Part I. Frames

Chapter 1

Prismatic Agon, Prismatic Harmony: Translation, Literature, Language

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An instance of the agon

In 1845, in London, the poet and translator Elizabeth Barrett (later Barrett Browning) expressed a deep regret: 'the recollection of this sin of mine, has been my nightmare & daymare, too— … I could look in nobody's face, with a "Thou canst not say I did it"—I know, I did it.'[1] What was her sin? She had written, and printed, twelve years earlier, when she was twenty-four years old, a translation of Aeschylus's *Προμηθεύς Δεσμωτής*, *Prometheus Bound*.

Barrett had been 'satisfied—tolerably satisfied' with this work when she accomplished it;[2] so why did it later come to seem so wrong? Answers emerge piecemeal in her correspondence. The translation 'is rather close to the letter … It is stiff & hard—a Prometheus *twice* bound, & to a colder rock than was intended'. Here, it looks like a dogged exercise in literalism, with the 'colder rock' perhaps signifying a leadenly uninspired kind of English. Yet in other ways the translation no longer felt close enough: she rather '*undid*' it than translated it – 'the iambics thrown into blank verse, the lyrics into rhymed octosyllabics and the like—and the whole together, as cold as Caucasus, & as flat as the nearest plain'.[3] As so often in poets' discussions of translations, images from the work translated inform the

understanding of the translational work that has been done;[4] and here they play out in contradictory ways. When she thinks of 'the letter', Barrett sees the translation as a matter of binding tight. Her metaphor includes an echo of Dryden's well-known image of the 'fettered legs' of the literal translator, and blends it with a reference to the characters Strength and Force in Aeschylus's play, who, in the words of the 1833 translation, 'Fix' Prometheus 'to the lofty-browëd rocks, by links / Infrangible of adamantine chains'.[5] Yet when her thoughts turn to the verse, a contrary web of association forms. Now, her handiwork seems too sloppy, undone, 'thrown' together, an unravelling of the source-text into something 'flat'. The translation is still 'cold', but now it seems that Prometheus himself has slipped his fetters and disappeared from the landscape of the work, leaving only the 'Caucasus' mountains to which he had been chained, and the 'plain' that might be seen from them. Altogether, this combination of verbal clinginess and formal latitude now seemed to Barrett a failure of literary re-animation: 'it is not *scholastically* that I am ashamed of it … but poetically'.[6]

So Elizabeth Barrett set about the work of translation all over again. The relationship between the 1833 and 1850 versions has been traced by Yopie Prins, together with the wider significance of *Prometheus Bound* in Barrett's poetry and biography. The second version embodies Barrett's later confidence as an established poet and her altered view of the importance of classical scholarship. It cannot simply be called more 'free' than the earlier version; rather, it was more in the vein of her own mature style (a style which her reading of Aeschylus had helped to form). It was especially important to her because Prometheus had become a widely suggestive figure for her sense of her work and life, including the bonds of her relationship with Robert Browning.[7] Yet none of this quite explains the ferocity of her attitude towards the earlier translation, a stance which is the more surprising because her own preface to her 1833 *Prometheus* had presented a strikingly relaxed account of the variousness of translations and their divergences from their originals.

Both ‘a literal version’ and ‘a transfusion of poetical spirit’ – she had argued – have their place; and ever more, variously idiosyncratic versions are to be expected: ‘it is in the nature of the human mind to communicate its own character to whatever substance it conveys’ – she had said; and therefore ‘we do not blame Pope and Cowper for not having faithfully represented Homer: we do not blame Pope and Cowper for being Pope and Cowper’. She reaches for a visual metaphor – almost but not quite a prism – to illustrate this variety which is blameless because inevitable: ‘a mirror may be held in different lights by different hands; and, according to the position of those hands, will the light fall’. The image recognises a twofold plurality: the source text in itself projects, not one consistent light, but many different ones; and the various translators each choose one of those lights and refract it in a different way. This diversity is, not only blameless, and not only inevitable: it is to be welcomed: ‘it is … desirable that the same compositions should be conveyed by different minds’. Now the visual comparison alters: since people inevitably ‘wear various-coloured spectacles’ none of us can escape the colour of our own individuality. But we can come to understand and respect the different tints experienced and embodied by others: ‘if Potter show us Aeschylus through green spectacles, and another translator, though in a very inferior manner, show us Aeschylus through yellow ones, it will become clear to the English reader, that green and yellow are not inherent properties of the Greek poet.’[8] The English refractions cannot make visible the different colour of the Greek; but they do enable it to be intuited.

