

## Metaphors for the translator

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'He's a number-8 wire sort of guy' or 'she took a number-8 wire approach to problem solving' are phrases you might find in the dialogue of a novel, or play, or in a magazine article from my country, New Zealand. The challenge they offer to translators, even those steeped in our vernacular, is considerable. (The reference is to the use by generations of New Zealand farmers of a standard gauge of fencing wire to fasten gates, repair machinery, etc., and suggests an approach to life that is rough and ready, but ingenious and effective.) Should the translator reproduce them fairly much word for word, with the intention of conveying something of the iconic status of agricultural fencing materials in New Zealand culture? (New Zealanders pride themselves on their down-to-earth practical abilities: Ernest Rutherford doubtless employed number-8 wire somewhere in the equipment with which he first split the atom!) Does the translator try to find a metaphor in the target language which conveys an approximately similar bundle of connotations? Or does she or he paraphrase the sense without the use of metaphor? The choice will in large part depend on how much the translator is concerned to instruct the reader in local cultural matters. Translating metaphor is one of the most fascinating challenges for translators of journalistic and literary texts, since it requires us to draw on a great range of our imaginative, cultural and linguistic resources (see Dagut 1976 and 1987; Mason 1982; Newmark 1980 and 1998).

Nevertheless, my concern in this chapter is not primarily with the question of translating metaphor, but with the, to me, even more fascinating (and neglected) topic of the parallel between the business of *doing translations* and the business of *making metaphors*. A first glimpse of the parallel may be found in the strong analogy between the etymologies of the terms *translation* and *metaphor*.

The English word *translation* derives from the Latin *translatus*, past participle of the verb *transferre*, meaning 'to carry across', which is echoed also in the English *transfer*. In translation, this etymology suggests, meaning is picked up bodily from one country and culture, transported across a frontier – or, as Rosanna Warren expresses it, across the chasm which separates one language from another (1989: 3) – and deposited (unaltered) on the other side.

The English term *metaphor* has Greek, rather than Latin, origins, coming from the Greek terms *meta* ('beyond') and *pherein* ('to bear or carry'). So it too involves 'carrying across,' but a 'carrying across' of meaning from one semantic domain to another. To refer to 'a number-8 wire approach' is to make an analogy between the domains 'daily life' and 'farming practice'. The Greek word *metaphoroikos* refers to a means of transport. In Athens, I am told, you will see trucks with METAPHORA on the side, meaning 'removals'. Translators and makers of metaphor may equally be said to be 'in the removal business'.

The 'carrying across' of translation has long been recognized to be problematic because it involves a transfer not only from one linguistic system to a different linguistic system, but at least as importantly from one cultural system to another. The question is always whether, and in what sense, what is deposited on the other side can be said to have the same meaning as the text that the translator originally picked up.

A simple example, which is problematic on the cultural, rather than the linguistic, level, will illustrate the point. European cultures traditionally make a firm distinction between *emotional* and *intellectual* activities, attaching them to *the heart* and *the head* respectively. In traditional Chinese culture, I understand, no such distinction is made, since *the heart* is referred to as the location of mental activity of all kinds. The difficulties this throws up for the translator into Chinese of much Western poetry and some prose will be evident. Take these sentences from Herman Melville: 'I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head. I had rather be a fool with a heart than Jupiter Olympus with a head' (Melville 1960: 3). Apart from the problem caused by the reference to Greco-Roman mythology, the distinction between the realm of the heart and the realm of the head in the original makes this very nearly untranslatable into Chinese.<sup>1</sup> (Translating it into a language such as Tongan, which maintains a strong prohibition against naming parts of the body, is equally problematic (Melenaita Taumoefolau, personal communication).)

Yet translation does occur, indeed communication between people of different cultures would be even more fraught with difficulty than it is if we did not undertake translations. Translation scholars such as George Steiner and Rosanna Warren insist on the socially vital character of translation. To quote Rosanna Warren, 'from the neurophysiological level on up through the broadest layers of culture, translation of one kind or another guarantees our shared survival' (1989: 30). The great German writer Goethe summed up the paradox around translation with the often-quoted quip that translation is 'impossible, necessary and important'.

