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Translation into English of excerpts from Charles Pépin's "Les philosophes sur le divan"

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TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH OF EXCERPTS FROM CHARLES PEPIN'S

“LES PHILOSOPHES SUR LE DIVAN”

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## Freud

How did Plato, Kant and Sartre come to be my patients? Word-of-mouth, of course, but, above all, the logical conclusion to a lifetime of questioning. Besides, I believe that we *had* to meet.

However, just like in the old days back in Vienna when, surrounded by uncertainty and solitude, I laid the first foundations of psychoanalysis, now too must I avoid being swept away by enthusiasm or undue excitement: it is not three of Western civilisation's greatest philosophers that I have in analysis but rather three men with their sufferings and anxieties. I must hold any pathos in check, remain calm, serious and proper as is the duty of any analyst—as I have always tried to be. This is the basis of a clear-headed approach, the ethics of my practice. Even when faced with Nazism, I strove to maintain this posture, not to cry wolf, not to inveigh against the supernatural or a metaphysical evil, not to meet pathos with pathos but to remain upright before what was there, to seek to grasp and understand it. In my practice, every day, even after all these years, I still try to set a steady course, to remain alert—to not get *carried away*. Even when faced with the red of hysteria, even before the blackest bile—to remain the savant in the white coat.

At first, I found it hard. I saw in myself the founder of a new religion, the discoverer of a new continent bearing the name of the unconscious, and upon which a flag would fly, carrying the image of my face. Oftentimes, I sacrificed my interest in my patients to my impatience to test my theories. From this perspective, I was not a good psychoanalyst. I was less interested in their cure than my little revolution: I saw myself as the third wound to humanity's narcissism. Galileo had banished the Earth from the centre of the universe, Darwin had brought Man back into the fold with the

other beasts, and I was discovering the unconscious deep down in each of us, the third slap across the face of human arrogance. But I have changed. The fantasies I had of being an explorer or a revolutionary are a thing of the past. Nowadays, I just try to be a good analyst.

Plato, Kant, Sartre. Because of them, my old demons almost resurfaced. I almost started to think of myself as the one who, thanks to them, would finally solve the riddle and lift the veil on the neurosis of Western Man. Plato does not recognise himself in his works and sees the face of another in what he wrote. Kant is incapable of love, ill because of everything he imposes upon himself. Sartre does not know who he is but never stops looking for himself in the eyes of others. Men who do not recognise themselves in what they do, do not know who they are, are obsessed by duty and the regard of others. Is there a better illustration of today's ills? How can one truly be interested in them, with their individual problems, and truly listen to *them* when, through their symptoms, they seem to get to the very heart of what is wrong today? And since they founded, oriented or imagined Western civilisation, since they were its quintessence and its pride, how can one not hope that by talking about themselves, they will provide us with the key to understanding it?

But I have resisted the temptation and shall continue to; I am doing everything possible to listen to what they really say, what it reveals about their particular histories, to hold the steady course that has always been my own. I know it won't be easy. It has been hard from the start: seeing them face-to-face, first Sartre and then Plato and Kant; each time, I wondered if they had been resurrected. Yes, me. Each time. Just for a second, perhaps even less. But it was already too long. And then I was a professional again. There is no resurrection, just as there is no supernatural or a metaphysical evil. There is only our intellect and the obstacles it comes up against.

Plato, Kant, Sartre. They didn't come *back*: they had never left. They are like us all, like you and me—they have, contained within their muscles and their words, like anyone else who lies down on the couch, traces of their extraordinary lives to be deciphered: their personal truth encoded in their bodies. They carry eternity in their bodies.

## Plato

This one really did not want to lie down. Indeed, he told me that from the off, without even realising how comic it sounded. He would agree to an analysis, but standing on his own two feet. I managed to keep a straight face. He paced nervously up and down in front of me, regularly bringing his right hand to his neck with a painful grimace. Everything about him was imposing—his height (he must have been over 6'2"); his massive, though now stooped, shoulders; his broad bulbous forehead; his impenetrable beard; his piercing look; his restlessness. He wore a pair of beige chinos and a white short-sleeved linen shirt. Every time he rubbed his neck, I could see his biceps at work: beneath the slightly sagging skin of an old man, thick muscles recalled what they once had been.

Standing, yes, standing, that was his *condition*, he informed me.

‘You would like to stay standing?’

I heard my voice, but I heard something other than what I had meant too:

‘That’s precisely why one lies down on the couch. To stay *standing*.’

For that matter, in the beginning he was not happy just standing: he paced, pontificating, from one end of my study to the other. I felt like a student in the Professor’s office. He told me again that it was his habit to think whilst walking, that everything he had understood—and the tone of his voice made it clear that this *everything* was no small matter—he had always understood whilst walking: walking and talking. I felt like telling him that he was not exactly there to have a dialogue. He was there precisely because he could not go on anymore.

‘I can’t go on anymore!’

Precisely the words I had almost said out loud. Fortunately, I had not said a thing, it was too soon. One slip and I would never see him again. He had been trying to understand for such a long time—walking and talking, his creased forehead lifted towards the ideal sky—that I let him carry on pacing up and down in my study, massaging his neck.

Just once, when his face seized up in a grimace, did I ask him what was wrong with his neck. He seemed outraged that I had dared to ask such a superficial question. He told me that he had not come to talk about such things, that a stiff neck was of absolutely no consequence whatsoever. He just had a neck ache but he was not there to talk about it.

‘Oh, you don’t want to talk about *id*?’

He froze, his eyes shooting daggers at me. I knew the tension was visible in my own like a smouldering fire. I was sitting at my desk, my eyes turned towards him. There were only those words between us, nothing but those words. *You don’t want to talk about id?* They whirled around, echoing, cracking like the lash of a whip. Then suddenly, his gaze softened, something in the recesses of his eagle eye yielded to doubt. He sat down. Or rather, he flopped into a chair. I remember very well the astonishing phrase that popped into my head at that moment: the Platonic heavens have just fallen on my head.

## Kant

‘Every time, and I mean every time, I manage to persuade myself, before it’s even begun, that love is impossible. My arguments have the full force of demonstrations.’

‘Yes. Your arguments...’

‘It’s my reason playing tricks on me. Faced with such arguments, it is impossible to resist. The first time was in Königsberg in the 1790s. I had a soft spot for, well...’

‘Mmm?’

‘I had feelings for a young lady who was not displeased with my attentions. I was seriously contemplating the prospect of our betrothal. She awaited nothing else. She was discreet, slim; she had a sharp mind. In brief, I found her pleasing. I remember it perfectly. I really believed what I told her; I was absolutely convinced of it. I had known poverty in my childhood and at the time I did not earn a great deal; my lectures at the university were my only source of income. She was likewise poor. Consequently, I considered all the possibilities in detail, performed all the possible calculations: there was nothing to be done—at least, I persuaded myself of that at the time. I deemed the idea of our matrimony impossible, I did not have sufficient means, it would not have been decent to propose.’

‘And you told her that?’

‘Yes. That day, I left home at an inhabitual hour and went to her home to explain my decision. And...’

‘Yes...?’

‘She cried.’

‘Yes...?’

‘She cried...a great deal.’

‘And what did you do?’

‘At the time, nothing. I was so convinced I was right, that I had taken the wisest, most moral decision that her tears did not reach me. They seemed unfounded, unjustified. Incidentally, I read the book you told me about, *Mars* by Fritz Zorn.’

‘Yes...?’

‘The man who does not cry, who does not know how to cry, and finally dies of cancer.’

‘Yes, and what do you think?’

‘His cancer is the accumulation of all his tears, all the tears he has never shed. His cancer...’

‘Mmm?’

‘His cancer is his way of crying.’

‘Yes, you could say that.’

‘Perhaps I need to find my way of crying, too.’

## Sartre

It's no coincidence that my practice is located on the *rue de Paradis*, running on from the *rue de la Fidélité*. As I walk along it, I often think about that sentence of Jacques Lacan's, the one at the end of *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*: "The only thing man may need be ashamed of, is to have given in to his desire." At the moment I enter the door code, I see Jean-Paul Sartre in the distance—with, as he wrote in his autobiography, a face like a frog's or a jellyfish—coming towards me. Just after the war, he published a short text of his philosophical lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* to resounding success. He had spent the war on café terraces. Between beers, he laid the foundations of his philosophy of freedom whilst other people were being tortured and killed in the name of *la France libre*. History thanked him by crowning him with glory.

I see him stop outside the window of the Orange shop. I imagine the reflection of his twisted smile that it bounces back at him, superimposed over offers for mobile phones for 1 euro, and I let my mind wander.

## Plato

‘And then, I wondered if I was alive. And it seemed to me that I was neither one nor the other; I wasn’t dead because there was this pain, my tense muscles, this ache in my neck...’

He fidgets a little and knits his fingers together behind his neck with a sigh:

‘I wasn’t alive either. Because this is no kind of a life, this waiting but no longer hoping, no longer believing.’

‘No longer believing in what?’

‘No longer believing in everything you’d always believed in. How can you go on living when you know that everything you’ve always fought for doesn’t exist anymore? When you want to fight for what does exist but you don’t know how? Anyway, that’s not the essential point –’

‘Ah, what is the *essential* point?’

There is a slight movement of the chin, he seems dumbstruck, incensed even, and only manages to make a reply on his third attempt:

‘I’m glad it makes you laugh.’

‘I’m not laughing.’

‘There was irony in your voice.’

‘Socratic, I hope?’

I wait a little before continuing.

‘I’m teasing you, of course, but I wasn’t being ironic. I just wanted you to hear what you’re saying, above all the fact that you’re still looking for the *essential*.’

‘Oh, because you’d rather I looked for the accidental?’

‘Well, why not?’

## Sartre

He paused for a moment before going on:

‘There is at least the certainty that I’m here, lying on this couch, with my head nestled in this cushion, still warm from the wonderings of whoever was here before me, asking myself who I am. There’s also the temptation to look for the answer in my writings. After all, what I did, is what others saw me do.’

‘It’s important, of course, to hear what you did, as well as what you said.’

‘I’m aware that I brought something to the history of philosophy, and this is definitely *something*, that I’m one of those philosophers society can thank for adding another small brick to the edifice of Western thought. The meaning of life has been enriched with a new dimension by my philosophy, another possibility. That’s not to say, of course, that I’ve changed the meaning of human existence but rather that I’ve brought an answer to the question of the meaning of life which, alongside a few others, shows what the history of philosophy can offer for those who consult it.’

‘Yes, indeed.’

‘For the Greeks, the meaning of life was to be found in belonging to the cosmos: the cosmos was a *maison close* where you had to find your place.’

‘A maison close?’

‘Yes, a closed world, a maison close. Both Epicureans and Stoics thought of it as a place for the pursuit of happiness- ’

‘A maison close for the pursuit of happiness...’

‘You can laugh but that’s precisely the difference between the Christians and the Greeks. For the Christians, there is no cosmos, the house is secondary: the world became just a place to pass through, a vestibule where you gained salvation and your place in the ever after. The meaning of life hinged completely on the tension between the here and the there: we must behave as good Christians *here* and aspire to prove ourselves worthy *there*. With the Enlightenment- ’

‘Where are you trying to go with this?’

‘To me, I’m getting round to me. But give me a chance. With the Enlightenment, the house became central again: now we needed to do it up as best we could, make it more comfortable, transform it and pass it on to our children.’

## Plato

He's getting carried away now, like an orator who has started to feel confident, but he looks more like a puppet in that position. His delivery goes up a gear.

'They will likewise object that modern times pay homage to the cult of the body; that the bodies of models are the gods of today and that all that is very far from being Platonic and heaven knows what else; that pornography has triumphed everywhere and it is difficult to read the advent of Platonism into such like. But again, what short-sightedness! Those strutting models have been stripped of the shapes which are life itself in its richness and diversity. Up on those catwalks, more than anywhere else, it is an *idea of the human body* which is terrorizing bodies.'

'There's something in that.'

'Look into the eyes of those girls with their perfect proportions and robotic legs: there is no desire. Top Model, they say, that's exactly right: instead of letting their bodies exult, the body is modelled to obey the tyranny of the idea, modelled to be on *top form* in a morbid frenzy.'

'To conform to the idea we have in our heads.'

'To the idea in the realm of Ideas, exactly.'

---

Plato, the man of *logos*. Logos: both 'reason' and 'word' according to Greek etymology. But Plato is now nothing but logorrhoea. Will he ever stop? Why does he like listening to himself so much? That is where we need to start. He talks about his

hatred of the body as the starting point for where the West went wrong but he does not provide any clue as to what the body is for *him*. His rationalized views are like a coat he wraps himself up in for protection from the very wound it hides. But pretty theories have never healed anyone. And I have often been able to ‘have someone’s hide’, to shine the light of day on what was trembling underneath. Only freely-expressed words—emotive words—freed from the stranglehold of reason, will be able to bring him closer to himself. He speaks quickly but he is not saying things as they come to him. He is still in control: he needs to let go.