This is a compelling theorisation of textual difference; indeed, almost of *différance*. There is no transfer of unchanged meaning, or unchanged anything, from Aeschylus’s Greek to the various Englishes of his translators. There are only significant disparities which readers can probe and gauge. Here, the prismatic processes of translation are recognised and welcomed: the variety they create is experienced as a kind of harmony. Yet this radical and compelling theorisation of the field of translation has little purchase on Barrett’s later feelings

about her own work. Her first *Prometheus* does not appear to her as one of the many possible reflected lights, or one colour in the inevitable and desirable spectrum. Instead it strikes her as a failure, a sin. When she is thinking about her own practice a second idea of translation supervenes, one in which it is possible to get, or not, what matters in the source; to do or fail to do it justice. Now, the prism of translation is felt as agon: the second version must extinguish the first one, 'replace' it (as the advertisement for its publication announced)[9] and prevent it from being read. One reason for this is Barrett's strong sense of translation as a mode of authorship in which her own identity is manifest. The first translation no longer feels like a fit representative of her, of the mature writer she has become: she does not recognise it as a 'Barrett's Aeschylus' to stand with Pope's or Cowper's Homer. The later version, by contrast, represents 'the sincerest application of my mature mind'; in it, she does her 'duty' by Aeschylus, 'not indeed according to his claims, but in proportion to my faculty'.[10] But that is not the whole of the matter, for what is it about the real, mature Barrett that was missing in the earlier version? Her ability to rise to the poetical challenge of Aeschylus, to capture at least something of his poetical warmth, fluidity and contours. The shadow of translation as the endeavour to achieve sameness has fallen across the celebration of translation as difference. Implicitly, the metaphor of translation as channel has materialised to haunt her thoughts, to turn difference into failure, and variety into a sin.

Elizabeth Barrett's long involvement with Aeschylus is significant in many ways. It reveals the centrality of translation to her creative practice: as with so many authors of the texts that make up 'English Literature', the language-world that she inhabited was not only English but plurilingual, and her writing life was laced with continual translation, not only from Greek but also from Latin, Italian, German and French. As Prins has recounted, her *Prometheus(es)* inaugurated a gendered imaginative community of readers and translators, with later writers such as Augusta Webster and Anna Swanwick producing their own

versions of *Prometheus Unbound* in dialogue with hers.[11] And Barrett's work with Aeschylus also shows with striking vividness the instability of a prismatic view of translation, for the mode of translational variety which she welcomes in her 1833 Preface is built on a rejection of translational variety of other kinds. The difference between translations made by different people is inevitable because everyone is different. But, within a career, each translator must strive to achieve the best equivalent they can, given their idioms and resources: indeed, it is each translator's striving to do the best they can which generates the variety celebrated in the Preface. The two views are in tension: why should the criticism that Barrett applies to her own translations not extend to translations by other people? And why, on the other hand, should her tolerance of variety in the 1833 Preface not extend to the various moments of her own self-realisation through writing? As we will see, this is not the sort of tension that can be dissolved by being thought about. A commitment to the model of translation as prism will always be haunted by the idea of translation as channel; an experience of the prism as harmony is always liable to flip over into an experience of the prism as agon. Any text that offers itself as a translation, or is treated as one, can fall prey to the same oscillation. Translation is defined by this radical instability.

Theorisation of the Prism and the Channel

The contradiction lived through by Elizabeth Barrett is latent in experiences and discussions of translation in many places and at many times. Readers know that translations are different from their sources, that no word of any translation has actually been written by the author whose name is usually attached to the book. Yet we still all merrily go on saying 'yes, I've read Ferrante' when what we mean is that we have read the translation by Ann Goldstein; or

present ourselves as quoting Derrida even though the words we type are English. Translators – no-one more so – are sharply aware of the shifts of tone, meaning, sound and rhythm introduced by every word they write; and yet they still – how could they not? – aim to capture something of their source texts and bring it over. Authors – who better? – understand the particularity of what they have composed – and yet still they hope (how could they not) that something will get across through translation to readers in other tongues.

This paradox – I contend – is fundamental to translation. It is what translation is. Translation is obviously 'prismatic', as we assert in the title of this volume: obviously a matter of endlessly varying proliferation and change. And yet it is also obviously a 'channel', a matter of bringing something across between different texts or people. We might try to resolve this contradiction by asserting that in fact translations are merely similar to their source texts, never 'equivalents'. Variations of this idea have been developed by Umberto Eco, Clive Scott and Karen Emmerich, among others.[12] Yet, as we began to see in the Introduction, this move does not do away with the paradox, for similarity or reiteration can always be broken down into a matter of sameness in some respects and difference in others: if we say that apples are similar to pears we might mean that they are the same in that both are fruit and different because they have distinct shapes and tastes (etc). In many domains of similarity, the tessellation of what people call sameness and what we call difference is relatively easy to manage. In print-runs of books, for example, we tend to think that the words are the same even though the paper and ink are not: different individual copies are all taken to embody the same work. It is possible for even this apparently straightforward view to be ambushed by a protestation of difference (perhaps any claim to sameness shares some such vulnerability): one can argue that no two printed copies of a book ever really embody *the same work* because they will always exhibit some material difference (more so in the early days of printing) as well as being read by different people in different ways.[13] But

conflict is especially liable to erupt in the case of translation – so much so that it becomes constitutive of the form. Translations are in many respects different from their sources; they are also in many respects the same; and what counts as 'sameness' and 'difference' is subject to perpetual contestation.