For centuries, people have referred to the imperfect nature of translation in such phrases as 'much has been lost in the translation'. If translating involves the 'transporting' of meaning across linguistic and cultural frontiers, or over bridges and tightropes, it seems that the buckets in which it is carried are leaky. Or, in the somewhat more technical terms of linguist George Grace, we are forced 'to reject the intertranslatability postulate . . . in

almost every case where it is possible to say the same thing in two different languages that possibility is due to special historical circumstances' (Grace 1987: 56). The 'special circumstances' would be where languages belong to the same family and have been shaped by similar cultural factors (say, French and Italian, or German and Dutch).

Metaphor may be said to be 'impossible' for much the same reason as translation, in that the making of metaphors suggests equivalence between semantic domains which have little in common. If you say that 'Emily takes a number-8 wire approach to life', you do not mean that she walks around town with a coil of it over her shoulder. The appeal of the metaphor lies in the invitation to the listener to recognize that it cannot be understood literally and, given that fact, to speculate about just what kind of association might be imagined between Emily's attitude to life and a farmer's use of fencing wire. Philosopher Ted Cohen, one of the most perceptive commentators on metaphor, asserts that the uttering of a metaphor has three aspects: '(1) the speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation; (2) the hearer expends a special effort to accept this invitation; and (3) this transaction constitutes the acknowledgement of a community' (1979: 6). The great majority of metaphors imply assertions which are literally absurd, in that they suggest identity or equivalence between objects or qualities which cannot be identical, and where equivalence is only very partial. The few instances of metaphors which are, or may be, literally true, e.g. 'no man is an island' or 'life is not a bowl of cherries' are almost all expressed in negative form. (The appeal of such statements lies, of course, not in their banal truthfulness, but in their invitation to the addressee to follow a particular imaginative track from that observation, e.g. 'since it is true that human individuals do not exist in isolation . . .'.)

Nevertheless, metaphor, like translation, is also clearly necessary. Metaphor permits us to express ideas and emotions which go beyond the resources of so-called literal language – every language is littered with metaphors whose origins we are unaware of: expressions like 'to bite the bullet', which most of us have forgotten derives from surgery on the battlefield in the days before anaesthetics, when soldier-patients were given a bullet to bite on during the operation.<sup>2</sup>

The point about the closeness of translation and metaphor is, I hope, clinched when I mention that in the Middle Ages the Latin word *translatio* was actually used to refer to metaphor.

A consequence of the partial and imperfect nature of both translation and metaphor is the fact that we never suppose that any single translation, or any single metaphor, is exhaustive or final. So, while the seventeenth-century George Chapman's translations of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* into English are regarded as wonderful achievements, literary monuments in their own right, anglophone scholars have felt an obligation to undertake retranslations from the Greek in almost every generation since. Each version achieves a particular, hopefully fresh, 'take' on the source text. The great American translator Gregory Rabassa wrote that translators can

never be sure of themselves, must always be dissatisfied with what they do, because there is no perfect solution to the problems they face: 'So he must continue to approach, nearer and nearer, as near as he can, but, like Tantalus, at some practical point he must say *ne plus ultra* and sink back down as he considers his work done, if not finished (in all senses of the word)' (Rabassa 1989). Translating is indeed a tantalizing business.

Similarly, it is rare to find a single phrase being treated as exhausting the metaphorical potential of a person, object or phenomenon. A vivid illustration of the way in which we feel the need for more than one metaphor to express the same idea arose in the coffee queue at the conference to which I presented an early version of the contents of this chapter. I overheard distinguished translation studies scholar and practitioner Sabine Fenton remark that 'the ethics of translation is a can of worms; it's a minefield'. Whereas the first metaphor suggests the mobile, slippery nature of the problem, the second draws attention to an aspect not covered by the first, its dangerously explosive character.

Philosopher of metaphor Susan Haack argues that it is the very partial, imperfect character of metaphor that gives it such importance in the development of philosophical and scientific thought. A fresh metaphor may offer a striking new imaginative insight into an old problem. It has been noticed, for instance, that, over the years that Charles Darwin was collecting biological and botanical data, he repeatedly drew in his notebooks sketches of branching structures, which might have been interpreted as trees, with their trunk, branches, and twigs, or might equally have depicted river deltas, and which served as a kind of imaginative model for the infinitely ramifying process he eventually understood evolution to be (Beer 2000). Metaphor is, according to Haack, pre-theoretical in the sense that an innovative thinker needs to try out a series of metaphors, sliding from one to another, because each illuminates a different aspect of the problem, on the way to constructing a fully developed theory (Haack 1994; Hanne 1999).