## Kant

When I went to fetch Kant from the waiting room, I noticed an old issue of the *Express* lying in full view on the table. Kant must have pulled it out from one of the piles cluttering up the place—I thought I had thrown it away. On the front cover, traversing the bearded face of Plato, a slogan read: ‘Happiness Through Philosophy’. Kant, ever the dandy, as impeccably attired as always, with his legs crossed and a cravat blooming from his breast pocket, stared at me with those startlingly blue eyes of his, in which a certain merriment seemed to shimmer. I wondered if Plato had come across this issue of the *Express*. Seeing what I was looking at, without getting up, he muttered:

‘Imbeciles.’

‘Come in, my dear fellow.’

I motion him to precede me into my study. As he takes off his jacket, folding it neatly and placing it on the back of the chair, I break with my usual habit of waiting for the patient to lie down before speaking to him:

‘So, do you have something against *philotherapy*?’

As soon as he’s lying down, he’s off:

‘It’s happened again.’

‘What’s happened again?’

‘In the street, a woman was walking behind me.’

‘Go on.’

‘She was walking along, and I grew obsessed by the sound of her footsteps.’

‘Tell me more.’

‘I could hear the tapping of her heels on the pavement just behind me. It was a galloping, hurrying, unnerving sound. She was walking at exactly my pace, yet I had the incessant impression she was gaining on me. I had to slow down so she would pass me by.’

‘Yes?’

‘She was gaining yards, sticking to me; I felt chased.’

‘By what?’

Did he hear it? Yards sticking. Yardstick. The *rule*.

‘I felt as if I were about to start screaming, to howl at her to stop following me. The rhythmic click of her heels was oppressive. Tap tap, tap tap, tap tap, tap tap. It was getting louder and louder without stopping. It was only when she had overtaken me that I could breathe again, that this weight upon my thorax was at last lifted.’

‘The heels overtook you.’

‘Yes, and the sound faded away. Tap tap, tap tap, tap tap, tap tap.’

‘So what was following you?’

‘I...don’t know.’

‘Tell me...what was following you?’

‘I don’t know...a woman...a man too...perhaps the man I must be, but I feel I’m harping on...’

## Plato

‘That’s perhaps the meaning of my dream, or rather my nightmare; indeed, like the baby in my nightmare I too wanted to break through the ice, I wanted to break through. Rivalry, yes, perhaps, but not with Socrates. I wanted, through my philosophical dialogues, to create a new literary genre which wasn’t drama, nor myth, nor poetry. I was hoping to draw enormous gatherings of my contemporaries.’

‘Yes...?’

‘But the theatre was more successful, a lot more successful, there was nothing like it. The Athenians would rush off to see a play by Sophocles or Euripides. In relation to this passion, this deep need that the Athenians had for the theatre and its tragic heroes, well, my dialogues drew a meagre crowd. It took me a while to realise that I had created this form, the philosophical dialogue, just to compete with the playwrights, that I had dramatised philosophy simply to gain a position that people didn’t acknowledge was mine. It’s true, I was jealous.’

He took a deep breath before letting out a sigh.

‘It’s absolutely normal; you wanted to be accepted, to be known.’

‘Known? I don’t know... Above all I just wanted renown.’

---

I excitedly scribble a few words on a piece of paper in front of me: neck, stiff neck, necking, stiffy, whilst his sickened words to Dion come back to me: *from all sides, they run about shamelessly like wild beasts, throwing themselves upon*

*everything they consider constitutes fine food or good drink, or will furnish them with the satisfaction of that servile and graceless pleasure improperly called after Aphrodite.*

## Plato

‘Sometimes, I say to myself that I could, that in actual fact I could put up with everything I bring up here...’

‘Yes...?’

‘I feel as if there is some kind of burning deep down inside me which could be hope, or even courage, I say to myself why not, yes, finally, why not live with this responsibility, perhaps I could manage it, I say this to myself and the hope that runs through my veins reminds me how sweet life can be. But I have hardly the time to feel it rise up within me before it slumps again, I have only to remember that it’s forever and the air goes out of my sails, I’m choking again, something is pressing down on my chest.’

‘Tell me.’

‘Ah...I often think about what Kant said of eternal life: it is perhaps the only framework in which we would be able to struggle to better ourselves, we need it, at least the idea of it, knowing it was possible would nourish our efforts to become better people, it would give us hope and strength...’

The last few words were barely audible, *strength* ending in a stifled croak. He gave a hollow laugh before taking a deep breath:

‘I said to Kant the other day in the waiting room: it’s eternity that’s killing me, holding me down, wiping out the bit of courage I had...I could try and accept it, but for...ever? No...I can’t do it *forever*.’

He does not say anything for a long time, as if to pull himself together. I force myself not to ask him what Kant's reaction was.

'My immortality...forces me to put up with all this, I can't even run away into death. For me, there is no oblivion; the success of my ideas has trapped me in this hated body. For all eternity. How am I supposed to get by?'

'Who are you trying to overtake?'

'I'm in pain and you're doing wordplay.'

## Kant

I think about the young woman he left in tears after he had told her that they would not be engaged, and about his tears which never came, which have still not come. Perhaps I too need to find my way to cry, he confided in me one day. And here he is today, again trying to justify his foundation of morality in reason, in *reasoning*. I stand, place my fists upon the desk and bellow:

‘So, it must *reason*!’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘It must reason! You said it yourself. Moreover, it must *resound*, correct?’

‘What do you mean? I don’t follow...’

‘The great voice, it has to boom, so that man cannot *not* hear what it’s saying...’

‘Exactly, so that every man can hear it, and therefore, that it speaks the language of reason...’

‘Do you really believe that men obey reason and argument? Do you really believe that reason is what men *hear*?’

‘I hope so.’

I bang my fists down upon the table; he starts; I am nearly shouting:

‘Thou shalt!’

He says nothing. I continue:

‘There you have it, the great voice. Do you really think that God justified himself to Moses, that he *reasoned*?’

‘Stop putting my Moral Law and the Ten Commandments in the same bag!’

## Plato

‘None of that would have existed if I had just been able to stand the success of the playwrights...I’ll never know if Hegel recognised me because I got rather teary-eyed and had to rush out of the room.’

‘The mentioning of the German Romantics affects you in a way which, of course, is of relevance, but I think you could try harder to ask yourself precisely what it is that moves you. I hear what you’re saying: the Romantics rehabilitated beauty, removing from philosophy an old reflex—the disdain for art, for which you claim responsibility. But there is perhaps more to it than just that...’

‘Of course, there’s also the fact—I’m absolutely aware of it—that they were young and were defending their, er, well, ideas...’

‘Their ideas?’

‘Yes, *their* ideas. It was their philosophy they were defending; they were lucky, they had this simple relationship with the world, they believed something and they defended it, body and soul.’

‘How do you know?’

‘I felt it. Intensely. That’s why I started to weep.’

‘Their conviction made me realise that I had never been like that, never had that, I had always thought...I had never been like them...fully there, I had always thought that I had renounced a part of myself to seek....well, renown...that’s why I feel guilty now.’

‘Yes...?’

‘Yes. Guilty. It’s the first time I’ve thought of it that way: renown, renounce...’

‘That’s good, that’s very good, we’ll stop here for today on what could be making you feel cut off from a part of yourself.’

## Sartre

‘Incidentally, I think that it’s this impasse which makes me ill every time I get insanely jealous, that everything I feel is destined to fail, that I can’t possess her or even find the impossible meaning to my existence through her...ah...it’s utterly absurd...’

‘Go on.’

‘This jealousy! This possessiveness! I who have fought against the idea of property all my life...’

‘Yes?’

‘All forms of property! I ended *The Words* with the idea that I didn’t have any “talent”, I owed it all to my own hard work, to my faith in writing alone. I founded existentialism on the idea that we didn’t have any identity, any past, any destiny. I demonstrated in *Being and Nothingness* that even *things* weren’t in possession of their own being. As a Marxist, I fought against bourgeois notions of property. When I was twelve, my mother remarried—a bourgeois businessman—and I never stopped fighting my step-father, despising what belonged to him—his factories at La Rochelle...’

‘And your mother...’

I think he genuinely did not hear me:

‘As soon as I had money—and I had a lot—I always spent it immediately, I only used cash so that it could slip through my fingers more easily. I gave it away to whoever needed it. I lived the majority of my life in a hotel—this was a conscious

decision that Castor and I had taken—and even when success came knocking, we carried on living in modest hotel rooms. I didn't even want a *raison d'être*, so why would I want a *raison d'avoir*? I was never the owner either of talent or an identity, a past or an apartment and here I am now, with this raging ache in my stomach, wanting to own my wife!

## Plato

Suddenly, I understand the Platonic play on words about which so much has been written: in ancient Greek, *soma* is the word for body, and *sêma* for tomb: *soma sêma*, the body is a tomb, as Plato put it. His hatred for the body comes from that: this fear before his mother and his mother's clan, before his mother defending brothers and uncles as though they constituted one sole body, before his mother who would not listen to his arguments, would not see reason, only the ties of blood. *The sea washes away the ills of man...* Perhaps that should be: *The mother washes her hands of him...*

I can already hear one of the most frequent criticisms levelled at psychoanalysis: the craziest visions of the world, the delirium of the highest magnitude would, by psychoanalysis, be reduced, boiled down, to so little. To just two words: Mummy and Daddy. I can indeed understand that some feel disappointed by this. But there it is.

The body's prison is the body of the mother. It is not "a little simplistic", as those who accuse psychoanalysis of reductionism like to repeat. It is rather, quite literally, *too* simple: this simplicity is so hard to accept that it becomes practically inaudible. The analysis has no other aim than to allow us to *hear* it.

## Kant

He gave a start and I noticed a slight sheen to his forehead—a dab of sweat. As he removes his jacket, he steals furtive glances at me. No sooner has he lied down than he starts to speak:

‘Once...I have never spoken about this before...’

‘Yes...?’

‘ I was working on *The Critique of Practical Reason* but I was finding it difficult to concentrate due to the singing, the singing of the prisoners...’

‘The singing of the prisoners?’

‘Yes, well, believe it or not, near where I lived in Königsberg, there was a prison. The inmates would start singing rather frequently, and when the prison windows were open, it would carry all the way to me.’

‘What kind of songs?’

‘Precisely...in summer, most particularly, I found their singing...unbearable.’

‘In summer?’

‘Yes, in summer, the sounds became thicker, heavier; I felt as though they were making me perspire...’

‘What kind of songs?’

‘They were a kind of lament, but at the heart of these laments there was something... joyous. Yes, a kind of joy.’

‘And that’s what was disturbing you?’

‘No, I do not think so. But there was joy, joy in their sadness...’

‘The joy that comes of being together?’

‘Perhaps...’

‘Is that what was painful?’

‘I did not have the sensation of being in pain...’

‘You weren’t upset?’

‘The impression it made upon me was that I had been distracted, prevented from working, that my tranquillity had been disturbed. So, one summer...’

‘Yes...?’

‘I appealed to the police.’

‘You appealed to the *law*.’

‘I appealed to the police and I succeeded in having the prisoners sing with the windows closed.’

## Plato

The following day he came to my practice though we were not due to have a session that day. He asked if I could see him.

‘Yesterday, I went downstairs and found myself in the *rue de Paradis*. For a long time, I stared: at the passers-by, at an oriental corner shop and the different hues of curry and saffron...at the window of a video store specialising in Indian movies—Bollywood films with women in colourful saris and moustachioed men dancing in rice paddies. Then I started walking...I was walking slowly but at the core of this slowness, I felt a new haste, something within me which had come together, had become more fluid, I was perhaps walking slowly to make the most of it, then I felt my pace speed up. As I walked, for a long time, I watched the people around me, the buildings, the colours of the sky...They were steps on a new scale, a striding new freedom, it was like a dyke bursting inside. I wound up in front of the town hall in the 10<sup>th</sup> arrondissement and went in. At the front desk there was a young smiling brunette with glossy lips. I asked her for the civil status department and she indicated the first floor on the left. She was still smiling. I didn’t smile but I felt like it, I really did. I didn’t take the lift, I wanted to measure out how far I’d come step-by-step. I got to the first floor and said to myself, this is it, we’ve arrived: first floor on the left in the town hall of the 10<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. The first floor on the left, that’s higher than the world of Ideas, that’s what I thought to myself. I looked up at the golden letters above the open double doors, “Civil Status”, and went in. I asked all the questions I had to ask. A man behind a glass pane answered them with a mixture of precision and detachment. He concluded, nevertheless, that it wouldn’t be easy to change my family name. I told him I was well aware of that.’

