not only a misnomer, but perhaps, more radically, a myth. And yet: is transposition after all fully satisfying a description of the operations resorted to? For things like padding and interpreting tend to point to a more radical process: to a certain extent, what is involved is a *rewriting* of the original, according to the structures and features of the target language — the aim of the game being to retain as much as is feasible (not only meaning but images, "colour," sounds, rhythm) of the original. Let us now see if the next part (transposing a modern poem from English into French) vindicates our present remarks.

2 — "Evans"

Evans

Evans? Yes, many a time
I came down his bare flight
Of stairs into the gaunt kitchen
With its wood fire, where crickets sang
Accompaniment to the black kettle's
Whine, and so into the cold
Dark to smother in the thick tide
Of night that drifted about the walls
Of his stark farm on the hill ridge.

It was not the dark filling my eyes
And mouth appalled me; not even the drip
Of rain like blood from the one tree
Weather-tortured. It was the dark
Silting the veins of that sick man
I left stranded upon the vast
And lonely shore of his bleak bed.

We shall adopt the same pattern as for the previous poem: first stanza first, second one next. A question of making the presentation easier, since more gradual. But before getting down to analysis, a few preliminary and, we do believe, not entirely useless, comments.

Indeed, R. S. Thomas being slightly less famous than Baudelaire, a few biographical details might help. R. S. Thomas: Welsh church minister and poet, born in 1913. Drew his imagery from nature and the elements. Specific feature: minimalist tendency, aiming at a maximum of expression.

Then form, to come down to the present poem. Two stanzas, of uneven length: the first nine lines, the second seven —which presents a feature (more or less) common to the previous poem: two stanzas as two units. But not quite: the very sparse punctuation makes the full stop in the exact middle of the second stanza all the more conspicuous, which divides it into two further (opposed) units of equal length, rhetorically (symmetrically) introduced ("It was not" / "It was"). The language is generally, as we have already pointed out, more "modern," meaning more ordinary, or "everyday." Which calls, at first reading, for one (apparently) negative remark. For instance, since here is free verse, why not have arranged the second and third lines thus:

I came down his bare flight of stairs
Into the gaunt kitchen

Same remark concerning lines 4 and 5 ("crickets sang / Accompaniment"), 5 and 6 ("kettle's /Whine"), 6 and 7 ("cold / Dark"), just to mention the first stanza. In other words, does "poetishness" have to stoop to coquettishness, at the risk of becoming an irritating tic — which alas is often the case? Or is there a specific reason commanding such choice of form? We shall address the problem later. But first the translation process. We shall proceed in the same fashion as previously: relevant (meaning problematic) segment after relevant segment.

Evans

Evans ? Oui, bien des fois
J'ai descendu ses marches
Nues jusqu'à la cuisine fruste
Avec son feu de bois, où le chant des grillons
Accompagnait la plainte de la bouilloire
Noircie, et de là dans le froid
Du noir pour étouffer dans le flux épais
De la nuit dérivant le long des murs
De sa ferme austère plantée sur l'arête de la colline.

2-3— ***his bare flight / Of stairs*** → **ses marches / Nues**. Hardly any need to comment on the inversion adjective-noun when transposing into French. "Flight of stairs," perhaps more logically, should have been transposed as "escaliers." But the result would have sounded awkward, and even "unpoetic." Then: "Bare" rendered by "Nues." A first attempt yielded "Dénudées" but, upon reflection, was not "bare" enough. Hence "Nues."

Into the gaunt kitchen → **jusqu'à la cuisine fruste**. An adjective like "gaunt" is seldom applied to a room, so that the French "fruste" entails a certain loss of effect and meaning. Then, same remark as before concerning adjective-noun order. All the more so since "fruste cuisine" (which was a possibility) would have definitely betrayed the "colour" of the whole poem. Also, impossible to literally translate "into" in such a context — hence "jusqu'à."