The view of translation which I am proposing builds on classic arguments about language in general. In 'The Conduit Metaphor: A Case of Frame Conflict in our Language about Language' (1979),[14] Michael J. Reddy drew attention to the metaphor of the conduit, or channel, which pervades much of the language for describing language in English (and related languages such as French, Italian and German). Meaning is 'conveyed', 'taken', or 'grasped'; and even the ambiguity of words like 'poem', or 'novel', as pointing both to the words on the page and to the ideational and emotional entity they signify, implies the conduit metaphor: the poem in the second sense is assumed to be somehow 'in' the words, or got at 'through' them. Reddy argues that the 'conduit' picture of language is mistaken, and develops an alternative metaphorical model to replace it. Let's imagine – he suggests – that individuals inhabit separate boxes with different features: they can convey picture-messages to one another but, since no-one has direct access to the world occupied by anyone else, making sense of the messages involves a lot of inference and guess-work. On this model, linguistic interaction is less a matter of transferring meaning, and more a matter of inventing it.

Reddy's conduit and toolmakers' paradigms are continuous with, respectively, the 'channel' and 'prismatic' views of translation; and, just like the theorists who argue that translation should be seen as similarity rather than transfer, Reddy recommends the adoption of his 'toolmakers' paradigm' as the better picture of how language works. But he also sees that the conduit metaphor will be difficult, if not impossible to eradicate: 'the logic of the framework runs like threads in many directions through the syntactic and semantic fabric of

our speech habits'.[15] In my view, the 'toolmaking' and 'conduit' pictures of language-use have to be allowed to co-exist in thinking about language, just like the 'channel' and 'prismatic' views of translation: the question is how the relationship between them is negotiated. There are all sorts of utterances, from 'yes' or 'get out!' to 'I love you' or 'isn't the sunset beautiful?' that might, in many circumstances, more plausibly be described as communicating meaning than enabling it to be constructed. Of course, any of these phrases might also turn out to suggest non-obvious meanings that have to be built up by the listener: 'yes' might mean 'no'; 'get out!' might mean 'I am really hurt'; 'I love you' might mean a very wide range of things, etc.. So there are many circumstances in which the toolmakers' paradigm would be the better picture. But the very fact that we are able to see this entails that there are also circumstances in which it would not. The oscillation between the pictures goes deep, not only into speech habits, but into people's ideas and feelings about how we relate to each other. Not only a theory of language but many everyday practices of human interaction would be different if speakers of English, French, Italian and other related tongues decided that their languages never, ever allowed them to *pensarla allo stesso modo*, *saisir une idée*, or feel at one. We need to recognise both the possibility of something that counts as 'communication' and the need to probe and criticise the terms on which it can be thought to have occurred.

Something like this contradictory movement was painstakingly traced and enacted in the work of Jacques Derrida. In *De la grammatologie*, the 'effaced and respectful doubling of commentary', 'le redoublement effacé et respectueux du commentaire', aims to grasp the 'conscious, voluntary, intentional' – 'conscient, volontaire, intentionnel' – relationship to history that a writer has constructed through language.[16] In later work, this explanation was revised: 'the moment of what I called, perhaps clumsily, "doubling commentary" does not suppose the self-identity of "meaning", but a relative stability of the dominant interpretation

(including the auto-interpretation) of the text being commented upon.'[17] In both definitions, the process of doubling commentary approximates to the 'conduit' metaphor of language: commentators efface their own impulses in order to receive an interpretation that has already been established. This endeavour to receive the text then opens onto a second, more energetic practice of interpretation which (in Simon Critchley's summary) opens the text's 'intended meaning, its *vouloir-dire,* onto an alterity which goes against what the text wants to say or mean'.[18] This deconstructive reading does not exactly tally with Michael Reddy's 'toolmaker's paradigm', but it shares with it a view of interpretation as making out of a text something other than anything that might be thought to be simply 'in' it.

In Derrida's later essay 'Survivre', translated as 'Living On / Border Lines', the double movement of reading extends into the reading-and-rewriting across languages that is translation:

> The line that I seek to recognize within translatability, between two translations, one governed by the classical model of transportable univocality or of formalizable polysemia, and the other, which goes over into dissemination – this line also passes between the critical and the deconstructive.[19]

> La ligne que je tente de reconnaître à l'intérieur de la traductibilité, entre deux traductions, l'une, réglée sur le modèle classique de l'univocité transportable ou de la polysémie formalisable, et l'autre qui déborde vers la dissémination, cette ligne passe aussi entre le *critique* et le *déconstructif.*[20]

The line passes 'between' in two senses: it separates, just as a deconstructive reading is something different from the effaced doubling of commentary; and it joins, just as the

respectful doubling of commentary will lead on into a deconstructive reading if only it is pushed beyond the border of consensus, if it 'déborde' (overflows) into dissemination. The second movement cannot exist without the first; and the issue I want to probe, and question, is the relationship between them. Repetition introduces difference: as the opening lines of 'Survivre' assert, to say the same thing 'autrement', or 'in other words', is never only to say the same thing again but always also to say something new. It is no different if you simply repeat the same words (as I write, politics offers a perfect, agonizing example: 'Brexit Means Brexit'). So sameness opens onto difference. The point I want to add is that difference can, at any moment, switch around and be claimed as sameness. We can see this happening in Paul de Man's critique (in *Blindness and Insight*) of Derrida's critique (in *De la grammatologie*) of Rousseau. Derrida painstakingly deconstructs Rousseau's text, making meanings from it which – he thinks – are at odds with the 'conscious, voluntary, intentional' significance revealed by the doubling of commentary. Yet, as it seems to de Man, the meanings elucidated by Derrida have been readily visible all along, with no reason to think that they were unintended: 'Rousseau's text has no blind spots … there is no need to deconstruct Rousseau'.[21] I do not wish to claim that one or the other view is right, merely to observe the switchback: what seems to Derrida a reading that goes against the text's *vouloir dire* strikes de Man as merely describing it.