The remainder of this chapter consists of a systematic, if light-hearted, journey through the numerous metaphors which have been (or might conceivably be) used to describe translation.<sup>3</sup> Each of the clusters of metaphors that I visit offers, I suggest, a fresh set of insights into the problems of translation, though the very partial nature of metaphorical thinking requires me to move on to another, and yet another.

Let us return to the 'carrying across' metaphor implicit in the etymology of the term *translation*. In an essay on translating some poems of Pablo Neruda, Hispanist and translator Margaret Sayers Peden coined a delightful, and quite intricate, metaphor for translation. She suggested that the best translators of literary texts act like curators transporting an old timber structure such as a log cabin to another location: 'Carefully we mark the logs by number, dismantle them, and reconstruct them in new territory, artfully restoring the logs to their original relationships and binding them together with a minimal application of mortar'. She insists that

the translator must avoid the temptation to 'slather on the plaster' beyond the point which is essential (Peden 1989: 14). Translation involves a *demolition* job followed by a *reconstruction*. This is an attractively ingenious image, which, on further consideration, turns out to be fundamentally mistaken. The problem is that, when you come to 'reconstruct' the text in new territory, you have to undertake the task, not with the original logs, but with timber (language) that is indigenous to the target culture, has a different grain, a different colour, and is supplied in different lengths. Moreover, as literary scholars from Mikhail Bakhtin to Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes remind us, all language is second-hand, which means that every literary text is made of fragments of earlier utterances.<sup>4</sup> So, when we translate, the lengths of timber with which we reconstruct the log cabin are not only of a different species, but they have also been recycled and bear the marks of the previous uses to which they have been subjected in that territory/culture.

The great translation theorist of the 1920s and 1930s, Walter Benjamin, was groping towards a similar conception of translation as a difficult demolition and reconstruction job when he wrote that translation involves the piecing together of fragments in the target language with loving particularity: 'Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another' (Benjamin 1961: 78). Milorad Pavić, the Serbian novelist, in his novel *Dictionary of the Khazars*, conjured up imaginatively an interaction between the two monks Cyril and Methodius, the first translators of the Bible into old Slavonic, which extends Benjamin's metaphor:

One quick three-week-old autumn, the brothers were sitting in their cell, trying to write out the letters that men would later call Cyrillic . . . Methodius called his brother's attention to four jugs standing on the window of their cell, but outside, on the other side of the bars. 'If the doors were locked, how could I get to one of those jugs?' he asked. Constantine [i.e. Cyril] broke one of the jugs, then drew the fragments piece by piece through the bars and into the cell, where he reassembled the jug, bonding it with saliva and clay from the floor beneath his feet. This they now did with the Slavonic language . . .

(Pavić 1988: 64)

Incidentally, Pavić is not the only commentator to refer to translation as a response to incarceration. Wendy Lesser, in an article entitled 'The Mysteries of Translation', describes translators as 'social workers . . . who bring essential luxuries to my [monolingual] cell'. Indeed she is hopeful that '[t]he prison of language is only temporary . . . and some day a merciful guard – the perfect translator – will come along with his keys and let us out' (Lesser 2002). The translators into English of the King James Version of the Bible used a host of related metaphors to describe the impact of the task they had undertaken:

Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernell; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water.

(Opfell 1982: 148)

Benjamin, idiosyncratic as always, is concerned not with the way in which readers or works are incarcerated by monolingualism, but with the capacity of the translator to 'liberate the language imprisoned in a work' (1961: 80).

A major deficiency of metaphors of translation based on transporting, demolition and reconstruction is that they fail to acknowledge the living or organic nature of cultural texts and their interaction with the environment within which they exist. A number of metaphors have been coined which take account of this. Benjamin states that a good translation involves 'the flowering of a text in another language' (1961: 80–1). Percy Bysshe Shelley uses another flower metaphor to indicate what he calls 'the vanity of translation' of poetry:

It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creation of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower, and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.