4-5— ***where crickets sang / Accompaniment to*** → **où le chant des grillons / Accompagnait.** The verb "sang" becomes a noun, and conversely the noun "accompaniment" ends up as a verb. This being mainly due to the English construction which has no direct equivalent in French. Another possibility here would have been "où les grillons chantaient (but certainly not "où chantaient les grillons" — a matter of general style once again) / Accompagnant", possibly with the addition of a comma after "chantaient." Which possibly suggests (but is it really the case?) that the "modern" form offers more scope than the classical one.

5-6— ***the black kettle's / Whine*** → **de la bouilloire / Noircie.** No need to comment on, first the *cas possessif*'s transformation in French, then on the syntactic modification. But why "noircie" for "black"? What is added here is a process (the kettle is blackened from use), whereas the adjective "noire" might have suggested an intrinsic quality: that the "bouilloire" was black from the start, which is certainly not the intended meaning — yet another matter of interpretation.

and so into the cold → **et de là dans le froid.** Here "into" can be rendered by "dans": the context ("de là") plainly indicates movement. But the rendering of "and so" by "et de là" is not very satisfying, because the connotation of causality is lost. It might be argued that this "so" is not so usual in English. But still — if anyone can find a better solution...

7— ***Thick tide*** → **Flux épais.** "Tide" logically should be "marée." But "marée épaisse," apart from the fact that it does not sound very nice, would be awkward, applied to "la nuit." Besides, "flux" is close enough, and the overall result, perhaps, happier — except for one detail: "tide" already alludes to (hence announces) the final image of a stranded boat.

8— ***that drifted about the walls*** → **dérivant le long des murs.** Because of the preceding "de la nuit," "qui dérivait" (again a question of flow) did not fit very well, hence the *participe présent*. "Drifting" / "dérivant": there again, a partial loss of meaning — *grandeur et misère de*

la traduction, to paraphrase Balzac. Also, semantically, "dérivant" is not an entirely happy choice: "glissant" might be an alternative solution — not entirely satisfying semantically either. Yet "dérivant," once again, may better fit the final, marine imagery.

9— ***Stark*** → **austère plantée**. A bold one, probably. But we tried to redeem the harshness of "stark," with "plantée" (padding, for changes (shifts of a lexical nature or in syntax, padding — among others) would be called for — while at the same time retaining the lexical "colour" of the orig would make the whole segment more accurate, semantically speaking. Were we right?

hill ridge → **arête de la colline.** No comment necessary for the lack, here at least, of *nom composé* in French. But "arête" for "ridge" begs an explanation: the French term is stronger, harsher than the English — and yet in keeping with the general, harsh and austere, atmosphere of the poem.

We can now attempt a first "synthesis" at the end of this first stanza — a synthesis which might simplify our work on the second one. Paradoxically, this second poem is no easier to transpose, in spite of its modern, "freer" form — true, "L'albatros" is far from being the hardest of Baudelaire's pieces. But, though the rules in the modern one be different and (apparently) less constraining, there is a very precise and, hence, demanding rhetoric in Thomas' poem — in other words, modern poetry creates (and therefore imposes) its own rules, which may be more exacting than the classical ones. Thus we may now attempt to explain this series of *enjambements* signalled earlier.

Their aim is not so much to stress some "poetishness" of the piece, but is part of the rhetoric just suggested — we mean that once more semantics (but also, from what I have been told, a certain *welshness*) accounts for them. Indeed we notice that each time they introduce a stark contrast between positive and negative (or, elevated and pedestrian) notions: "flight" / "stairs" (all the more so since the latter term is associated with coming *down*), "sang" / "Whine" (opposition nature / culture, the latter presented in negative, bleak touches: "black," "Whine,"

in other words natural carefree "joy" against human grime and pain), "cold" / "Dark" (here dark, albeit it is the main term, comes to reinforce the negativity of "cold"), "tide" / "night" (negativity again, plus the emergence of sea as metaphor for night), "walls" / "stark farm" ("stark" introducing another touch of negativity retrospectively affecting "walls").