If we turn back to translation between languages (or rather to the kind of translation which, as we have seen in the introduction, both collaborates in and contests the separation of languages), instances corresponding to the first shift, from commentary to dissemination, are easy to find. They occur whenever a translation – or part of it – that has been felt to stand as an equivalent to its source is then felt not to (as when Elizabeth Barrett so comprehensively changed her view of her 1833 *Prometheus*); or whenever a translation is criticised by a reviewer or reader for some sort of failure or misunderstanding; or whenever a translational

text is felt to be not really a translation but something freer such as an 'imitation' or 'version'. However, the opposite movement, in which a translational text shifts from being seen as an instance of dissemination to being taken as a vehicle of transfer, is also possible: prominent instances include parts of Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, at first decried by many classicists for inventing innuendoes that could not possibly have been in the Latin, only later to be accepted as having discovered something after all; or Robert Browning's *Agamemnon of Aeschylus*, widely ridiculed as unreadable when it appeared – but a century later adopted by Tony Harrison, when he was working on his celebrated theatre version of the *Oresteia*, as the key to creating hearable Aeschylean verse in English.[22]

The feeling of something 'getting through' in translation need not entail a naïve belief in the 'self-identity of "meaning"' any more than does Derrida's 'doubling commentary'. The meaning or rhythm or tone that are felt as 'coming through' are of course co-created by the recipient, as we saw in the Introduction: this is true of any reading of any text, and is no less true of the reading of translations. The fact that reading and hearing are active processes does not mean that nothing is ever read or heard. Charles Martindale, a theorist of translation who works in the field defined as 'Classical Reception' and who therefore is not as well known as he might be in Translation Studies and Comparative Literature, has given a subtle account of the difficulties for description which are generated by the continuities between translation and reading:

> Translations determine what counts as being 'there' in the first place, and good translations thus unlock for us compelling (re)readings which we could not get in any other way. 'Tone', for example, becomes … not something read off but something constructed; indeed, … the difference between 'reading off' and 'reading in' is dissolved. Our conception of 'Ovid' is mediated through translations like those of

> Dryden which have helped define what 'Ovid' is for us. We read in and through translations, though these always imply the possibility of other translations, other readings.[23]

The argument has obvious strength for texts in classical languages, which can only be learnt via those exploded and re-organised translations known as dictionaries and grammar books. It is in fact no less true for all texts, from any chronological moment, and in any location on the global continuum of language variety. As soon as you encounter the source you begin to read, drawing on your learnt knowledge of its language (whether you tend to think of that as your 'own' or as 'foreign') – and therefore you begin to translate. Your idea of 'the source' is (just like Derrida's 'doubling commentary') already an interpretation, so there can be no distinction between 'reading off' and 'reading in'. It follows that there can be no theory of translation as introducing inevitable differences from 'the source' since any conception of the source is already a translation. Our contrasting metaphorical networks – on the one hand the prism and reiterative difference, on the other the channel, transfer and equivalence – are both equally simplifications of a process which (as Douglas Robinson has argued) cannot adequately be known or represented. As Robinson puts it, source language and target language 'inhabit the translator's body in a great swirling confusion', until something happens that involves 'somehow making the leap, making the blind stab at understanding or reformulating'.[24]

Why, then, bother with our contrasting metaphorical networks at all? Because they are the conceptual and linguistic resources that are available in the environment of English and overlapping languages. They are the terms through which translators and readers of translations have done and still do experience their behaviour, and therefore through which it happens. Endeavouring to understand that behaviour better entails, not asserting the

superiority of one set of terms over the other, nor jettisoning them both, but tracing and using them with an alertness to their ramifications and shortcomings. Translation involves a continual oscillation between the conviction that something has been found, clinched and brought across, and the reconfiguration of those acts as deviation, addition or change. That prismatic moment can be felt as agon (with Barrett Browning), failure, betrayal, growth or creativity; or it can swing round to seem like a channel once more. As we will see, attention to these varying configurations, and the feelings attached to them, offers a good way of tracing the work of translators, and mapping the cultures of translation which they at once inhabit and create.