(Shelley 1965: 33–4)

Many commentators refer to translation as the 'transplanting' of a text, though Italian dramatist Pirandello, like Shelley, was thoroughly pessimistic about the prospects for the success of such a procedure: 'It is like transplanting a tree that has sprung from one soil and flowered in one kind of climate into a soil that is not its own; its foliage and flowers will be lost in the new climate' (quoted by Bassnett 2000: 9). Living, as I do, in the moist, mild climate of New Zealand, I am well aware, however, that oak trees transplanted from Europe grow twice as fast in the new environment as they did in the old, and it is sometimes the same with literary texts. A spectacular example is the *One Thousand and One Nights*, which is not highly regarded or studied as a literary text by Arab scholars, but is given extraordinary scholarly attention by European academics. Moreover, as any enthusiastic gardener knows very well, if you want to transplant a tree from one location to another, it is often advisable to dig up a ball of the soil in which the tree was growing and leave it attached to the roots of the tree when you drop it into a hole at the new location. As a literary translator, one often feels the need to do something similar, that is to find some way of transmitting elements of cultural context along with the text itself, perhaps in the form of a translator's introduction, endnotes, or some other device. Indian translation scholar Harish Trivedi employs another

metaphor associated with trees to describe the work of the sixteenth-century Indian writer Tulsi Das, who popularized the Hindu epic *The Ramayana* by translating it from Sanskrit into Hindi. This involved, he says:

a natural process of organic, ramifying, vegetative growth and renewal, comparable perhaps with the process by which an ancient banyan tree sends down branches which then in turn take root all around it and comprise an intertwined family of trees: *quot rami tot arbores.*

(Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 10)

George Steiner, in his *After Babel*, explores an almost infinite range of metaphors depicting translation as a kind of naturally occurring metamorphosis, as well as musical imagery of transposition from key to key, or instrument to instrument.

More illuminating still, I suggest, are the metaphors associated with transfusion and transplanting between human bodies. Eminent British translation specialist Susan Bassnett offers a key to this metaphorical domain in her statement: 'Language is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy' (Bassnett 1980: 14). Elsewhere, she refers to translation as bringing 'new life blood' to the target culture (Bassnett 1996: 12). Brazilian translator Haroldo de Campos likens translation to a blood transfusion, by which the translator is nourished and made healthy (Vieira 1999). A more cynical version of this metaphor would treat the translator as leech or vampire bat, or merely a mosquito, a blood-sucking parasite on the body of the source text or culture. The translation of a culturally significant text might also be described as a kind of organ transplant, that requires the translator to undertake delicate microsurgery to connect the work up to the cultural bloodvessels and nerves which will keep it alive in this different body. If not, the transplanted organ will certainly suffer rejection. In France in the seventeenth century, some translators viewed their art as involving a kind of metempsychosis, or migration of the soul from one body to another (Hermans and Stecconi 2002: 9), a concept of translation which is still very much alive in East Asia (Shouyi Fan 1999). More trivially, French translators of the same period felt obliged to practise a form of 'cosmetic surgery', to remove what were regarded by audiences in the target culture as unattractive blemishes on the face of the original text.

Walter Benjamin, followed by Maurice Blanchot and others, employed another kind of organic metaphor for translation. Benjamin referred to translation as ensuring the 'survival' (*Überleben*), the 'gaining of an afterlife' (*Fortleben*), for a literary work in another culture. (The earliest, thirteenth-century, use of the term 'translation' in English refers not to a linguistic carrying over at all, but to the carrying up to heaven of a saintly figure without dying.) Similarly, as Theo Hermans reminds us, Renaissance translators from Latin and Greek often referred to their work as bringing great

writers of the ancient world back from the dead (Hermans and Stecconi 2002: 6).

Metaphors of transplanting (whether horticultural, surgical or spiritual) acknowledge that the translator is enriching the life of the culture into which the transplant is made. Metaphors of survival or afterlife imply that translation is conferring a benefit on the culture from which the work is taken. Both kinds of organic metaphor imply an essentially positive character to literary translation. Yet, as gardeners know, transplanting is only legitimate with the permission of the people whose garden the specimen is taken from, or when no damage is done to the forest in which it originally grew. Moreover, the transplanting of organs is only ethically defensible when the donor is willing, and/or dead. Even then, one feels that some translators could be condemned as grave-robbers.