We did not put it into words but I knew, as I accompanied him to the door, that this would be his last session and he would not be back. He knew that as well as me. We shook hands for a little longer than usual and I looked him in the eyes as I wished him farewell, 'Goodbye Mr Aristocles'.

# Introduction

## Why this book

I decided to write an annotated translation for my Master's thesis because Charles Pépin's *Les philosophes du divan*, a novel featuring Freud, Plato, Kant and Sartre as its protagonists, combined my interest in philosophy with the challenge of translating literature—and more specifically wordplay, in which the novel abounds.

My first contact with philosophy was through *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder. This introduction to the subject in the form of a novel has sold over 20 million copies since its publication in the 1990s and been translated into over 50 languages. It has been so successful that others have tried to repeat the formula—such as *Le théorème du perroquet* for mathematics—attempting to bring difficult subjects into the popular domain without rendering them simplistic.

*Les philosophes sur le divan* fits into this vein of popular philosophy. Pépin's presentation of the ideas of its four characters is engaging and the language interesting. The different characters in the novel employ different styles of discourse, and any successful translation would have to acknowledge this; however, it was the numerous examples of wordplay that really sparked my interest as a translator. I wanted to know if wordplay was an insuperable obstacle to translation, as many people seem to believe. This dissertation will explore the challenges I faced when translating the excerpts from the novel and present some ideas which underpin successful creative translation.

**About the author :** Charles Pépin



Charles Pépin is a qualified teacher of philosophy in Saint Denis and the *Institut d'Etudes politiques de Paris*. He writes regularly for magazines such as *Philosophie* and *Psychologies*.

His previous books are: *La descente* and *Les infidèles*, both works of fiction, and *Une semaine de philosophie*—a guide for French students taking the philosophy part of the *Baccalauréat*. *Les philosophes sur le divan* is his first novel of popular philosophy.

## **Les philosophes sur le divan**

The novel explores the philosophies of Plato, Kant and Sartre by holding up their authors to the scrutiny of Freudian psychoanalysis. The ideas of Plato, Kant, Sartre and Freud have survived to this day, and the book takes this as a pretext to make their authors literally immortal, living in modern-day Paris. The book reveals the travails of the three philosophers, struggling to live with the impact and the consequences that their ideas have had on the world as well as on their own lives. As a result of this, they start to see a therapist, and who could be better qualified than Freud himself? The novel is thus narrated by Freud and for the main part is structured around dialogues as the three patients undergo analysis.

As the novel progresses, we learn about Plato's theory of ideas, Kant's moral law and emphasis on duty, and Sartre's existentialism and obsession with the regard of others. What makes this novel different from other works of popularisation is that the philosophers' ideas are analysed by bringing the philosophers back to life and putting them on Freud's couch. There, we learn about their life stories, their childhoods, their relationships with their parents and so on.

In this way, we are able to see how their philosophies were affected by their relationships with other people and were not simply the fruit of inspiration or 'divine reason': their ideas reflect their lives. Unfortunately for Plato, Kant and Sartre, they are all unable to cope with the impact their ideas have had on themselves and the world around them. All three have psychological and physiological issues they need to overcome to get better: Plato cannot sleep, racked by guilt and severe neck pain; Kant cannot fall in love and is impotent; and Sartre has attacks of extreme jealousy. Freud, aside from occasionally missing his wife, has never been better.

By the end of the novel, Plato has lost some of his arrogance and come to realise that his relationship towards Socrates had not been entirely healthy. It is Socrates' rationalism and Plato's own name—actually a nickname given him by his gymnastics teacher: Plato may have meant 'very wide forehead'—that led him to denigrate what he genuinely loved: art.

Kant has been unable to find love. At the start of the novel Kant only wants to expound his ideas of duty but as the story unfolds, he gradually reveals more and more personal details about his past. Thanks to his analysis, he begins to see that his founding of morality in reason is actually based on his fear of passion—the cause of his mother's death when he was still a young boy.

For Sartre, however, the book does not bring a happy ending. Throughout the novel he rails against Freudian psychoanalysis, rejecting the notion that our present troubles may be the result of our past. With many a Gallic shrug and a broadside at Freud himself, he defends his philosophy with force—not to say an unhealthy dash of arrogance. Freud tries to help him understand that the cause of his extreme jealousy and his emphasis on freedom and choice are all bound up with the events of his childhood. Unsurprisingly, Sartre refuses to countenance this yet is always back the following week for another session...

## **Let's get theorETical**

Translation studies has developed a great deal since Holmes published his article 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies' in 1972, which sought to establish translation as a whole new area of study. Since then, it has carved out a place for itself in universities around the world and allowed new theoretical approaches to flourish. Theories today, in a deliberate break from the past, tend to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. However, there is no one particular theory that can describe how a good translator works in *all* situations or how to always emulate the best, with many old ideas surviving beyond their sell-by date (see Chesterman, 1997).

Previously, ever since the church fathers clashed over how to translate the Bible, debate had been limited to a free-versus-literal approach with not only a reverence for the Word but also a preference for the word-for-word (see Robinson in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson, 2006). Even in entirely secular texts, word-for-word, or linguistic translation, continued to hold sway. The growth of machine translation added weight to this view, and translation came to be seen as merely the process of decoding and encoding strings. In short, words were all that mattered.

### **This is my interpretation**

Fortunately, times have changed. As Cary (1962) notes, translators need to be aware of the difference between the words on the page and the ideas they sprang from:

Should we not always keep in mind that the written text—the only one we have access to—is but a mummy, a faulty and fragmented copy of the author's living thoughts? A 'cadaverous' discourse and a 'paralytic' expression to quote Plato. [...] When we translate, do we not sometimes wonder: 'What does he really mean, this author from whom I am only getting a partial message [...]

Such feelings and ideas fed into the work of Mariane Lederer and Danica Seleskovitch, who established the *Interpretive Model of Translation*, which has provided the theoretical underpinning for this dissertation. The model has its origins in the flourishing of professional interpretation in the post-war period, and is an attempt to break away from an insistence that the words on the page are the only thing a translator can, or should, use when translating. Though its roots lie in conference interpreting, it identifies all translation, whether oral or written, as occurring in the same three stages: interpretation, deverbalisation and re-expression. With its emphasis on the freedom of the translator to interpret the sense of a text, it greatly appealed to me; and its stated goal of equivalence between texts rather than word-for-word correspondences seemed of especial relevance to this dissertation given the difficulty of translating wordplay. Let us examine the three stages of translation in turn.

## **Interpretation**

Oral statements are ephemeral. We often talk about what other people have said without actually recalling statements word-for-word. The important thing for most of us is what people mean. For professional interpreters too, the evanescence of the spoken word is a given; the actual spoken words fade from memory though the ideas remain. This may seem poles apart from the fixed nature of the written text but as Lederer (2003) explains, translators do not—cannot—simply rely on the written words in front of them; they must draw on extra-linguistic knowledge if the translation is to be successful.

Words taken on their own often have multiple meanings but words put in context do not usually give rise to multiple interpretations. However, this is only true where people are concerned; as any user of Google's online translation software will

tell you, computers are not nearly as good at interpreting the meaning of a text. Take the following example: your French girlfriend is waiting for you at the train station; you arrive and she says, 'Mais t'as pas vu l'heure? Le train est parti maintenant. On va faire quoi pour y arriver maintenant?' The translation it gives me is, 'But you did not see the clock? The train is gone now. We will do what to do now?' These are not complicated sentences but the result is very foreign-sounding and ungrammatical. The computer has been given some context to help it such as the specific noun 'train' rather than the pronoun 'il'. Nevertheless, it fails: it interprets 'heure' as meaning a specific clock rather than the more general 'time', translates 'est parti' by 'is gone' rather than 'has gone', and finishes with complete disregard for English grammar and syntax in the final sentence. A translator is unlikely to produce such a result. Moreover, if he has access to the text from which the sentence came, unlike a machine he would have the freedom to choose from an array of possible translations to suit the situation. For example, from a mild 'Do you know what time it is?', an angrier 'Have you seen the time?', to even a sarcastic 'Do they not have watches where you're from?'

This is not to say that humans are infallible. Imagine a French woman speaking English to her English friend. A new multiplex cinema has opened on the outskirts of town, the billboard boldly declaring its '10 salles'. The woman would like to go, and would probably feel confident saying that the multiplex had '10 rooms'—the linguistic correspondence between 'salles' and 'rooms' being well-established. Unfortunately for her, she would be wrong. The translator, drawing on past experience of billboards advertising new cinema multiplexes, would know that in this context the correct translation would be '10 screens'.

Interpretation then is how we make sense of an utterance or text; and the examples above demonstrate that we are able to do so thanks to the background knowledge we draw on, as Lederer (2003: 4) writes:

At the level of the text, the semantics of utterances is enhanced by general and contextual knowledge [...] which allow translators to translate authors and not only language.

Our contextual knowledge comes from the meaning of words in relation to each other in a text and has its source in our short-term memory; our long-term memory accounts for our linguistic knowledge as well as our extra-linguistic general knowledge, and this in particular is key to Lederer's theory.

### **World knowledge**

An individual's general knowledge, which Lederer calls *encyclopaedic or world knowledge*, is available to the translator at all three stages of the translation process to make sense of the words on the page. It includes a person's linguistic knowledge but is much more than that. She explains:

Our world knowledge is not made up of notions which are either coherently structured or individually named; it is made up of mental representations of facts, experience, significant events, emotions. World knowledge is also theoretical knowledge, imaginings, the result of reflections, the fruit of readings, or general culture and specialised knowledge. It is a whole, contained in the brain in deverbaised form, and each one of us delves into it to understand a text. (ibid: 29-30).

Lederer provides an example of how this affects translations, quoting from a French version of John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*. The phrase 'the old Chinaman comes out

of the sea' becomes in French 'le Chinois sort de l'océan' (ibid: 31). For Lederer, there is no doubt that the transformation of 'sea' in English to 'océan' in French (and not 'mer') takes place because the translator intuitively feels this is the right choice given the story's setting on the Pacific Coast of the USA. It is Lederer's view that a willingness to put to use our world knowledge when making our translation choices, rather than fearfully or slavishly clinging to word-for-word correspondences, makes for more effective translations.

### **Deverbalisation**

Lederer's second stage, deverbalisation, refers to the retention of meaning in our minds after the words themselves have vanished from memory. This is what allows us to recall at a later time information which is important without remembering word-for-word what was actually said. In the past, when consecutive interpreting was the norm, many believed that interpreters must have had phenomenal memories to do their job but as Lederer explains, this was not the case:

Consecutive interpreters who succeed in retaining each nuance of sense before spontaneously re-expressing the whole discourse in their own language put into practice a very general aptitude which consists of retaining what has been understood whilst the words themselves disappear. (ibid: 13).

So, although the meaning of a speech arises out of words, it should not be confused with them. This might seem to apply only to oral communication but the written word is much the same, as Jean-Paul Sartre, quoted by Lederer, explains:

Sense is not contained by the words (of a text) since it is sense itself which allows each word's meaning to be understood; and although the literary goal is reached *through* language, it cannot be found in language; [...] that is why each of the hundred

thousand words of a book can be read one by one without eliciting the sense of the work; sense is not the sum of the words, it is their organic whole.

### **Don't mind if I do**

An important part of understanding what someone is saying is not just the ability to interpret the meaning of the language used but also to identify the underlying *intentions*. Aside from severely autistic people, this usually comes naturally, as we all have what neuroscientists call 'a theory of mind'.

Robert Winston (2002: 288) provides an illustration:

A classic experiment involves acting out the following scene in front of a child, usually with puppets. Fred, the first puppet, is inside a room holding a chocolate bar. He hides the chocolate under a cushion, then leaves the room. The second puppet, Annie, comes into the room, takes the chocolate bar out from under the cushion and puts it in her basket. When Fred walks back into the room, the child is asked: where will Fred look for the chocolate? Very young infants think that Fred will know what they know—that the chocolate is in Annie's basket. However, older children, by the age of about four, realize that Fred will look under the cushion. They are beginning to understand that different individuals are capable of making different actions and having different motivations from themselves.

What does this experiment tell us? The theory of mind is often called upon to explain why autistic people have such difficulty in gauging the emotions of others but it is much more than that. It is being aware that other people have thoughts and beliefs which may or may not be like our own. Our ability to guess what someone is thinking is fundamental to our ability to guess what someone is trying to say (see also Gopnik,

2009 and Blakemore & Frith, 2005), and therefore, for our purposes, how someone's words should be translated.

It is also this ability which allows us to understand someone's intentions, as a distinct quality implicit in someone's words but not bound to them. The philosopher Stephen Neale provides the following example: suppose you came to my house looking thirsty and I open the fridge door and say, "Take anything you like." Something has gone very wrong if you walk off with the fridge, the fridge door or the thermostat. Though I never outlined that they were not possibilities, and the words on their own certainly do not proscribe such actions, you are perfectly able to separate the intention from the notional meanings of the words.