An instance of oscillation: John Dryden

In the discipline of Translation Studies, Dryden tends to appear as a significant but simplified figure: a practioner of 'fluent' and 'domesticating' translation strategies, and the author of a distinction between three 'types' of translation – metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation – which still has some influence on how the translation of poetry is understood.[25] Yet, as scholars working in the disciplines of English Studies and Classical Reception have shown, Dryden's involvement with translation across the four decades of his career, encompassing versions of Ovid, Horace, Juvenal, Lucretius, Homer, Theocritus, Plutarch and others, and culminating in *The Works of Virgil in English*, was more restless and complex than this. Paul Hammond has traced how Dryden's translations, and also his own poems, 'activate the half-hidden Latin roots of the language', so that 'Latin continually shadows the English', and 'the time and space of translation' become 'a third field, a synthesis of Roman and English worlds'.[26] Julie Candler Hayes has argued that, with his awareness of the 'feedback loops'

between translation and originality, Dryden develops a '"translational," rather than authorial, self-consciousness, overcoming the dichotomy between translators as abject and dependent and authors as independent and original'.[27] David Hopkins has pointed to the dynamic relationship between his theory and practice, so that 'Dryden's writings on translation are best considered not as a fixed body of theory or doctrine, but as the working notes of a practitioner … continually modified, enriched, and transformed.'[28] In my own work, I have traced Dryden's vexed relationship to the idea that translation necessarily interprets: he translates in order to 'open' the subtleties of Virgil's verse, but by clarifying them he necessarily destroys them, and the resulting drama plays out with particular vividness when actions of opening or interpreting are portrayed in the scenes being translated.[29] Here, my aim is to explore how far Dryden's complex translational activity can be captured by a prismatic view of translation; and, in so doing, to put his writing in dialogue with the theoretical issues addressed by the volume as a whole. Perhaps this pillar of the translation canon is more prismatic than he has often been made to seem.

Dryden's description of his hope for his *Aeneis*, 'to make *Virgil* speak such *English*, as he wou'd himself have spoken, if he had been born in *England*, and in this present age', is in itself fraught with complexities.[30] What becomes of Dryden's own writing voice in this work of making another writer 'speak'? How far does the authorial figure of Virgil remain himself when he is re-made in another language? The intricacies proliferate when we realise that there are traces of other authors in Dryden's utterance, and echoes of other speech. Dryden points to 'the *French* translator', Jean Regnault de Segrais, whose translation influenced his, and to whose 'Preface' he pays repeated tribute in his 'Dedication', though he does not quote the exact words: 'j'ay voulu donner l'Eneïde en François, comme j'ay conceu qu'il l'eust donnèe luy-mesme, s'il fust né sujet de nostre glorieux Monarque' ('I have endeavoured to give the Aeneid in French, as I conceive he would have given it himself, if he

had been born a subject of our glorious Monarch').[31] Dryden's concealed echo-and-riposte to Segrais connects with assertions, elsewhere in the 'Dedication', of the value of being English rather than French – as, for instance, when he defends the political interpretations which he draws from Virgil's text: 'I shall continue still to speak my Thoughts like a free-born Subject as I am; though such things, perhaps, as no *Dutch* Commentator cou'd, and I am sure no *French*-man durst.'[32] Freedom of speech, already established as part of the ideology of Englishness, licences Dryden's freedom in interpreting, and gives a particular inflection to his freedom as a translator. Making Virgil 'speak … English' will of course require the translator's usual freedom of departing from the words for the sake of sense or style; but it will also entail the uttering of latent political suggestions in a public sphere that was comparatively free. Segrais's words, in turn, echo those of Sir John Denham, the Royalist poet and translator, whose version from *Aeneid* II, *The Destruction of Troy* (1656) was also an important stimulus to Dryden in both kinds of freedom. Denham too resounds in Dryden's famous phrase: 'If *Virgil* must needs speak English' – Denham had written in his own 'Preface' – 'it were fit he should speak not only as a man of this Nation, but as a man of this age.'[33]

Dryden's famous phrase is, then, a particularly charged instance of agnation, that aspect of language which – as we saw in the Introduction – surrounds any utterance with the alternatives from which it has been selected. Dryden's statement is shadowed (to recall Christian Matthiessen's word) by other statements which, in this case, do not lie latent in the language but have in fact been made by other writers. It differentiates itself from them by being distinct, and also connects itself to them by being similar. The relationship between Dryden's statement and the others is not stable like the structure of a crystal, but rather dynamic, even wobbly, as we can see if we notice another concatenation of echoes. Back in 1680, in the 'Preface' to the group translation *Ovid's Epistles*, Dryden had been more critical

of the idea of making people speak in the language of a time and country not their own. Ovid himself was faulted for doing this in the *Heroides*: 'perhaps he has Romanized his Grecian dames too much, and made them speak sometimes as if they had been born in the city of Rome, and under the empire of Augustus'.[34] Denham's mission statement was equated with Abraham Cowley's idea of 'imitation': 'that is, not to translate his words, or to be confined to his sense, but only to set him as a pattern, and to write as he supposes that author would have done, had he lived in our age and in our country'. This, Dryden firmly opined, was 'the greatest wrong which can be done to the memory and reputation of the dead'.[35] This disparity between the earlier and later texts shows Dryden's practice and theory evolving, as Hopkins suggests: the writer of the 1697 Dedication is a more confident poet-translator than that of the 1680 Preface, with more developed tactics for remaking verse in imitation of a style. All the same, something of the earlier opinion persists, and the venom which, in 1680, had been aimed at Denham and Cowley is, in 1697 redirected at himself: 'I have done great Wrong to *Virgil* in the whole Translation.'[36]

It is the same switchback that we observed in Elizabeth Barrett Browning. A work of translation to which Dryden had been committed becomes a source of shame to him. Here, though, the turn to self-criticism happens continually: the compulsion to translate is inseparable from regret at having translated, and especially in this particular case. In 1685, Dryden had announced: 'methinks I come like a malefactor to make a speech upon the gallows, and to warn all other poets by my sad example from the sacrilege of translating Virgil' – yet that was near the start of his own long translational involvement with the *Aeneid*.[37]

The 1680 Preface also includes Dryden's – equally famous – distinction between metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation. In our terms, this is an attempt to subjugate the prismatic deviances of translation to a structure which follows the metaphor of the channel.