Transplant metaphors constitute a small subset of the much larger category of metaphors that underline the transactional character of translation. Some are commonly used, whereas others may be coined to illuminate a particular facet of the topic. Translators have traditionally assumed, or been ascribed, 'supportive and deferential roles as humble servants or handmaidens obeying their masters, as discreet, unobtrusive and self-denying facilitators, mediators, enablers, go-betweens, bridge-builders and the like' (Hermans and Stecconi 2002: 1).

Since translation usually involves the translator working into his or her own native language and culture, it has become almost a commonplace of translation theory that translation involves 'bringing home' foreign goods. Some translators may well be thought of as tourists and souvenir hunters. With a greater level of expertise, they may become tourist guides. 'Translator as importer' is one of a number of metaphors to emphasize, and necessarily, the commercial, profit-oriented dimension of translation. Literary translators, as importers, spot and take advantage of gaps in the range of cultural products available on the home market. They may sometimes be thought of as 'importing dangerous goods' (Hermans and Stecconi 2002: 7) and even as, in both a positive and a negative sense, spreading literary and cultural 'infection' across national boundaries (Levyi, Jiřy, quoted in Friedberg 1997: 204).

The range of metaphors alluding to the intermediary role of the translator is extensive, with each particular metaphor highlighting a different aspect of the power dynamic involved. If only it were true that, as André Lefevere suggests, translators are 'busy matchmakers who advertise a half-veiled beauty as being very lovely: they arouse an irresistible desire for the original' (Lefevere 1977: 35–6). Only too often, the (inadequate) translation usurps the place of the original and the reader is tricked into marrying the ugly sister. Translators have often been referred to as 'ambassadors': a term which usefully underlines the delicacy required of them in interpreting one culture to another. But an ambassador, as Henry Wotton famously wrote, 'is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country'.<sup>5</sup> (Try to translate that wonderful aphorism into any language that does not have a

homonym like 'lie' which, in the seventeenth century at least, meant not only 'to tell untruths', but 'to reside'.) The requirement that the translator look in two directions has been characterized both positively – Harish Trivedi refers to the valuable cultural role of the 'multilingual Janus-faced Indian translators' (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 7) – and negatively – Italian translator Paola Galiberti, ironically rather than cynically, I suspect, described her profession as that of 'double agent' (personal communication). A similar (but undoubtedly cynical) view is captured in the Italian aphorism *traduttore/traditore* (translator/traitor). Robert Wechsler treats translating as a performing art, not unlike musical performance or acting on the stage, with the important difference that the performance is in the same medium (the written word, even if in a different language) as the original (Wechsler 1998).

A number of commentators have, in their choice of metaphor, highlighted the complexity of the power relations implicit in the translation process.<sup>6</sup> Anuradha Dingwaney refers to translation as a form of violence (1995: 3). Boris Slutsky manages to mix metaphors of rushing rivers, demolition, and theatrical performance in this curious description of the act of translating:

While translating verse  
You crash through a wall  
And with a bloody face  
You are suddenly on the stage  
Lit up by thousands of watts  
Facing thousands of eyes  
After having made your way  
Through the brick, like a stream

(quoted in Friedberg 1997: 118)

Haroldo de Campos has famously described translation as both 'a form of parricide' and 'cannibalism' (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 3). Jerome in the fourth century CE congratulated Hilary the Confessor for having, in his translation from Greek to Latin of some homilies on Job, 'by right of victory led away the sense captive into his own language' (Jerome). By contrast, Johann Gottfried Herder famously criticized French translators in the seventeenth century for their arrogance in adapting all foreign works to French taste: 'Homer must enter France a captive, and dress according to their fashion' (Lefevere 1992: 74). Russian translators and translation theorists, according to Maurice Friedberg, have been particularly preoccupied with the dimension of power in the process of translation (1997). Kornei Chukovsky referred to 'a *tug of war* between the translator and the poet being translated' (Friedberg 1997: 65). Vasily Zhukovsky declared that a translator of prose is a slave, while a translator of poetry is a rival (Friedberg 1997: 40). Writers who have taken up the labour of literary translating

unwillingly (to make a living and/or because an authoritarian regime has censored publication of their own writing) portray themselves as slaves – or worse. Boris Pasternak is reported as saying: ‘Mayakovsky shot himself, while I translate’ (Friedberg 1997: 115). Anna Akhmatova wrote that ‘for a poet translating is like devouring one’s own brains’ (Friedberg 1997: 116).