Indeed, through the choice of adjectives, the ambience is resolutely bleak: "bare," "gaunt," "black," "cold," "thick," "stark." One positive touch, yet: this "wood fire" warming up the "gaunt kitchen" (but its echo further down in that lonely "weather-tortured" tree and dripping blood-like rain again makes for retrospective negativity). And we may note that on the whole nature itself seems to contribute to such human grimness, destitution and pain. However, there is a loss of some of this contrasting rhetoric with the passage to French. Thus the "flight / Of stairs" was hard to render, only redeemed by another (approximate) contrast, "marches / Nues." Same with "the black kettle's / Whine": "la plainte de la bouilloire / Noircie" is definitely not up to the original. The rest, fortunately, could (more or less) be saved.

Another stylistic aspect we have hardly tackled so far is that of sounds, and more specifically alliterations and assonances. Theoretically, the general style of the poem being austere and bald, there should not be an abundance of such effects. And yet the stanza here considered is literally swarming with them: "many" / "time" / "came", "flight" / "stairs" / "into" / "gaunt" / "kitchen" / "its" / "crickets" / "accompaniment" / "to" / "black" / kettle" / "into," "cold" / "dark," "smother" / "thick", "tide" / "night" / "that" / "drifted" / "about," "walls" / "his" / "hill," "stark" / "farm," "hill" / "ridge" — just to list most of the alliterations and a few of the assonances. Such abundance is no doubt to be (at least in part) attributed to Thomas' minimalist aesthetics. We may simply add that most of these sounds are hard, with a prominence of "t's" and "c's," thus creating a kind of harsh music which in turn stresses the images of general desolation — and this "musicality" too contributes to the *welshness* of the piece. Needless to

say that part of this (very sophisticated) network of sounds / *welshness* was lost, yet again, in the process of transposition.

But now to the second stanza — in which the patterns pointed to in the first should logically be found too.

Ce n'était pas le noir emplissant mes yeux
Et ma bouche qui m'horrifiaient ; même pas la pluie
Dégouttant comme du sang de l'arbre solitaire
Supplicié par les éléments. C'était ce noir
Envasant les veines du grabataire
Que je laissais échoué sur le vaste
Rivage solitaire de son lugubre lit.

10-11— ***filling my eyes / And mouth*** → **emplissant mes yeux / Et ma bouche**. Another instance of *enjambement*, this time creating not a contrast but a surprise: dark (of night) filling eyes is logical, but what about dark filling *mouth*? In fact, it may be considered that this most unusual image announces the subsequent one of dark filling Evans' veins. So it was decided here to keep the English construction (with possessive determiner instead of the more usual definite article in French) to enhance the opposition between Thomas' and Evans' situations, the latter being by far (as acknowledged by the poet) the more tragic of the two.

appalled me → **qui m'épouvantait**. Suppression of the relative pronoun in the original, which had to be re-established in French. "Epouvantait" translating "appalled" is not quite satisfying — is it not a bit too strong? "Effarait" might furnish a valid alternative.

11-12— ***the drip / Of rain like blood*** → **la pluie / Dégouttant comme du sang**. Yet another *enjambement*, towards yet another effect: no contrast here either, but a fusion nature / humanity through the comparison with blood (an image moreover announcing the subsequent reference to Evans' sick veins). Alas, the order of the original had to be reversed, with the ensuing loss of meaning and effect. All the more so

since an oral rendition of the original may suggest "rain-like blood" (see next line "Weather-tortured"), a staggering inversion of the written text.

12-13— ***from the one tree / Weather-tortured*** → **de l'arbre solitaire / Supplicié par les éléments.** "Unique" was first chosen for "one," but "solitaire" finally retained: indeed, there is a certain ambiguity in "unique." "Du seul arbre" was hardly any happier, giving the impression that among several trees only this one drips rain. Besides, "solitaire" introduces a discreet parallel with lonely and suffering Evans: another instance of nature-humanity fusing. "tree / Weather-tortured": another *enjambement*, introducing a new, violent image. The compound adjective (English pithiness yet again) had to be developed in French. "Supplicié," stronger than "torturé," connotes a Christic image which reaches Evans through the relay of the tree. Was it an addition not warranted by the original?