The three modes are channels for different things: the first, for ‘words’ and ‘lines’; the second, for ‘the author’ and ‘his sense’; the third, for ‘only some general hints’. As I showed in *The Poetry of Translation*, this structure begins to disintegrate in the moment of being uttered, and its relationship to Dryden’s practice is left in question. ‘I am ready to acknowledge that I have transgressed the rules that I have given’, Dryden wrote at the end of the Preface; and the sense of misfit between prescription and practice continues, two decades later, in the Virgil translation which operates, he says ‘betwixt Metaphrase and Paraphrase’. A reader’s understanding might want to to know what it is getting: ‘is this paraphrase? Is this metaphrase? What sort of equivalence is being claimed?’ – but the translating imagination is always wriggling out of one or the other definition as it responds to different aspects of the source and remakes them in English: sometimes a particular form of words might ask to be respected; sometimes a richly ambiguous meaning might ask to be opened out. As the translational writing continually escapes the available definitions, it repeatedly causes dissatisfaction: this line might seem to echo the shape of the words but lose some nuance of their meaning; this line might seem to open their sense while neglecting some aspect of their form.

As we have seen, Barrett Browning had a theoretical appreciation of the variety of actual and possible translations, the prismatic spray of colours which give an idea of the different tonality of the source by their multiple divergences from it; but this way of thinking did not extend to her own work, which she experienced as an endeavour to match up to Aeschylus and do him justice. Dryden too has a vivid awareness of other translations that have been and could be done; but he takes comfort from seeing his own work in their company. In 1685, he may have felt like a malefactor on the gallows when he compared himself to Virgil: it seemed to him that he had translated one episode too literally, and another not literally enough. But when he looked around him at the prismatic company of

other translators, he cheered up: ‘all that I can promise for myself is only that I have done both better than Ogilby, and perhaps as well as Caro’ (Ogilby had translated Virgil into English in 1649; Annibale Caro the *Aeneid* into Italian in 1581).[38] Throughout his career, Dryden lived translation as a communal activity. The volumes which he edited, and to which he contributed, in 1680 (*Ovid’s Epistles*), 1684 (*Miscellany Poems*) and 1685 (*Sylvae*) were all anthologies of work by multiple translators, done in collaboration with the young publisher Jacob Tonson; Dryden participated in discussions of translation as a member of the Earl of Roscommon’s informal ‘Academy’ and continued those conversations into his prefaces and other writings; and, above all, he wrote surrounded by other written texts. William Frost, the modern scholarly editor of Dryden’s *Virgil*, notes that he ‘worked from a library full of Latin editions of Virgil’s works and of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Virgil translations into English, French and Italian’.[39] Elements of Dryden’s practice and theory which correspond to the ‘channel’ metaphor – such as making Virgil ‘speak’ – need to be cross-hatched with this awareness of the prismatic plurality of voices among which he worked, and within which his writing found its place. He was not only translating a text but translating among texts; this affects how his translations should be thought about and read.

One of the things that Dryden most felt himself to be adding to exisiting translations and readings of the *Aeneid* was an appreciation of what he called Virgil’s ‘address’. That is, meanings which are not stated in the writing but which emerge from it when you enter imaginatively into the drama of a scene or the detail of its composition: a rough modern equivalent would be ‘illocutionary force’ (in the terms of speech act theory). Here, for example, Dryden compares Aeneas’s reaction to the loss of his wife Creusa in the fall of Troy to the fuss made by Achilles when his concubine Briseis was taken from him, and sees Virgil’s ‘address’ in the fact that Aeneas tells his story to Dido, who of course was on the point of falling catastrophically in love with him:

> *Aeneas* took a Nobler Course; for having secur'd his Father and his Son, he repeated all his former Dangers to have found his Wife, if she had been above ground. And here your Lordship may observe the Address of *Virgil*; it was not for nothing that this Passage was related with all these tender Circumstances. *Aeneas* told it; *Dido* heard it: That he had been so affectionate a Husband, was no ill Argument to the coming Dowager, that he might prove as kind to her. *Virgil* has a thousand secret beauties, though I have not leisure to remark them.[40]

The apparent casualness of 'though I have not leisure to remark them' is characteristic of Dryden's critical style. The phrase draws attention to the limitations of criticism's resources when faced with poetry as nuanced as Virgil's. It opens an imaginative space in which the poetry can exist as itself, away from the critical terms which, both despite and because of their limitations, help it to be seen for what it is.