Increasingly, the attention of translators and translation theorists has focused on the central role played by translation not only in colonization but also in post-colonial globalization. According to Eric Cheyfitz, for instance, translation was ‘the central act of European colonization and imperialism in America’ (Cheyfitz 1991: 104). Translators into English served for centuries as agents of empire, ransacking colonized or dependent territories for their literary treasures, to be taken home for display like shrunken heads in a museum for the edification of their compatriots. The absence of respect for the source culture that they often demonstrated is epitomized in the words of Edward Fitzgerald, the nineteenth-century translator of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam*: ‘It is an amusement for me to take what liberties I like with these Persians who (as I think) are not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them’ (quoted in Lefevere 1992: 119). So we come to the metaphor of *translator as plunderer*, taking back booty, as an agent of empire.

At the same time, and usually in close association with the agents of empire, translators from colonizing or dominant nations have taken texts (both religious and canonical literary, notably Shakespeare) from their ‘home’ culture and translated them for presentation to the supposedly benighted savages as works of a superior civilization and, indeed, as being of universal validity. Which brings us to the notion of the translator as ‘missionary’ both in the literal and in the metaphorical sense.<sup>7</sup>

While the individual translator most often ‘brings home’ foreign texts, the process of globalization means that dominant (especially English-speaking) cultures are principally exporters in cultural terms. As Lawrence Venuti implies (1992: 5) translations from English, like McDonald’s and Coca-Cola, are everywhere and there is a serious balance of trade crisis in the field of translation between the hegemonic (predominantly English-speaking) cultures and the rest of the world. Nevertheless, there have been historical moments at which nations, or their governments, have made it a matter of policy to commission translations from cultures which, in some respects, they saw as being more advanced than themselves, to enhance their own culture or social and economic development: most notably the opening to the West which took place in Japan in the mid-nineteenth century and somewhat later in the case of China.

One of the most durable and pervasive, but also problematic, metaphors associated with translation is that of fidelity. Robert Wechsler, who edits translations, argues persuasively that a good translator has the qualities of a good lawyer:

The process of translation is a trial from beginning to end: discovering and building the evidence (knowledge of the author's works, of the cultural and artistic context of his works, and often of his life); interpreting the evidence (figuring out what the original means and what's most essential to it, and then determining the range of alternatives); and making numerous judgments and decisions.

The translator, he concludes, has fiduciary responsibility towards the author whose work she or he translates (Wechsler 1998: 15). In nicely reciprocal style, prominent legal theorist James Boyd White has devoted a whole book to demonstrating that a good lawyer may be viewed essentially as an expert translator (White 1990).

While an ethical obligation to the source text and its author is implied in such metaphors, it is by no means self-evident just what a 'faithful translation' might be. Are we referring to fidelity to supposed authorial intention? To the sound patterns of the original poem? To its word-for-word sense? To the supposed spirit of the work? Readers of this chapter will be familiar with the old, cynical and lamentably sexist French formulation of the problem: 'translations are like wives: either plain and faithful, or beautiful and treacherous'. As Lori Chamberlain makes clear, such a formulation combines traditional denigration of translators and of women (1988). I would argue, in any case, that only a beautiful translation can be truly faithful to a fine original.

Jonathan Tittler, my former colleague in Spanish at the University of Auckland and a distinguished translator of Latin American fiction, rather surprised the students of a graduate course in literary translation that I convene when he referred to 'the erotics of translation'. He explained that he was referring both to the delight to be gained from the encounter with the *otherness* of the text for translation, and also to the almost sensual pleasure he experienced in the transformative process of translation. The sexual and gendered nature of the translation process has been illuminated by a number of metaphors employed by translators and theorists of translation.