This matters because to some degree a translator is called upon to render the intentions of the author in the target text, for example by using 'océan' rather than 'mer' when translating a book set in California. The choices an author makes when writing will reflect his underlying intentions; a translator not only has to understand what an author is trying to say but also how he or she is trying to say it. Stylistic as well as linguistic issues, therefore, must be borne in mind. An author may, for example, desire a character to have a particular register, and it would be a matter of importance that this be carried across in translation.

However, there is, in general, a very close tie between our words and our intentions. This makes some people wary of the Interpretive Model of Translation; they fear that the word 'interpret' could suggest that translators have carte blanche to translate as they like. Let us take an example similar to the one above: your friend opens the fridge door and, whilst pointedly looking at you, says, 'Il n'y a plus de bière' ('There's no more beer'). This statement could very likely contain the

information ‘There was beer here earlier’ and ‘Someone has drunk all the beer’, and could be tacitly taken to imply ‘You drank it all, didn’t you? Well, you’d better go and buy some more beer.’ If this is one ‘interpretation’, one might argue this would be an acceptable translation. This is not, however, what Lederer means to suggest. She explains:

For the translation theorist, what is *presupposed* by language [There’s no more beer = There was beer here earlier] is part of the natural association between word meanings and world knowledge; what is *implied* [You’d better go and buy some more beer] belongs to the realm of the speaker’s intentions which have provided the impetus for the production of the utterance. These intentions can be understood, or at the very least suspected, but they are not part of the sense to be transmitted in translation.  
(Lederer, 2003: 26, my examples)

The translator must bring together the implicit and the explicit to understand a text but that does not mean that everything that is implied lies within the field of translation. This is why ‘Il n’y plus de bière’ could be translated as ‘There’s no more beer’ or ‘There was beer here earlier’ but could not be translated as ‘You’d better go and buy some more beer.’

### **Re-expression**

So, although translators have an amount of freedom in how they choose to translate a text the words of the source text limit their translation choices to some degree. For the third stage of translation, re-expression, I wish to discuss how a translator makes these choices with reference to two ideas: skopos theory and personal knowledge. The first has become a mainstay of translation theory, and was developed by Hans J. Vermeer.

## Σκοπός

Skopos theory—Greek for aim, purpose or goal—takes as its starting point that every target text translation or, as it is sometimes known, *translatum* has a purpose, which is given at the outset in the form of the commission or may even be adapted or defined by the translator himself:

The skopos of a translation is [...] the goal or purpose, defined by the commission and if necessary adjusted by the translator. In order for the skopos to be defined precisely, the commission must thus be as specific as possible [...] If the commission is specific enough, after possible adjustment by the translator himself, the decision can then be taken about *how* to translate optimally, i.e. what kind of changes will be necessary in the *translatum* with respect to the source text (Vermeer, in Venuti, 2000: 230).

For Vermeer, the translation does not, ipso facto, have to be a ‘faithful’ rendering of the source text at all. ‘Fidelity’ is just one of the possible strategies at the disposal of the translator. This denies the viewpoint which

has often been seen as the only valid one: that a source text should be translated “as literally as possible” (ibid: 231).

## Engendering discord

A case in point came to light when, on 20 May 2010, the New York Times featured an article on Simone de Beauvoir’s landmark feminist work *The Second Sex*. It was published in France in 1949 and came to be regarded as highly controversial—even receiving that most coveted of awards, a place on the Vatican’s Index of Forbidden Books. Subsequently, a translation into English was commissioned but Howard M. Parshley was asked not only to translate the work but also to condense it—the publisher considered Beauvoir to be suffering from ‘verbal diarrhoea’ (du Plessix

Gray). The translation which appeared in 1953 was substantially reduced (by as much as 15%) and although Beauvoir complained about it later, this version was the one which brought feminism into the Anglophone post-war world.

In 2009, however, a new translation was published. This version, by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, was an attempt to correct what were seen as deviations from Beauvoir's style and reinsert the previously excluded material. This version is still not to everyone's taste, however. In her review of the new translation, Du Plessix Gray is less than impressed, arguing that '[...] it doesn't begin to flow as nicely as Parshley's' and '[t]hroughout, there are truly inexcusable passages in which the translators even lack a proper sense of English syntax'. She provides a few examples:

Writing about the aggressive nature of man's penetration of woman, Parshley felicitously translates a Beauvoir phrase as "her inwardness is violated." In contrast, Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's rendering states that woman "is like a raped interiority." And where Parshley has Beauvoir saying of woman, "It is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life," the new translators substitute, "It is she who defines herself by reclaiming nature for herself in her affectivity." In yet another example, man's approach to woman's "dangerous magic" is seen this way in Parshley: "He sets her up as the essential, it is he who poses her as such and thus he really acts as the essential in this voluntary alienation." But in Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, "it is he who posits her, and he who realizes himself thereby as the essential in this alienation he grants."

In fact, neither of the two translations are actually *wrong*; they are merely reflections of translators, consciously or unconsciously, following two different *skopoi*. Parshley was presumably aiming for a fluent, straight-forward style whereas Borde and Malovany-Chevallier aimed to give Beauvoir a more challenging, academic register.

It is not the translators who have made mistakes but rather left it to the reader to see which style they prefer.

### **Getting personal**

Sometimes in explaining the decisions I have taken in translating *Les philosophes sur le divan*, my choices will be more a case of what ‘felt right’. This may look at first to be what Chesterman (2001: 40) called ‘translating blind’ but in my view it is nothing of the sort. Translating is a human activity that is honed by practice—like learning to ride a bicycle or swim. When we start to learn, it can seem very difficult but with practice we can master the skill. If, however, we are later asked what it is that keeps us afloat or stops the bicycle from falling over we might well struggle to give the correct answer, but that does not mean that we do not have what Polanyi terms ‘personal knowledge’.

He points out (1958: 49):

[it is a] well-known fact that the aim of a skilful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them (*italics removed*).

For example: how does a cyclist maintain his balance?

When he starts falling to the right he turns the handlebars to the right, so that the course of the bicycle is deflected along a curve towards the right. This results in a centrifugal force pushing the cyclist to the left and offsets the gravitational force dragging him down to the right. This manoeuvre presently throws the cyclist out of balance to the left, which he counteracts by turning the handlebars to the left; and so he continues to keep himself in balance by winding along a series of appropriate curvatures. A simple analysis shows that for a given angle of unbalance the curvature

of each winding is inversely proportional to the square of the speed at which the cyclist is proceeding (ibid: 49-50).

So, does this tell anyone how to ride a bicycle? Of course not:

Rules of art can be useful, but they do not determine the practice of an art; they are maxims, which can serve as a guide to an art only if they can be integrated into the practical knowledge of the art. They cannot replace this knowledge (ibid: 50).

The integration of rules *may* be useful, but not without the unconscious skills acquired through practical hands-on experience: our personal knowledge. This seems to be very close to Lederer's notion of world knowledge.

Another of Polanyi's examples is that of the pianist's 'touch'. A note can be made to sound different according to how the pianist plays it. In my view, this is not very far from how a translator can render a text differently depending on how they choose to translate or 'play' it—as the pianist has to develop his touch, so too does the translator need to develop 'an ear'. So, how is this to be done? Polanyi's answer is *tradition*:

An art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice (ibid: 53).

So, in my particular case, it is not solely by dint of long hours spent poring over books on translation theory but by following the example of my teachers at *L'école de traduction et d'interprétation*, or ETI as it is known for short, at the University of Geneva.

By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself (ibid: 53).

Perhaps, we can say then that an inability to provide a theory is not necessarily translating blind, and maybe an overreliance on a theory is blind faith. As I wrote earlier, there is no one theory which actually fully describes what it is the translator *does*.

For the translator to develop an ear for what ‘sounds right’, one of the most important things he must do is read, read, read. To know what is usually said or written about a particular subject a translator has to read extensively in that field in the target language. These texts which provide the background information and inspiration to the translator are called parallel texts. For the purpose of this dissertation, for example, I read novels relating to philosophy and psychoanalysis such as Tibor Fischer’s *The Thought Gang* and Jed Rubenfeld’s *The Interpretation of Murder* as well as works of philosophy and psychoanalysis themselves, such as *The Choice of Hercules* by A.C. Grayling, *Freud and Freudians on Religion* edited by Donald Capps, *The Story of Philosophy* by Bryan Magee, and many more. More titles can be found in the bibliography. These books constitute part of the knowledge that at times I have drawn on when making my translation choices.

## **The importance of having pun**

Wordplay is everywhere. Pick up a magazine or a newspaper and, more likely than not, you will be bombarded with puns. Turn on the radio or the TV and a thousand commercials will vie to gain your attention (and hopefully your money) with a play on words. Luckily for me, I like them.

In 1905, Freud published *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (*Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*), in which he attempted to outline his theory concerning wordplay and its relationship to the unconscious. The book I chose to translate has a great deal of wordplay and this is not, in my view, simply a reflection of the author's predilections but rather a conscious strategy to emulate Freud. Consequently, throughout the book Freud jokes, plays on words, makes allusions and perpetrates puns.

The inherent challenge of translating wordplay stirred my interest in translating *Les philosophes sur le divan*. For many, wordplay is like poetry: it is what gets lost in translation. I think people are very quick to say that such-and-such a word/pun/novel/poem etc. is untranslatable despite the fact that great works and great poetry have been translated for thousands of years. I wanted to see if I could translate a book which presented countless examples of what is 'untranslatable', and more importantly, without recourse to footnotes, which as Umberto Eco (2006: 129) would have it is always a sign of weakness in a translator.

## Getting wordy

Jacqueline Henry (2003) believes wordplay can be divided into four categories.

I. The first category is the most complex, and deals with wordplay based on sense as opposed to sound. It is subdivided into three categories: *l'enchaînement* (sequencing), *l'inclusion* (inclusion) and *la substitution* (substitution).

A) Sequencing includes:

- *Fausse coordination* (Syllepsis): A figure of speech in which one word is applied to two others but where only one is grammatically correct, e.g. Neither they nor it is working.
- *Enchaînements par homophonie* (Homophonic sequences), e.g. des messages, des mets sages, des massages.
- *Enchaînements par echo* (Echo sequences), e.g. See ya later, alligator.
- *Enchaînement par automatisme* (Reflex sequences), e.g. Salt and pepper, pepper pot, pot of gold, golden ring.

B) Inclusion covers:

- Anagrams: a rearranging of the letters in a word to form another word, words or name, e.g. Dud infers mug (Sigmund Freud).
- Palindromes: a word or words which can be read from left to right or vice versa with no change in meaning, e.g. Satan, oscillate my metallic sonatas.
- Spoonerisms: switching around parts of words by mistake or for comic effect, e.g. Is it kisstomary to cuss the bride?
- Portmanteaux: fusing together two separate words to form a new one, e.g. Smog (smoke and fog).

- Verlan: French back-slang which inverts spelling or phonemes, e.g. Laisse béton (=laisse tomber i.e. let it be/forget about it).
- Acronyms: a new word formed by pronouncing its initials as one word, e.g. Laser (**L**ight **A**mplification by **S**timulated **E**mission of **R**adiation).
- Acrostics: whereby the first letter of a word in each line spells out a word or message, e.g. The poem in the final chapter of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (327) which spells out Alice's real name (Alice Pleasance Liddell).

### C) Substitution

The mainstay of wordplay, as it constitutes the much-entered realm of the pun. Before providing its description, however, it is important to clarify some terms, namely: homophones, homographs, homonyms, paronyms, synonyms and antonyms.

- *Homophones* are words which share the same pronunciation but not the same spelling, e.g. Ewe/You/Yew.
- *Homographs* have the same spelling but different meanings and often a different pronunciation, e.g. Tie a ribbon in a *bow*/When you meet the Queen you *bow*.
- *Homonyms* share both the spelling and the pronunciation, e.g. *Dear* John/Food is very *dear* in Geneva.
- *Paronyms* are words whose pronunciation or spelling is very similar, e.g. Collision/Collusion.
- *Synonyms* are words which are equivalents or near-equivalents, e.g. Seat/Chair.
- *Antonyms* are opposites, e.g. Big/Small.