As he translates the episode in which Aeneas relates the repetition of all his dangers, Dryden moves sometimes word by word and line by line with the Latin, and sometimes takes more room to amplify Virgil's 'Address'. Equally, he sometimes writes in unison with previous translators – especially with Lauderdale, who had lent him his version in manscript – and sometimes expands on meanings which seem to him to have been missed. He begins the episode in chorus. Here is Lauderdale's version:

> "Alas, I lost *Creusa*, hard to tell,
> "If by her cruel Destiny she fell,
> Or if to Toils unus'd, with Cares oppress'd,
> And weary grown she laid her down to rest,

> Or if she miss'd her way; but since that Hour
> (Whate'er befel) I ne'er beheld her more.[41]

And here is Dryden's:

> Alas! I lost *Creusa*: hard to tell
> If by her fatal Destiny she fell,
> Or weary sate, or wander'd with affright;
> But she was lost forever to my sight.[42]

Both may have been nudged towards the directness of 'Alas! I lost Creusa' by dissatisfaction with Ogilby's earlier attempt:

> Ah, by sad Fate, I my Creusa lost[43]

Ogilby is closer to the words of Virgil's Latin:

> Heu! misero coniunx fatóne erepta Creüsa.[44]

('misero … fató' is 'by sad fate'; 'erepta Creusa' means 'was snatched Creusa'). But then Virgil's was not the only Latin that Lauderdale and Dryden had in front of them. The paraphrase in Ruaeus's edition introduces the words 'dubium est', ('it is uncertain', 'it is hard to tell'), which no doubt helped both of them to structure their English sentences in the way they do.[45] At this point the French of Segrais ('Creüse … sa disgrace est encore incertaine' and the Italian of Caro ('Restai (misero me) senza la mia / Diletta moglie, in dubio') join in

the translational harmonies only as outliers, though Caro too seems to have found inspiration in Ruaeus's 'dubium est'.[46]

Observing Dryden's text among the other translations, we can see how his idea of what the *Aeneid* could be in English, of what needed doing to give it a better representation, comes into being in collaboration with them. First he adopts an already achieved solution (Alas, I lost *Creusa*…); but then, in the ensuing lines, he sees a need for tighter verse than Lauderdale had written in order to imitate those 'sober retrenchments of his Sense', that reserve in the midst of emotion, which so impressed him in Virgil's style.[47] Yet, of course, maintaining that sobriety requires him not to open out the implications of Virgil's 'Address', and Dryden soon becomes frustrated at this restraint. Virgil writes two further compact lines of grief:

> Quem non incusavi amens hominumque Deorumque?
> Aut quid in eversa vidi crudelius urbe?
> (Out of my mind, what man or god did I not blame? Or what more cruel than that did I see in the fallen city?)[48]

Here, Ogilby, Segrais and Lauderdale all keep quite close to the Latin, but Caro feels the need for something more, adding 'miserando' ('grievous') to 'cruel' and inserting two more lines of expostulation.[49] Dryden follows him:

> This was the fatal Blow, that pain'd me more
> Then all I felt from ruin'd *Troy* before.
> Stung with my Loss, and raving with Despair,
> Abandoning my now forgotten Care,

Of Counsel, Comfort, and of Hope bereft,
My Sire, my Son, my Country Gods, I left.[50]

'Stung', 'raving' and 'abandoning' are all in the same vein as Caro; what is new is the mention of 'Counsel', 'Comfort' and 'Hope'. These words seem designed to prompt us to remember that Aeneas is telling this story to Dido, i.e. to someone who might offer him all those things. They alert us to 'the Address of Virgil', since – as Dryden had said in the 'Dedication' – 'it was not for nothing that this Passage was related with all these tender Circumstances'.

A little further on, Dryden effects another significant deviation from the spectrum of earlier translations. Here is Lauderdale:

Where'er I pass I on *Creusa* call,
I fill with Cries the Houses, Streets; through all
In vain *Creusa* sadly I proclaim,
A thousand times repeat the dear lov'd Name:
Lamenting thus I roam through every Street,
At length *Creusa*'s airy Shadow meet,
'Far bigger than the Life; …[51]

Caro and Segrais, too, had both made Aeneas repeat Creusa's name a thousand times: 'Mille volte iterai l'amato nome'; 'Ah!, Creüse, ay-je dit, & redit mille fois'.[52] Dryden chooses to rely on showing rather than stating the repetition; and the repetition is itself repeated:

> Then, with ungovern'd Madness, I proclaim,
> Through all the silent Streets, *Creusa*'s Name.
> *Creusa* still I call: At length she hears;
> And suddain, through the Shades of Night appears:
> Appears, no more *Creusa*, nor my Wife:
> But a pale Spectre, larger than the Life.[53]

'Creusa … Creusa' calls up 'appears: / Appears'. In this, Dryden is responding to the repetitious texture of the Latin, where Aeneas calls 'iterumque iterumque' ('again and again'), and the sound of 'que' ('and') echoes in words on either side, 'quaerenti' ('seeking) and 'nequicquam' (in vain), and even the phrase 'sine fine' ('without end') is turned into a repetition by early modern typography, which prints it almost indistinguishably from 'fine fine'.[54]