There is, however, considerable variation in the gender and sexual roles attributed by commentators not only to the translator, but also to the source text and its author. Traditional accounts describe the translator as having conventional feminine characteristics: the translator is a handmaiden or mistress to the male creative writer, subservient, deferential and passive. Modern commentators are not so sure. George Steiner, in his *After Babel*, refers repeatedly to the need for the translator to 'penetrate' the text to be translated, while Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes her experience of literary translation as one of 'love and surrender' to the source text (written almost always, it should be noted, by a *female* author) (Spivak 1993: 180–1). Modern Chinese writer and translator Qian Zhongshu hypothesized that the Chinese term, *fan-yi*, might derive from *fan* meaning 'to turn over', and *yu*, meaning 'to seduce'.<sup>8</sup> Rosanna Warren has described the translation theory of Christian Church father Jerome in the following, scarcely celibate-

sounding, metaphor: he believed that a good translation 'sets the two languages . . . vibrating together' (1989: 5). When you think about it, what is translation if not an occasion when one tongue meets another? The metaphor employed by Richard Sieburth is rather less erotically charged: translating involves a *communion* between author and translator, 'hospitality . . . receiving someone as a guest . . . with the full formality and etiquette that that entails' (quoted in Wechsler 1998: 35) – though it is not absolutely clear (and this may be deliberate) which is the guest and which is the host. (It may be relevant that, in some of the Romance languages, a single word, e.g. French *hôte*, is used to refer to both parties involved in hospitality.)

I suggested early in this chapter that much of the value of metaphor in assisting us to gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon lies in the ease with which we are able to slide from one metaphorical formulation to another, as each illuminates a different facet. We should, I suggest, be suspicious of grand metaphors which may trap us into limiting and unproductive interpretations of reality. It is for this reason that I am highly critical of the almost universally accepted foundation myth and metaphor for the fact that we speak so many different languages: the Tower of Babel. (Its recurrence in the titles of an article by Derrida, a book by George Steiner, and a major journal of translation studies cited in the present volume, as well as the quotation from Shelley, suggests just how widely accepted it is in our field.) The Tower of Babel story suggests that we have been condemned to speak different languages for an act of defiance to the divinity, which makes linguistic diversity a form of divine punishment. I would argue on the contrary that we should regard ourselves as blessed with speaking different languages, that it should be a delight to us that we do, and that the sign of human arrogance that we really need to fear is the drive we are currently witnessing towards the dominance of one or a very few languages, and the erasure of multiplicity and diversity. (Gregory Rabassa rejects another commonly used metaphor, that of the 'target' language or audience, because, to his mind, a target is 'something to shoot at and ideally, kill, which does, indeed, often happen in the matter of translation' (1989: 5).)

The conceptual somersaults of post-structuralist theory have generated some splendidly paradoxical metaphors around the business of translation. With its thorough-going scepticism over the concepts of *the author*, *originality*, *creativity*, and *singleness* and *presence of meaning* for literary texts, comes a breakdown in the traditional dichotomy of 'author' versus 'translator'. The translator is as much (or as little) an original, creative writer as the author. 'The meaning of any text', writes Kathleen Davis, 'is undecidable, since it is an effect of language and not something that can be extracted and reconstituted' (2001: 51). Consequently, the translator is faced with an infinite series of decision-making moments. The translator is therefore seen no longer as the faithful servant of the original author, but as inventively joining in the production of meaning. Jacques Derrida takes a characteristically extreme position, declaring that the good translation is not in any sense an

equivalent to the original text, a simulacrum in another language and cultural context, it is rather the complement to a faulty or incomplete original. 'And if the original calls for a complement, it is because at the origins it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself' (Derrida 1985: 188). Puzzling though this comment may seem at first sight, the point he is making is itself less 'original' than might be supposed. It echoes a number of earlier provocative remarks about translation, including the often quoted observation of Cervantes, that a translation is like the reverse side of a tapestry (or, as has also been said) the reverse side of a Turkish rug. In similar vein, Leo Tolstoy wrote that the perfection of Pushkin's dramatic poem 'The Gypsies' became apparent to him only on reading the poem in French. In the words of Grigorii Lenkov: 'The translation became the mirror which enabled Tolstoy to see those features of the original which he was unable to notice earlier' (Friedberg 1997: 65). Similarly, Wendy Lesser, whose article I have mentioned already, refers to the (unauthorized) translation into English of a Japanese novel as revealing 'the shadow self' of the novel's author. Whereas conventional commentaries sometimes refer to translation as 'dressing a work in new clothes', novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer makes the paradoxical observation that 'translation undresses a literary work, shows it in its true nakedness' (quoted by Delisle and Woodsworth 1995: unnumbered opening page).