Puns (*calembours*) can be divided into two groups, those resting on the different meanings of the same words (*Calembours sémiques* or Semic puns) or those playing on the sounds of words (*Calembours phoniques* or Phonic puns). Semic puns can be further divided into:

1. *Calembours polysémiques* (Polysemic, that is multiple sense, puns): this often turns upon a distinction between a word's concrete vs. abstract, or literal vs. figurative meaning. This frequently involves homographs, e.g. The harm caused by sibling rivalry is relative.
2. *Calembours synonymiques* (Synonymic puns): a word or syllable is replaced by a synonym, e.g. (Henry, 2003: 26) *analphabète/alphacon*
3. *Calembours antonymiques* (Antonymic puns): a play on words revolving around opposite meanings, e.g. (ibid: 26) *On lui prête du génie, mais il ne le rend jamais.*

Phonic puns are grouped into:

1. *Calembours homonymiques* (Homonymic puns) : this involves, as Freud (ibid: 26) put it, making use of the same material, e.g. Prévert's 'Doux présent du présent'.
2. *Calembours homophoniques* (Homophonic puns): wordplay based on identical pronunciation, e.g. A cardboard belt would be a waist of paper.
3. *Calembours paronymiques* (Paronymic puns): wordplay based on a similarity in pronunciation, e.g. He laboured so hard that he worked his fingers to the bonus.

II. Henry's second way of categorizing wordplay is based on whether the multiple meanings are exploited implicitly or explicitly. If one word has as its subtext another

word, this implicit wordplay is deemed a *calembour in absentia* (pun *in absentia*) e.g. Valéry's 'Entre deux mots, il faut choisir le moindre'.

The opposite is the *calembour in praesentia* (pun *in praesentia*), which refers to wordplay where the terms appear together as co-referents e.g. the famous aphorism of translation as treachery: Traddutore, traditore.

III. Henry's third possible categorization is between puns which allude to something else or do not. In the domain of allusions, a line from John Osborne's *The Entertainer*, 'Thank God we're normal. Yes, this is our finest shower!' (1997: 242) parodies and alludes to the famous line in Churchill's speech on 18 June 1940, 'Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour"' (ibid: 99).

Henry states that puns *in absentia* are, by their implicit nature, *a priori* better suited to puns based on allusion.

IV. The final category incorporates those puns which integrate elements of several other categories, and are consequently termed *calembours complexes* (complex puns). Henry cites a sentence from San Antonio, 'La mère rit de son arrondissement' (Henry, 2003 : 27), as an example of a complex pun. There is the homophonic pun on mère rit/mairie which is followed by and includes a polysemic pun on the town hall in an area of Paris with the newly-found curves of pregnancy!

## On the fourfold root of the principle of sufficient treason

Henry accepts that some cases of wordplay may not be translatable but maintains that the case for the ‘untranslatability of wordplay’ is far from conclusive and in many instances hastily drawn. In fact, this is because many people confuse translation with transcoding. She argues that it is neither the original form of the wordplay nor the original method by which it was produced which determines how we should translate wordplay but the *context*. She identifies four different procedures.

### I. Traduction isomorphe (Isomorphic translation)

This is translation using the same procedure as the original as well as the same words—or the target language’s very close equivalents. To see how it works, let us first consider an example of how to *miss out* on this kind of translation. Freud in his *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* provides a pun from his own witty entourage:

I was talking to a lady about the great services that had been rendered by a man of science who I considered had been unjustly neglected. ‘Why,’ she said, ‘the man deserves a monument.’ ‘Perhaps he will get one some day,’ I replied, ‘but *momentan* [for the moment] he has very little success.’ ‘*Monument*’ and ‘*momentan*’ are opposites. The lady proceeded to unite them: ‘Well, let us wish him a *monumentan* success’ (1960: 21).

In the above quote James Strachey chose to document the pun by providing the German and explanations in square brackets and footnotes. If he had instead sought to create an isomorphic pun then he could have translated as follows:

‘Why,’ she said, ‘the man deserves a monument.’ ‘Perhaps he will get one some day,’ I said, ‘but for the moment he has very little success.’ The lady replied, ‘Well, let us wish him a monumentary success.’

This example demonstrates Henry’s reasoning, as it shows that whether we are translating from German to English, French, Italian or indeed many more combinations, the pun could be preserved, as words of similar etymology exist in all these languages despite their belonging to different linguistic families.

## II. Traduction homomorphe (Homomorphic translation)

This entails using the same procedure or kind of play on words, e.g. translating polysemic puns by polysemic puns, but with different words. Henry considers this the most natural route for the translator to take when starting out on his journey to find an equivalent that works. She provides an example when translating the paronymic confusions of Mrs Baker in *Free live free*, who says, ‘It was not quiet dinner time’ as, ‘Ce n’était pas tout à fait l’or du dîner’ (Henry, 2003: 178).

## III. Traduction hétéromorphe (Heteromorphic translation)

Here the translator employs both different words and a different procedure. Henry gives the example of D.R. Hofstadter, who wrote articles for a section of Scientific American called ‘Mathematical Games’. He did not want to be restricted to writing articles solely about mathematics and was given free rein by the editors. So, he renamed the section ‘Metamagical themas’, which is an anagram of the former title (ibid: 143). After much head-scratching, the French translator was inspired to use ‘Ma thémagie’, which is not an anagram but a homophonic pun in *absentia* and a

neologism (ibid: 144, 183) centring on ‘maths et magie’ whilst preserving the allusion to ‘thèmes’.

#### IV. Traduction libre (Free translation)

Or as I like to think of it: *freestyle*. Henry says we can ‘replace wordplay by allusion’, ‘replace allusion by wordplay’ or we can go for ‘total creation’. The first two are self-explanatory replacements but the last merits a little more attention.

Total creation is where the translator introduces some kind of wordplay into the target text where the source text has none. Henry uses *Alice in Wonderland* (79) as an example:

‘Well, I’ve often seen a cat without a grin [...] but a grin without a cat! It’s the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!’

Translated by Parisot as:

‘Ma foi! pensa Alice, il m’était souvent arrivé de voir un chat sans souris [...] mais ce souris de chat sans chat! c’est bien la chose la plus curieuse que j’aie contemplée, de ma vie!’ (in Henry: 190)

Here, the translator has called upon old-fashioned French to use the word ‘souris’ for ‘smile’ where ‘sourire’ would normally be expected. ‘Souris’ thus becomes a pun, as it means both ‘smile’ and ‘mouse’, although no pun is present in the original English. This is clearly justified, argues Henry, as the link between cats and mice is often

present in children's literature; and more importantly because *Alice in Wonderland* is overflowing with wordplay—another one won't do any harm.

This kind of procedure is frequently employed to avoid the tendency of translations to be 'flatter' than the original (Hermans, 1999: 58). However, Henry's free translation should not be confused with what is referred to as 'compensating' for 'loss'. This is when a translator feels that the effect of the source text has not been carried across to the target text at a certain point and so something is inserted into the source text at another point to make up for it. Free translation *may* be used to compensate for loss which has occurred elsewhere in a text but Henry's point is that this is not its sole usage; free translation can occur even in the absence of any sense that the target text is deficient.

## Wordplay and Text Analysis

My translation contains all four of the procedures mentioned above. Below are tables of instances of wordplay alongside my translation. Remarkably, seven of the twenty examples cited below follow the same procedure and use the same words. This on its own should demonstrate the need to be cautious before assuming wordplay to be untranslatable.

- Isomorphic Translation

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 16 Coe, vii	- C'est justement pour cela que l'on s'allonge sur le divan. Pour pouvoir <i>rester debout</i> .	'That's precisely why one lies down on the couch. To stay <i>standing</i> .'
Pépin, 58 Coe, xiii	[...] je voulais juste vous faire entendre ce que vous dites, notamment que vous cherchez encore <i>l'essentiel</i> . - Vous préféreriez que je cherche quoi, l'accidentel ?	'[...] I just wanted you to hear what you're saying, above all the fact that you're still looking for the <i>essential</i> .' 'Oh, because you'd rather I looked for the accidental?'
Pépin, 264-265 Coe, xxxii	- J'ai appelé la police. - Vous avez appelé <i>la loi</i> .	'I appealed to the police.' 'You appealed to the <i>law</i> .'

The original French excerpts above are all examples of polysemy and rely on sense not sound, which I have preserved in my translation. I think the double-meaning of 'rester debout' carries across reasonably well and to be sure that the phrase was noticed, in the first paragraph I translated 'debout' as 'standing on his own two feet'.

The second quote is a polysemic pun with an allusion to Aristotle. Aristotle was Plato's pupil at the Academy in Athens and distinguished between the 'accidental' and the 'essential' properties of an object. Accidental properties are those which do not affect the essence of a thing. For example, if a dissertation is available as a printout, a hardback book or attached to an email as a Word document, these are just 'accidents'; they do not alter the fact that it is still a dissertation.

The third example hinges on the relationship between the police and the law and Kant's *moral law*. The verb caused me a problem because 'appeler la police' is usually translated as 'to call the police'—but telephones were thin on the ground in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. I mulled over various possibilities such as 'send for' and 'involve' the police but 'appeal to' seemed the best solution.

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 12 Coe, iv	Souvent, j'ai sacrifié l'intérêt pour mes patients à l'impatience de vérifier mes théories.	Oftentimes, I sacrificed my interest in my patients to my impatience to test my theories.
Pépin, 92 Coe, xvi	Platon, l'homme du <i>logos</i> ...Logos : raison et discours à la fois, dit l'étymologie grecque. Mais désormais, Platon n'est plus que logorrhée.	Plato, the man of <i>logos</i> . Logos: both 'reason' and 'word' according to Greek etymology. But Plato is now nothing but logorrhoea.
Pépin, 201 Coe, xxiv	- Il faut que ça raisonne ! C'est vous que l'avez dit. Et même que ça résonne, n'est-ce pas ?	'It must reason! You said it yourself. Moreover, it must <i>resound</i> , correct?'

French and English have such a huge amount of vocabulary in common that paronymic puns can often be retained. The quotes above are paronymic puns *in praesentia*, revolving around the similar sounds of 'patients' and 'impatience'; 'logos' and 'logorrhoea'; and 'reason' and 'resound'.

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 116 Coe, xix	- J'avais l'impression d'être poursuivi par les talons. - Par les talons ? L'entend-il ? Par les talons, par l'étalon, par la règle.	'She was gaining yards, sticking to me; I felt chased.' 'By what?' Did he hear it? Yards sticking. Yardstick. The <i>rule</i> .

The final quote in this section took a great deal more to translate. In French, it is an example of a homophonic sequence: the words 'les talons' (heels) being re-formed as 'l'étalon' (benchmark), which sounds almost the same. It would appear that French lends itself more easily to this kind of wordplay than English, so I considered trying to translate the wordplay using a different approach. Unfortunately, the *sound* seemed critical to the story, as Freud uses the words he hears to perform his analysis.

‘L’étalon’ can be translated in this example as ‘benchmark’, ‘guideline’ or ‘yardstick’.

I found that I could form a pun by taking a few liberties with the first line of the excerpt and instead of translating it as ‘I felt as if I was being pursued by high heels’, to which Freud replies, ‘High heels?’ I could alter it to ‘She was gaining yards, sticking to me; I felt chased.’ Freud then had to reply, ‘By what?’ In this way ‘yards’ runs on into ‘stick’ and the pun is formed. It also presented me with the possibility of using ‘chased’ instead of ‘pursued’ as an intended allusion to Kant’s condition of being—decidedly against his wishes—chaste.

- Homomorphic translation

The tables in this section contain excerpts of my translations in which I have managed to follow the original’s procedure to make a play on words but via a different wording. The following table contains more examples of polysemy.

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 16 Coe, vii	Il me répétait qu’il avait l’habitude de réfléchir en marchant [...] J’avais eu envie de lui répondre qu’il n’était pas là exactement pour dialoguer. Qu’il était là justement parce que <i>ça ne marchait plus</i> .	He told me again that it was his habit to think whilst walking [...] I felt like telling him that he was not exactly there to have a dialogue. He was there precisely because he could not go on anymore.
Pépin, 17 Coe, viii	Je me souviens très bien de l’étonnante formulation qui m’est alors venue : <i>le ciel des Idées</i> vient de me tomber sur la tête.	I remember very well the astonishing phrase that popped into my head at that moment: the Platonic heavens have just fallen on my head.
Pépin, 81 Coe, xiv	- Une maison close où trouver son bonheur...	‘A maison close for the pursuit of happiness...’
Pépin, 93 Coe, xvi-xvii	Il parle de sa haine du corps comme fondatrice d’un travers de l’Occident mais ne laisse rien apparaître de ce que c’est que le corps <i>pour lui</i> . Son discours rationnel est comme un manteau dans lequel il s’enroule pour se protéger de la blessure qu’elle recouvre. Mais les belles théories n’ont jamais guéri personne. Et	He talks about his hatred of the body as the starting point for where the West went wrong but he does not provide any clue as to what the body is for <i>him</i> . His rationalized views are like a coat he wraps himself up in for protection from the very wound it hides. But pretty theories have never healed anyone. And I have often been able to ‘have

	<b>je suis parvenu si souvent à leur « faire la peau », à mettre à jour ce qui tremblait dessous !</b>	<b>someone's hide', to shine the light of day on what was trembling underneath.</b>
<b>Pépin, 186 Coe, xxiii</b>	<b>- Comment voulez-vous que je m'en sorte ? - Vous voudriez aller où ?</b>	<b>'How am I supposed to get by?' 'Who are you trying to overtake?'</b>

The first excerpt does not provide as much of a wordplay 'hit' in my translation as is the case with French because I have been forced to use 'walking' and 'go on' together where the French can use 'marcher' twice to mean 'walk' and 'it's not working'. Though 'walk' and 'work' could function as a paronymic pun in some situations, (perhaps 'It's not working anymore' against 'It's not walking anymore'), the pun did not fit here.