13-14— ***the dark / Silting the veins*** → **ce noir / Envasant les veines**. Here the second part of the *enjambement* suddenly alters our perception of the preceding "dark": no longer the external night, but the dark of looming death (further suggested by "sick"). Also, we felt that the demonstrative in French reinforced the meaning of this segment.

of that sick man → **du grabataire**. A literal translation was a possibility: "de ce malade" — but "grabataire" was found infinitely better. Also, we felt that "du" was better than "de ce": it would have made the rhythm heavier without contributing much. Do we out-Thomas Thomas?

15— ***I left stranded*** → **Que je laissais échoué**. Here again, the relative pronoun had to be reintroduced. "Laissais" (the imperfect sounds better here than the original simple past) takes up once more the notion of solitude, with possibly a connotation of guilt ("abandonnais" would be another possibility, more explicit in that respect). "Stranded" / "échoué" opens the last, long metaphor of a wrecked boat "stranded upon" a "lonely shore" (solitude again).

15-16— ***the vast / And lonely shore*** → **le vaste / Rivage solitaire**. The syntax here had to be changed, with as a result the dropping of "And" ("le vaste / Et solitaire rivage" would hardly fit the general style of the piece). Why "vast," which here may seem forced? Somehow the notion of vastness intensifies that of loneliness — also, it suggests yet another contrast between a shrunken boat / body lost upon a vast shore / bed: another connotation of utter desolation.

of his bleak bed → **de son lugubre lit**. "Lugubre" for "bleak" somehow is not entirely satisfying, while "sinistre" might be too strong — also consider the alliteration (already present in the English) which would have been otherwise lost. The original order adjective-noun was for once retained, for reasons of rhythm (this way the French ends on an alexandrine, while the English concludes on an octosyllabic pentameter — actually the last five lines of the original can be said to fit that pattern): indeed, "de son lit lugubre" would have spoiled the whole thing.

It is with no surprise that we note that the intricate sound pattern present in the first stanza is basically repeated in the second one (listing it once more would be a bit tedious). The same remark may be added regarding the "*déperdition*" through transposition. One notable change, though, is the introduction of the very elaborate final metaphor: so that we switch to a different register, from the pedestrian to a "nobler" tone. Also to be noted are the (possible albeit discreet) religious connotations tending to turn dying Evans into a Christ figure, and his drab and pathetic end into a sort of humble Passion play (after all, the author was himself a minister). And is it mere chance if the nobler style of the ending crowns these religious hints? All the more so since "Evans" is a very common Welsh name: thus the poem slowly shifts from the banal and almost anonymous (hence the rhetorical question mark after the name at the opening of the poem) to both the individual and the symbolic, i.e. the universal.

We may now come to a general conclusion of the whole undertaking.

What emerged from this double study is simply that there is no miracle "method" (and certainly *not* of the descriptive, mechanistic type, which is cosmetic at best) for transposing a piece of writing, be it prose or poetry: each case is practically unique, and calls for a specific treatment fitting its various composites and features. Thus Baudelaire, we tried to show here, is not to be approached like Thomas.

Also, let us repeat, "translation" as such hardly exists — which is why we had rather use the term "transposition." Or, even more boldly, (in part at least) "rewriting." Consequently the result, as we have had ample occasion to verify, may turn out to be somewhat unsatisfactory and frustrating, according to the features — the possibilities but also limitations, another term for the latter being simply the *demands* — of the target language, not to mention, where poetry is at stake, the crucial aspects of form (prosody, rhythm, sound patterns, etc.) But, to quote Paul ing translatio*n processes. But now to work, and to our chosen corpus, re.* Which is all the truer when it comes to so-called "translation."

Ultimately, one may suggest that the Paul Valéry remark heading the present article is perfectly apposite regarding the transposing of a text into another language: the work is never quite really finished — just abandoned. For better or worse.

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