This line of argument runs parallel with the debate over whether a literary work, rather than being rendered in a translation which will seem familiar or comfortable to the target audience, should actually retain its otherness in the target language. The metaphors employed here treat the foreign text as a more or less wild animal, which may either be tamed, domesticated in the translation, so that it will move through the house to which it has been introduced without causing disruption, or, on the contrary, be valued precisely for its wildness, for the fact that it does knock over the household furniture, shake things up on the home front. In the words of German philosopher Rudolf Pannowitz, 'our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English . . . The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue' (quoted in Benjamin 1961: 80-1). This, in turn, brings us back to the nature of metaphor, which might equally be regarded as allowing matter from one domain to 'jolt' in some productive way the settled routine of life in another.

A number of feminist and post-colonial translators have tested the potential of translation to positively disrupt oppressive power relations, and it is with the metaphors that have been employed to describe their resisting practices that I shall conclude. The translator, feminist and/or of colour, claims an authority traditionally denied to his/her group, thereby adopting a wilfully authorial role. The metaphors listed by Maria Tymoczko to describe the plight of peoples who have been colonized or oppressed

includes: 'voices silenced, margin and centre, and epistolary exchange' (1999: 19), so the metaphors employed to describe writers who resist or react to such oppression naturally include: 'reclaiming a voice', 'reclaiming the centre' and/or 'writing from the margin' and, of course, 'writing back'. The terms employed to describe the assertive practice of feminist and post-colonial translators include metaphors: of *territory* – working in the 'contact zone' (Simon 1996); of *biology and genetics* – the production of culturally 'hybrid' texts (Mehrez 1993; Alvarez and Vidal, 1996); of *archaeology* – the 'recovery', the 'making visible', even the 'reconstruction' of female characters and experience depicted in only shadowy form in the source text (von Flotow 1997: 24–34); and of *terrorism* – 'hijacking', by radically adjusting language or content in the translation of works deemed defective or offensive (Arrojo 1994; Maier 1998: 99).

Making metaphors, like doing translations, involves crucial choices. In choosing any one metaphor rather than another from the extensive list available, we draw attention to just one thread of the translating process. Only with the assistance of the full range of metaphors available can we begin to describe the extraordinarily complex and creative work of the translator as writer.

## Notes

1. Daniel Cheng of the Wellington Community Interpreting Service, in a personal communication, has confirmed that in classical Chinese culture the heart is the residence of intellect (as well as emotion), offering as evidence the fact that the character for *heart* is found in the compound characters indicating (roughly) both *wits* and *moral intelligence*.
2. For a rich discussion of the role of metaphor in expanding the semantic resources of a language, see Lewis 1995.
3. The translation scholars who have hitherto made the most comprehensive collection of metaphors applied to translation are Theo Hermans and Ubaldo Stecconi, in a wonderful collaborative presentation entitled 'Translators as hostages of history' which they made in Luxembourg and Brussels on 17 and 18 January 2002 (Hermans and Stecconi 2002). Three other works which have offered particularly rich resources for this study are: an essay by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (1999); a book on literary translation in Russia by Maurice Friedberg (1997); and a book on literary translation as performance by Robert Wechsler (1998).
4. See, for instance, Roland Barthes's statement that 'any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text' (Barthes 1981: 39).
5. Wotton wrote this in a friend's album, and it has since been cited in numerous dictionaries of quotations.
6. For a comprehensive study of this topic, see Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002.
7. See Chapter 6, entitled 'Translators and the spread of religions', of Delisle and Woodsworth 1995: 159–87.
8. His essay 'Lin Shu de fan yi' was published in a book with the same title, edited by Qian Zhongshu *et al* (1984), Shang Wu Yen Shu Guan, Beijing: 18–51. The essay is not, so far as I know, available in English. For telling me about this essay, I am most grateful to Kevin Liu, graduate student of the University of Western Ontario, and for tracing the reference, to my own doctoral student Mei Hui Sun.

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