The pun in French is polysemic with an allusion to the Gaulish fear of the sky falling on their heads (ever-present in Asterix comics). 'Le ciel des Idées' posed a problem as it is literally 'the sky/heaven of Ideas' where in English, we usually talk about the 'world of Forms' or 'Ideas', the 'realm of Forms' or 'Ideas' or the 'Platonic heaven'. These two parts had to be joined so I changed 'sky' to 'heavens' and placed the word 'Platonic' before it.

The third quote posed the tricky problem of ensuring that 'maison close' (literally 'closed house' but which actually means 'brothel') was translated with all its polysemy intact. I decided that enough English people—or at least those who were willing to read a philosophical novel and therefore, presumably, reasonably knowledgeable—would be aware that 'maison close' meant 'brothel' and that 'maison' meant 'house'. To add to the piquant of Sartre's words I made 'où trouver son bonheur' into 'for the pursuit of happiness'—instead of simply 'where you can find happiness'—as a link and allusion to Enlightenment philosophy, which he goes on to discuss.

The next excerpt revolves around Freud's punning on 'corps/body' and 'faire la peau' (literally 'make skin' but actually 'bump somebody off'). To keep the same idea I resorted to 'have someone's hide' which is close enough to skin, I think.

The final quote above concerns the polysemic pun in French of 's'en sortir' which means concretely 'to leave' or 'get out' as well as figuratively 'to get by' or 'to get over something'. Because of Plato's relationship and rivalry with Socrates in the story, I felt I could deviate from the French 'Vous voudriez aller où?' (Where would you like to go?) to 'Who are you trying to overtake?' I was satisfied with the resulting pun and its effect.

Page	Original	Translation
<b>Pépin, 166</b> Coe, xx	- Vous vouliez être reconnu, c'est bien normal de vouloir être reconnu. - Être reconnu...je ne sais pas...je voulais surtout être connu.	'It's absolutely normal; you wanted to be accepted, to be known.'  'Known? I don't know... Above all I just wanted renown.'
<b>Pépin, 168</b> Coe, xx	Je griffonne nerveusement sur une feuille devant moi : mal à la nuque, nu que, nue queue [...].	I excitedly scribble a few words on a piece of paper in front of me: neck, stiff neck, necking, stiffy [...].

The two quotes above are both examples of wordplay hinging on the sounds of words but for which I could not use exact English equivalents. The first excerpt in French is a paronymic pun *in praesentia* resting on the pronunciation of 'connu' ('known', 'familiar' or 'famous') and 'reconnu' ('recognized', 'accepted' or 'acknowledged'). As there would be no pun engendered by an 'accepted/famous' opposition I had to move things around a little to bring in a pun. I chose to use 'accepted' to replace the first 'reconnu' and 'known' for the second to provide the paronymic pun on 'renown' in the final line.

The second extract is a homophonic sequence and as I explained earlier this does not come easy in English. I decided to allude to word association of the kind often linked to psychoanalysis and changed the wordplay from a homophonic sequence to a reflex sequence. Thus the French through the separating out of the letters is re-formed to mean something which would if translated literally read: ‘stiff neck, bare that, bare cock’, which is frankly bizarre. I felt that my word association worked (‘neck, stiff neck, necking, stiffy...’) and captured the ideas behind Freud’s scribblings.

Page	Original	Translation
<b>Pépin, 210</b> Coe, xxvi-xxvii	- [...] j’avais toujours pensé coupé d’une part de moi-même, c’est de cela aujourd’hui dont je me sens...coupable justement. - Oui. - Oui. Coupable. C’est la première fois que je l’entends ainsi : coupable, qui <i>peut être coupé</i> . Coupé d’une part de soi...	‘[...] I had always thought that I had renounced a part of myself to seek....well, renown...that’s why I feel guilty now.’ ‘Yes...?’ ‘Yes. Guilty. It’s the first time I’ve thought of it that way: renown, renounce...’ ‘That’s good, that’s very good, we’ll stop here for today on what could be making you feel cut off from a part of yourself.’
<b>Pépin, 259</b> Coe, xxx	<i>La mer lave de tous les maux...</i> Ce serait plutôt : <i>la mère s’en lave les mains...</i>	<i>The sea washes away the ills of man...</i> Perhaps that should be: <i>The mother washes her hands of him...</i>

The final two extracts in this section are both complex puns which I have managed to translate but with perhaps partial loss in effect. Both are paronymic puns *in praesentia*, the first is also polysemic—playing on the meaning of ‘coupable’ (usually ‘guilty’ but here being used to mean ‘cuttable’) and the second is both homophonic (‘la mer’/ ‘la mère’) and polysemic—playing on the double meaning of ‘laver’ as ‘wash’ or ‘wash your hands of someone’.

In the first quote, I had to rearrange the wording and introduce the word ‘renown’ to pun with ‘renounce’. This chimed well with my earlier ‘known/renown’ pun so seemed to work well.

In the second quote, the English for ‘la mère’ and ‘la mer’ is ‘mother’ and ‘sea’, which therefore obviously precludes an isomorphic translation. I felt the effect of the pun on ‘washes away’ and ‘washes her hands of him’ was still strong but nevertheless I have unfortunately lost part of the pun’s vim.

- Heteromorphic translation

Below are examples of where I have had to deviate from the original procedure to maintain the pun.

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 16 Coe, viii	Qu’il avait juste mal à la nuque et qu’il n’était pas là pour ça. - Ah... vous n’êtes pas là pour <i>ça</i> ?	He just had a neck ache but he was not there to talk about it. ‘Oh, you don’t want to talk about <i>id</i> ?’
Pépin, 88 Coe, xvi	<i>Top model</i> , dit-on, c’est exactement cela : au lieu de se laisser aller à sa vie de corps exultant, le corps est modelé pour obéir à la tyrannie de l’idée, modelé pour être au top dans une fureur mortifère...	Top Model, they say, that’s exactly right: instead of letting their bodies exult, the body is modelled to obey the tyranny of the idea, modelled to be on <i>top form</i> in a morbid frenzy.’

The original French is another case of polysemy—‘ça’ meaning ‘that’ and ‘id’. It would perhaps have been more natural for Freud to have said, ‘Oh, you don’t want to talk about that?’ but I feel that the use of ‘it’ instead does not trip up the reader and gives a nice pun on ‘id’.

I had hesitated to use ‘Top Model’ in the second quote as I would more naturally have said ‘Super Model’ in English. However, the success of the reality TV series ‘Britain’s Next Top Model’ (and its sister shows in the USA and Australia)

meant I was clearly being old-fashioned, so I decided to keep ‘Top Model’. However, the second quote needed the introduction of italics to ensure ‘on top form’, which is the translation of ‘au top’, remained present as a pun on ‘Top Model’. Originally, I had just put ‘on top’ but I felt the addition of the word ‘form’ was an added bonus given the terminology of Plato’s ideas. It could be argued that ‘form’ would be better capitalized to make it a definite double pun but I decided it would be a step too far.

- Free translation

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 236 Coe, xxix	Je ne voulais même pas <i>être</i> , alors comment aurais-je voulu <i>avoir</i> ?	I didn’t even want a <i>raison d’être</i> , so why would I want a <i>raison d’avoir</i> ?
Pépin, 13 Coe, vi	Ils sont comme nous tous, comme vous et comme moi, comme tous ceux qui s’allongent sur le divan avec dans leurs muscles et leurs mots les traces à déchiffrer de leur histoire singulière : leur vérité, elle est inscrite dans leur corps.	They are like us all, like you and me—they have, contained within their muscles and their words, like anyone else who lies down on the couch, traces of their extraordinary lives to be deciphered: their personal truth encoded in their bodies.

In the first example above I replaced allusion by wordplay. All French verbs, when they require an auxiliary verb, are conjugated with either ‘être’ or ‘avoir’ so ‘être et avoir’ is a kind of double-act in the French language. I decided that a literal translation would not produce the desired effect on an Anglophone ear so I chose to be a little more creative. In my opinion, everyone knows what ‘raison d’être’ is and so could logically be expected to understand the neologism ‘raison d’avoir’.

In the second example, I allowed myself the liberty of Henry’s Total Creation. There is no wordplay here in the source text but I chose to translate ‘inscrite’ by ‘encoded’ instead of ‘written’ or ‘engraved’, satisfyingly creating a link between it and ‘deciphered’.

## **They do things differently there**

One debate in translation that continues to rumble on is whether to embrace a strategy of domestication or a strategy of foreignization. The translator whose name is most associated with this debate nowadays is Lawrence Venuti. He explains that this choice was summed up most forcefully by the philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher:

In an 1813 lecture on the different methods of translation, Schleiermacher argued that ‘there are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him’ (in Weissbort and Eysteinsson, 2006: 548).

Venuti rephrases this as allowing the translator to:

[...] choose between a domesticating method, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home, and a foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad (ibid: 548).

Venuti comes down clearly on the side of a foreignizing strategy, regarding the use of a domesticating strategy as ‘ethnocentric violence’ which is very often put in the service of an ‘imperialist appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economic, political’ (ibid: 547). The goal of ethnocentric fluency and the invisibility of the foreign culture has led in the past to—by today’s standards—excesses such as Guthrie’s translation of Cicero’s speeches with Cicero portrayed as a Member of Parliament (550).

Though many people would rate translation's primary goal to be the preservation of natural-sounding language in the target text, Venuti will have no truck with this, stating that his goal is:

[...] resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations. (ibid: 556)

### **A bit of a domestic**

Venuti's ideas serve as a useful reminder to translators to be self-conscious and critical in their choices, to be aware of possible bias and ethnocentricity in their work. In this Venuti is performing a useful task that has likewise been undertaken in other areas of the Social Sciences and in society at large for several decades now in our post-colonial world. However, though undoubtedly important and despite my sympathy for Venuti's desire to open up the English-speaking world to other languages, I am not entirely sure translation is best served by providing an 'alien' reading experience. After all, a translation is supposed to be *into English*.

The text was not originally written in English, and the reader may be well aware of that, but that does not mean the rules of English no longer apply. As Lederer states:

For the reader to be able to read a text without difficulty, it must follow the norms of the language it is written in (Lederer, 2003: 58)

And:

For a translation to be understood by the person who depends on it, translators must constantly remind themselves that translation is simply a particular type of communication. What happens when we have something to say? We express it intelligibly in forms accepted by all. Sense is individual but forms are social (ibid: 58).

I believe the desire by some translators to foreignize their text is frequently born of their sense or fear that the reader is ‘missing out on something’ (see Mounin, 1994). As mentioned above, this is usually referred to as ‘loss’.

### **A sense of loss**

French has no word for ‘jet-lagged’. If words are all that count, does this mean that French people are unable to communicate the idea behind our word ‘jet-lagged’? No, French is perfectly capable of expressing the idea in other ways. As Lederer explains, people make the mistake of thinking words and their meanings should match up perfectly between languages because of a confusion between ‘correspondence’ and ‘equivalence’.

Words rarely correspond between languages on a permanent one-for-one basis. If they always did, then lexical gaps in our respective vocabularies would leave translators and interpreters out in the cold or forever having to coin new terms. But words are used in context to mean a particular thing—‘actualized’ in Lederer’s terminology—and translation relies on producing an equivalent text rather than word-for-word matches.

Besides, the translation has not really ‘lost’ anything for the simple reason that the target-language never had it in the first place. To lose something means that you previously had it and, presumably, would like it still. English does not have a word-for-word match for the Italian ‘tavola’ but does perfectly well without. If it is not, then, the translation that has suffered a loss, perhaps it is the reader? Maybe, but only if you consider the reader’s life to be one of sterility until he has learnt the 5000 or so languages in the world.

The word ‘loss’ stems, in my view, from translators’ love of language and the fact that they cannot use a word, expression or suchlike from the source-language in the target-language. But like every enthusiast should know, you cannot make everyone love your passion—some people just do not care about foreign languages. The reader will not be aware of the loss as long as the translation is equivalent and fluent. In short, what they don’t know, won’t hurt ’em.

### **Patchy**

The distinction between foreignization and domestication is broadly the same as the French ‘sourcier/cibliste’ distinction. ‘Sourciers’ draw their inspiration from the well of the source-language whereas ‘ciblistes’ set their sights on the target-language. Despite the fact that this distinction is ever-present in translation studies, Lance Hewson (2004) considers it a nonsense; the strategies employed are nowhere fully evident as almost all texts are a ‘patchwork’ of strategies and techniques. This tallies with Eco’s pragmatic belief that these rigid dichotomies should be replaced by a plurality of solutions, decided on a case by case basis (2006: 225).

For Hewson, the real difference lies not in strategy but in whether the translator merely fits in with target-language norms or is *creative*. This entails bringing all the tools at the translator’s disposal to bear on the text, perhaps in so-doing drawing attention to it, and moves away from the idea of producing a mere bland copy.

### **Location, location, location**

If I had to choose between domesticating and foreignizing, I would admit to a natural leaning towards domestication. This led me at first to consider the rather radical step

of removing all the foreignized elements and producing what House (2009) termed a ‘covert translation’ (that is, not explicitly a translation).

This did not seem such an audacious move for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are very few references in the book which actually identify the setting. In fact, it is never made clear that the book is set in France yet alone Paris, although the French reader could be expected to guess as much. A few words do however lead us to this probable conclusion, namely: ‘Xe [arrondissement]’, the use of euros as payment and the ‘boutique SFR’. *Arrondissements* are administrative units, primarily associated with Paris to be sure but also present in Marseilles and Lyons. The mobile phone company ‘SFR’ is one of the main mobile phone providers in France but I could not be sure that it did not exist in another French-speaking country, such as Belgium. A quick google of ‘rue de la Fidelité’ and ‘rue de Paradis’, however, proved that the novel was indeed set in Paris. So was the location integral to the story or just a minor detail? For the author, did it matter?

My second justification for considering fully domesticating the novel was the characters. Only one of them is French (Sartre), the others being Greek (Plato), Prussian (Kant) and Austrian (Freud). Though Freud did stay for a year, none of these characters bar Sartre actually lived in Paris during their lives—for Plato it would have been a particular come-down in his day. Therefore, it did not seem to be overstepping the mark if instead I domesticated the book and moved the setting to London.

My thinking behind this was that the novel takes place almost entirely in Freud’s study. It is described in detail, referring to the statues he had been inspired by, such as his sphinx or the Hindu god Ganesh, and these objects are preserved in the Freud museum in London to this day. It is an exact replica of his study in Vienna, and

was where Freud spent his last days before his death, having fled the *Anschluss* and Nazi persecution.

An alternative, given the use of euros as payment, and the role of Freud's study, was to let Freud go back home to Vienna after all these years. Or perhaps, given the characters' varying backgrounds, I could move his study to any reasonably important European town, such as Strasbourg, Luxemburg or Brussels.

In the end though, I realised that those were decisions that the author could have taken but had not. If the author wanted them in Paris, then why not? It may not have been an ethnocentric decision on his part but simply a reflection of the status the city has had for philosophy since the time of the Enlightenment. Philosophers do, after all, enjoy a higher status in France than in many other countries; Sartre's funeral cortège was witnessed by no less than fifty thousand people in 1980. When was the last time a philosopher got that treatment in England?

### **Pick 'n' mix**

So, in light of the discussion above, I decided that what was most important was to be aware of my ethnocentric urges without 'overcompensating' and thereby creating a bizarre alien experience for the reader. I would adopt neither a wholly foreignizing nor a wholly domesticating approach but a patchwork solution, albeit tending towards the goal of native-speaker fluency.

## Foreignization, Domestication and Text Analysis

Below are examples of times I have maintained a word-for-word correspondence of foreignized words in my translation:

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 12 Coe, iv	de rester le savant en blouse blanche.	to remain the savant in the white coat.
Pépin, 33 Coe, xi	mon cabinet se trouve rue de Paradis, dans le prolongement de la rue de la Fidélité.	my practice is located on the <i>rue de Paradis</i> , running on from the <i>rue de la Fidélité</i> .
Pépin, 33 Coe, xi	sous la torture au nom de la France libre.	were being tortured and killed in the name of <i>la France Libre</i> .
Pépin, 80 Coe, xiv	le cosmos était une maison close	the cosmos was a <i>maison close</i>
Pépin, 236 Coe, xxix	Je ne voulais même pas <i>être</i> , alors comment aurais-je voulu <i>avoir</i> ?	I didn't even want a <i>raison d'être</i> , so why would I want a <i>raison d'avoir</i> ?
Pépin, 314 Coe, xxxiii	devant la mairie du Xe	in front of the town hall in the 10th <i>arrondissement</i>

Though 'savant' is an English word, it still retains its French feel. I could have chosen to use 'expert' or 'professional' or some other equivalent but I felt that a man of Freud's erudition warranted the term.

The street names seemed easy enough for the reader to infer their meanings without too much trouble and I did not want to alter them as they are both real streets in Paris, and because of the significance of the names given the nature of the book.

'La France Libre', as a historical force which has been referred to often without being translated in many books, television programmes, and films did not require translation here either.

As I have dealt with the following two quotes in a previous section, I shall move on to the last example. This is a case of both foreignization and explicitation (which I shall explore further below). 'Xe' means 'dixième' as in 'dixième

arrondissement’ (tenth arrondissement) and the use of this word for the city’s administrative divisions puts the reader squarely in a foreign country.

Below are some examples of domestication:

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 15 Coe, vii	il devait frôler le mètre quatre-vingt-dix	he must have been over 6’2’’
Pépin, 16 Coe, viii	que son torticolis n’avait aucun intérêt, vraiment, aucun intérêt	that a stiff neck was of absolutely no consequence whatsoever.
Pépin, 31 Coe, x	Oui, on peut le voir ainsi	Yes, you could say that
Pépin, 88 Coe, xvi	A l’idée dans le ciel des Idées	To the idea in the realm of Ideas
Pépin, 115 Coe, xviii	Le bonheur par la philo	Happiness Through Philosophy

The first example is an obvious clash between the prevalence of the metric system in the world and Anglophones still limping on with feet and inches. By using the imperial system there is the release of what Venuti terms a ‘domestic remainder’ but it is inevitable given that the vast majority of English speakers would not be sure if 1m90 was tall or not. In this, I am simply attempting to remove barriers to understanding by flattening what Chesterman refers to as the ‘culture bump’ (1997:185).

The second example is a prevalent feature of French which does not carry across to English very often: medical jargon. The French frequently speak as if they were all qualified doctors and nurses but Greek and Latin vocabulary, though common in English, tends not to be used in the medical field by the layman so the change was needed.

The third quote shows a shift in perception between the languages: French using ‘voir’ (see) and English ‘say’. I could have kept the same point of view but it

would have made the remark longer, giving ‘Yes, you could see it like that’ but I do not think the translation would have gained much from this.

The ‘realm of Ideas’ is used to provide a more normal domesticated alternative to the ‘Platonic heavens’ I had had to use earlier for the pun. ‘Philo’ is not a commonplace abbreviation for ‘Philosophy’ in English in my experience so I had to use the whole word.

The following is an exchange between Freud and Sartre:

Page	Original	Translation
<b>Pépin, 81</b> Coe, xv	Où voulez-vous en venir?	Where are you trying to go with this ?
<b>Pépin, 81</b> Coe, xv	c’est à moi que je veux en venir. Mais attendez.	I’m getting round to me. But give me a chance.

A quick translation for the first quote would be ‘What’s your point?’ but that sounded too abrupt in relation to the French so the translation I chose allowed me to link up with the idea of Sartre getting to his point by many a verbal detour. Finally, I chose to domesticate the expression ‘attendez’ to make it sound more normal and more polite than the imperative ‘wait’.

The following table represents examples of domesticated expressions or figures of speech:

Page	Original	Translation
<b>Pépin, 12</b> Coe, v	la troisième gifle sur la joue de l’arrogance humaine.	the third slap across the face of human arrogance.
<b>Pépin, 15</b> Coe, vii	dès la première fois	from the off
<b>Pépin, 15</b> Coe, vii	J’avais réussi à ne rien laisser paraître	I managed to keep a straight face.
<b>Pépin, 17</b> Coe, viii	en me fusillant du regard	his eyes shooting daggers at me
<b>Pépin, 88</b>	Son débit s’accélère	His delivery goes up a gear

<b>Coe, xvi</b>		
<b>Pépin, 88</b> <b>Coe, xvi</b>	<b>et je ne sais quoi encore</b>	<b>and heaven knows what else</b>
<b>Pépin, 185</b> <b>Coe, xxii</b>	<b>le voilà qui se dégonfle</b>	<b>the air goes out of my sails</b>
<b>Pépin, 202</b> <b>Coe, xxv</b>	<b>Mais arrêtez d'assimiler ma loi morale aux dix commandements !</b>	<b>Stop putting my Moral Law and the Ten Commandments in the same bag!</b>

The first excerpt is not an expression *per se* but is a more forceful version of the French. 'A slap' is strong but would be mitigated by 'across the cheek' so I chose instead to make it 'across the face'.

'From the off', 'keep a straight face', 'shooting daggers', 'goes up a gear' and 'in the same bag' are simply expressions which came naturally to the flow of the text. 'Heaven knows what else' seemed an appropriate choice of expression to put into Plato's mouth instead of 'and I don't know what else', adding a little allusion to keep the translation interesting. The same can be said for 'the wind goes out of my sails' instead of, for example, 'the air goes out of my balloon' or 'I get deflated' etc. It seemed an appropriate choice of metaphor as the book relates Plato's voyages across the Mediterranean.

## Explicitation

### Meaning

Explicitation is a very old, very well-documented phenomenon in translation studies.

It entails adding to the target text on the part of the translator to make something explicit which is only implicit in the source text. Below are examples of explicitation:

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 11 Coe, iv	comme avant, à Vienne	just like in the old days back in Vienna
Pépin, 33 Coe, xi	Au moment de composer le code	At the moment I enter the door code
Pépin, 88 Coe, xvi	Son débit s'accélère	His delivery goes up a gear
Pépin, 116 Coe, xix	C'était comme un galop, une hâte angoissante	It was a galloping, hurrying, unnerving sound.
Pépin, 236 Coe, xxviii	un bourgeois	a bourgeois businessman
Pépin, 314 Coe, xxxiii	devant la mairie du Xe	in front of the town hall in the 10th arrondissement

What these examples have in common is that they are all times when, in accordance with Polanyi's idea of personal knowledge, I intuitively felt changes were needed in the translation but I was sometimes hard-pressed to consciously explain why. In general, these are examples of words added to the source text so that it would flow better and provide the reader with any necessary information.

The first excerpt is the most striking. I intuitively felt that 'just like in the old days' and 'back in Vienna' worked better than simply saying 'just like in Vienna'. I realise I have turned four French words into nine English ones but the flow seemed to necessitate such a change.

'Door code' is used instead of simply 'code' to provide the right frame of reference to British readers who, in the main, live in houses and not apartments and are not accustomed to this particular feature of communal living.

‘C’était comme un gallop, une hâte angoissante’ would literally be ‘It was like a gallop, an anguishing haste’ and needed transforming into something the reader could relate to. The result, ‘a galloping, hurrying, unnerving sound’ is longer but more meaningful. It also hopefully conveys the rhythm of the French sentence which seems to match Kant’s feeling of being pursued. The metre is provided by a trio of adjectives, all possessing three syllables and all ending in ‘ing’.

The third and fifth examples were straight-forward additions of ‘delivery’ to explain what was speeding up, and ‘businessman’ to explain what Sartre meant by ‘bourgeois’. The final example shows the line I drew between what cultural knowledge can be expected of the reader and what cannot. ‘Xe’ would probably be meaningless to many readers so I turned it into ‘tenth arrondissement’, whereby I expect the readers to be, at least vaguely, aware or able to infer from the presence of the words ‘town hall’, that an ‘arrondissement’ is an administrative area of Paris.

## Effect

Another reason I felt it was necessary to change something in the target text was to cross what Chesterman (1997: 114) calls the ‘significance threshold’. Put simply, what might seem important enough for French ears, loses its significance without some extra back-up for English ears. This might be simply a matter of lexical choice or the addition of some lexical element—an adverb here, an adjective there and so forth. Again this is very much where Polanyi’s ideas relating to knowledge and feeling come into play.

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 12 Coe, iv	même devant la bile noire	even before the blackest bile
Pépin, 12 Coe, v	J’essaie simplement d’être un bon analyste.	Nowadays, I just try to be a good analyst.

Pépin, 33 Coe, xi	L'Histoire l'avait remercié en lui offrant la gloire	History thanked him by crowning him with glory
Pépin, 33 Coe, xi	et je pense au passé	and I let my mind wander
Pépin, 315 Coe, xxxiii	Je lui ai dit que je le savais	I told him I was well aware of that
Pépin, 315 Coe, xxxiv	je lui ai dit « au revoir » en le regardant dans les yeux, « au revoir monsieur Aristoclès »	I looked him in the eyes as I wished him farewell, 'Goodbye Mr Aristocles'

I made it 'blackest bile' and 'I was well aware of that' instead of a more literal 'black bile' and 'I knew that' to avoid a flat translation. This is also why I chose 'crowning him with glory' instead of 'offering him glory' as I felt it had greater power. I added 'nowadays' which is not present in the original to provide greater contrast with Freud's previous habits. 'I let my mind wander' was a deliberately more figurative sentence to give Freud before he explained Sartre's past in the novel, rather than simply 'I thought about the past'. Finally, I avoided repetition by using 'farewell' and 'goodbye' for the French version's 'Au revoir' which is used twice. 'Farewell' seemed the appropriate word for Plato and Freud's parting.

### Substitution

I decided to change some specific words that I felt did not work or could be improved in the translation.

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 16 Coe, viii	Un mot déplacé	One slip
Pépin, 33 Coe, xi	Entre deux demis, il avait posé les bases de sa philosophie	Between beers, he laid the foundations of his philosophy
Pépin, 33 Coe, xi	devant la vitrine d'une boutique SFR	outside the window of the Orange shop
Pépin, 115 Coe, xviii	ce numéro de <i>L'Express</i>	an old issue of the <i>Express</i>
Pépin, 314 Coe, xxxiii	une boutique de DVD et de cassettes VHS	a video store

‘One slip’ instead of ‘one word out of place’ was a deliberate allusion to the commonly used expression ‘a Freudian slip’ and was another piece of wordplay that was not present in the original.

‘Between beers’ is, after several attempts, my final offering for ‘entre demis’. It sounded too much like a football expression, and hence completely misleading to the reader, to use ‘between halves’. ‘Between half-pints’, aside from being clumsy, left a domestic aftertaste that was at odds with the Parisian setting. ‘Between drinks’ could have worked but made Sartre sound rather like a heavy drinker to my ears so I rejected it and settled for ‘between beers’, despite my misgivings.

I decided to alter ‘la boutique SFR’ to ‘the Orange shop’ as both England and France have them and ‘SFR’ would not be known to most English readers. This had the effect of freeing the reader from wasting time wondering what an ‘SFR shop’ was, or my having to choose between providing a rather pointless footnote or using the generic term ‘a mobile phone shop’. Specific details are frequently what bring a novel to life, as opposed to mere generics, so ‘the Orange shop’ seemed a way of sidestepping the problem.

A similar escape route was provided by my simply omitting the definite article of *L’Express* so that to English eyes ‘Express’ could be either English or French.

I did however choose to use a generic term for the last example. This is because ‘video store’ is more succinct and, in my view nowadays, more applicable than to specify that it was a ‘VHS and DVD store’. After all, who goes in for videotapes now? Some may level the accusation that the author is trying to place the idea of a modest shop in our head by saying that these people still use videos but I think it is more a case of technology becoming obsolete faster than books.

Freud's prompts also needed a little tweaking:

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	Oui...	Mmm?
Pépin, 30 Coe, x	Dites	Yes...?
Pépin, 31 Coe, x	Oui...	Yes...?
Pépin, 116 Coe, xviii	Oui.	Go on

These minor changes were born of my desire to provide Freud with a little more variety in his prompts. I have not created an enormous range as the author obviously must have wanted the prompts to be fairly low-key as a way of encouraging the patient to talk further but the reliance on 'oui...' was needlessly repetitive.

### Omission

Sometimes, some things just do not make the cut:

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 15 Coe, vii	J'ai repris	(none)
Pépin, 58 Coe, xii	Je suis heureux que ça vous fasse sourire...	I'm glad it makes you laugh
Pépin, 58 Coe xii	Il y avait de l'ironie dans votre voix...	There was irony in your voice
Pépin, 58 Coe xii	...socratique j'espère?	Socratic, I hope?

Words denoting speech, such as 'he remarked' or 'he insisted' do exist but are more common and varied in French where English prefers the frequent 'he said' or simply nothing at all, which was my choice in the first example. The other three are instances of ellipsis which are, again, frequent in French but if not used sparingly, quickly become irritating in English—hence their removal.

## The Characters' Register

Register means the variety of speech or writing a person employs for a particular purpose or social setting. Below are my attempts to capture the personalized forms of speech which the author has used to reflect the characters' personalities.

### Freud

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 11 Coe, iv	il faut encore que je résiste aux enthousiasmes	now too must I
Pépin, 11 Coe, iv	aux excitations déplacées	undue excitement
Pépin, 12 Coe, iv	souvent	oftentimes
Pépin, 115 Coe, xviii	Venez, bien cher, venez	Come in my dear fellow

The French text certainly conveys the idea that, though Freud is alive and practising in 2010, he still talks as though he resided in fin-de-siècle Paris. The examples cited above are my attempt to convey this.

Freud's register is one of politeness, erudition and affability without ever really letting his emotions sway him from reason. With this in mind, the examples should speak for themselves but perhaps the first and third require some explanation.

'Now too must I' may seem too old-fashioned, more contemporaneous with Shakespeare than Freud (which would be the wrong register of course) but it is used in Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, which are closer in time to Freud's own.

'Oftentimes' is considered an archaic or Americanized form of 'often' but is actually still present in British discourse. I decided that to carry Freud over the

significance threshold, the rhythm and pedigree of ‘oftentimes’ lent greater weight to the sentence. These are minor details I realise but are precisely the sort of things that can change a text from being interesting to being flat.

## Plato

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 88 Coe, xvi	On m’objectera pareillement	They will likewise object
Pépin, 88 Coe, xvi	l’époque est au culte du corps	modern times pay homage to the cult of the body
Pépin, 88 Coe, xvi	Ces mannequins qui défilent sont allégés de ces formes qui sont la vie même dans sa richesse et sa diversité	Those strutting models have been stripped of the shapes which are life itself in its richness and diversity

Plato’s discourse is literary, figurative, academic (which seems appropriate as he invented it). The first two examples capture Plato in expansive mood, lecturing Freud on the tyranny of Ideas.

The third example is my attempt to reconstruct Plato’s figurative style—here his alliteration—in English. In the original French, there are eight cases of the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in this one sentence. In my version, the alliteration is not ‘pure’ as it utilises not one but four sibilants: the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in ‘strutting’, ‘stripped’, ‘shapes’, ‘its’, ‘richness’, ‘diversity’ and ‘itself’; the voiceless alveolar fricative /z/ in ‘thouse’ and ‘models’; the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ in ‘shupes’; and the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ in ‘which’ and ‘richness’.

Though not pure, the alliterative effect is nevertheless fully conveyed by the twelve sounds to the original’s eight.

## Kant

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	J'avais des sentiments pour une jeune fille à qui je ne déplaisais pas	I had feelings for a young lady who was not displeased with my attentions
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	J'envisageais sérieusement que nous nous mettions en ménage	I was seriously contemplating the prospect of our betrothal
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	enfin elle me plaisait	In brief, I found her pleasing
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	Elle était pauvre, elle aussi	She was likewise poor
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	J'ai donc examiné	Consequently, I considered
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	fait tous les calculs possible	performed all the possible calculations
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	J'ai jugé impossible de me mettre en ménage	I deemed the idea of our matrimony impossible
Pépin, 30 Coe, ix	Ce jour-là, je suis sorti de chez moi à une heure inhabituelle	That day, I left home at an inhabitual hour

All of these examples taken from the same page of the novel reveal Kant still speaking in an 18<sup>th</sup> century literary style. I have attempted to match Kant's style by using similar figures of speech in English prose which were contemporary or near-contemporary with Kant (see Fielding, 1834). At times, I may have 'over'-translated in my desire to render his register effectively. 'Elle était pauvre, elle aussi' I have chosen to render by 'likewise' instead of the more normal 'also'. The same accusation could be levelled at my 'consequently' for 'donc' instead of a commoner 'so' or 'therefore'. I felt the changes added to the effect the author wanted to give and I leave it to the reader to judge whether they become caricature or are—as I hope—effective.

The use of 'inhabitual' instead of 'uncommon' or 'unusual' was deliberate as I believe the author wanted to insist on Kant's breaking with habit in this particular passage of the novel—Kant being famously so rigid in his habits that people could set their clocks by him.

Below are examples from elsewhere in the novel which posed a problem in relation to Kant's register:

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 115 Coe, xviii	Ah... les cons	Imbeciles
Pépin, 116 Coe, xix	cette pression au niveau du thorax s'est enfin relâchée	this weight upon my thorax was at last lifted

A conspicuous word at the best of times, 'cons' juts out like a mountain when put to use by the ever-cordial Kant. The range of possible translations for this word goes from 'cunts' to 'idiots', depending on the person and the intonation. Given that the author had at his disposal the full arsenal of French barbs and yet chose 'cons', it could be argued that he wanted the shock factor. However, this would be to misunderstand the cultural differences that exist between an anglophone and a francophone use of swear words. Swearing in French is much more acceptable even in relatively formal situations than it is in the English-speaking world. Consequently, an old-fashioned insult or something tame could be a good choice, such as 'dandiprat'. I opted instead for 'imbeciles' as it carries across the weight of intellectual disdain.

'Thorax' is used here as a reflection of Kant's register in this particular passage, and stands in contrast to my earlier decision to turn Plato's 'torticollis' into 'a stiff neck'. Both were deliberate choices made to convey the characters' registers at those particular points in the story.

## Sartre

Page	Original	Translation
Pépin, 235 Coe, xxviii	quand je deviens fou de jalousie	every time I get insanely jealous
Pépin, 235 Coe, xxix	nous avons continué à habiter de modestes chambres d'hôtel	we carried on living in modest hotel rooms

Sartre died in 1980 so it should come as no surprise that throughout the novel his style is often more modern than the others'. To ensure equivalence in this respect, in the quotes above I used 'get' instead of 'become' for 'deviens' and the phrasal verb 'carry on' instead of 'continue'.

Though more modern, Sartre can still compete in feelings of self-importance, as seen below:

Page	Original	Translation
<b>Pépin, 80</b> Coe, xiv	<b>J'ai conscience d'avoir apporté à l'histoire de la philosophie quelque chose, qui n'est pas rien justement, de faire partie de ces philosophes à qui l'on doit une toute petite pierre de l'édifice de la pensée universelle</b>	<b>I'm aware that I brought something to the history of philosophy, and this is definitely <i>something</i>, that I'm one of those philosophers society can thank for adding another small brick to the edifice of Western thought</b>
<b>Pépin, 235</b> Coe, xxviii	<b>Moi qui toute ma vie ai combattu la propriété</b>	<b>I who have fought against the idea of property all my life</b>

I struggled with 'pensée universelle' as in other contexts it can have pejorative connotations—the idea of 'uni-thought' which is imposed on the whole world. Sartre clearly means to be positive about his philosophy and I toyed with 'world thought', 'global thought', and 'universal thought' but finally settled for the staid 'Western thought'.

I felt the need to expand the sentence from 'property' to 'the idea of property' as it sounded to my ears as far less forceful, and even ridiculous, for Sartre to 'fight property'. As a proud philosopher, he would be happy fighting ideas.

## Conclusion

I decided to translate *Les philosophes sur le divan* as it combined literature, philosophy and wordplay into one translating challenge. The ideas provided by Lederer on a translator's world knowledge and creative freedom, and Polanyi's notions of personal knowledge and intuition, which I believe are crucial to ensuring effective translations, provided the theoretical underpinning I needed to tackle translating the excerpts.

The author's choice of the French capital as the novel's setting proved a test for me as I strove to maintain a balance between strategies of foreignization and domestication. Paris' historical connections with philosophy's glitterati allowed the occasional use of French calques, preserving some of the novel's foreign feeling, although my overall goal remained fluency. To this end, I made certain translation choices in terms of explicitation, substitution and omission in order to achieve a naturalness of English expression. Choice of vocabulary was also vital in maintaining an equivalence of the characters' register.

Most importantly, I wanted to see how far translation of wordplay was possible. To do so required an appreciation and understanding of the mechanics of wordplay, its various forms and the methods available, which was largely found in the work of Henry. There was partial loss in places in my translation but, in general, I believe the intended effect of the wordplay was maintained, and by introducing embellishments elsewhere, I compensated for this. Overall then, I feel satisfied that it was at least a partial victory.

Translation is a creative process. As we have seen, the words of the original are not the only thing that matter. Other factors—such as context, style, and effect—

play a part. Translators, unlike machines, interpret a text and can choose how to bring out its register and style, subtleties and nuances. At times, parts of a translation will fall short of the original's effect but there are also moments when a translation surpasses the original. As long as translators are willing and able to be imaginative, literature—and wordplay—are challenges to be embraced.

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