In this, Dryden might be thought of – and might have thought of himself – as channeling Virgil's style: in the 'Dedication' he presents himself as 'the first *Englishman*, perhaps, who made it his design to copy him in his Numbers, his choice of Words, and his placing them for the sweetness of the sound'.[55] Yet the endeavour to channel, to repeat Virgil's repetitions, of course introduces difference; and the lodging of the words within the scene seems to recognise and reflect upon this fact. Repeated, 'Creusa' shifts from being the name of a person who might be recovered to being the name of someone who has been lost: Creusa is no more Creusa. 'Appears' undergoes the same change: at first, it seems to announce the appearance of a person; but it turns out to announce the appearance of an appearance – a 'Spectre' or (as we say) an apparition. The echoic scene is charged with other echoes still, of Dryden's own ambitions as a translator. He puts all his energies into conjuring up a hearable voice for Aeneas, as Aeneas puts all his energies into conjuring up Creusa; and

Aeneas (and Dryden) do manage to make her speak as if she were alive; only she is not, and when her speech ends she vanishes like an empty dream or blast of wind. At this, other potential metaphors of translation supervene. Creusa has trusted her 'common Issue' with Aeneas to his care (ie their child Ascanius); and he returns to where he has left his family, finding the group swelled with 'Men, and Matrons mix'd', 'young and old'. Aeneas yields 'to Fate', takes his aged father on his back, and sets off to fulfil Creusa's prophecy, to follow 'long wandring Ways' through 'many painful years' until they will be cast 'on *Latium*'s happy shore' where '*Fortune* shall the *Trojan* Line restore'.[56] In the 'Dedication', Dryden had figured himself in terms derived from this episode, as having 'the weight of a whole Author on my shoulders': Paul Davis has outlined the importance of this image for Dryden's sense of translation as 'labour'.[57] Other traces connect to other aspects of Dryden's thinking about his art. 'Way' had long been one of his key words for describing the possibilities of translation. Paraphrase is 'the second way', imitation 'the third way'; Denham and Cowley contrived 'another way of turning authors into our tongue'; Aphra Behn's version of Ovid is 'in Mr Cowley's way of imitation only'; in short, the whole challenge of translation was to work out 'which way of version seems to me most proper'.[58] And Dryden also endeavours to restore the '*Trojan* Line': indeed, he is following it 'line by line'. So, in this scene, which starts with an individual setting off by himself to conjure a voice, and ends with a group labouring together to transplant a civilization, Dryden gives imaginative life to the contradictory frames of translation as channel and as prism, and discovers a narrative by which they can be accommodated. The solitary conviction of hearing someone speak inspires, and gives way to, the slow, communal exploration of 'wandring Ways' through which the work of translation is, in practice, done.

The history of translation and the contemporary scene

In both Dryden and Barrett Browning we have observed the co-existence of channel with prismatic views of translation: of a commitment to some kind of transfer or equivalence with a recognition that translation necessarily generates and participates in a multitude of differences. The co-existence was lived in different ways – as agon and as oscillation – but in neither case could one view win out over the other or the two be reconciled. Translation cannot be seen only as a channel nor only as a prism, and neither can the two views merge. Translation is constituted by the paradoxical co-existence of both frames.

Much writing about translation over the last three decades – in both theoretical and anecdotal veins – has attended to the disjunction beween the idea that translation aspires to sameness and the recognition that it introduces difference. Often, the idea of the channel (or 'sameness', or 'transfer') is located elsewhere: a summary of many arguments might go: 'other people think of translation as transfer; but we know it generates change'. For instance, Derrida, in 'Survivre' and 'Living On / Border Lines', takes aim at what he thinks to be the 'classical model' of translation as transfer which 'prevailed up until Benjamin perhaps'.[59] However, as we have discovered, neither Dryden nor Barrett Browning was at ease with that model – and both of them lived well before Benjamin. Some of what they said about translation, and some of their translational endeavour, can be aligned with it; but other aspects of their work and thinking cannot. Not ubiquitous before Benjamin, the 'classical model' has not vanished after him. Any celebration of translation as difference is haunted by translation as sameness. Any endeavour to achieve equivalence is rattled by awareness of disparity.

As we began to see in the Introduction, one recent line of theorisation pushes the channel view elsewhere by attaching it to the structures and requirements of the nation-state. Naoki Sakai concludes from his research into the literary and linguistic history of Japan:

> The particular representation of translation as communication between two particular languages is no doubt a historical construct. Given the politico-social significance of translation, it is no accident that, historically, the regime of translation became widely accepted in many regions of the world, after the feudal order and its passive vassal subject gave way to the disciplinary order of the active citizen subject in the modern nation-state.[60]

The postcolonial scholar Robert Young has pointed to the role played by nineteenth-century imperialism in promoting this sort of 'representation of translation' by standardizing languages and defining them as discrete entities:

> Translation can occur only if both languages have been made proper, have been standardized. Wedded to the written form, translation is sustained by the ideology of discrete unitary languages, assuming and requiring monolingualism, for without that separated distinction the conversion of one language into another would never take place—and would never be needed.[61]

Of course Young is not thinking of all the varied modes of re-making that can be described as 'translation', but only of the same particular representation as Sakai. Other factors, too, have been connected to the formation and maintenance of this mode. Michael Cronin, referencing the architectural theorist Mario Carpo, emphasises the role, not only of the 'written form', but

especially of print, and other technologies of mechanical reproduction, in creating a 'regime of identicality' that pushes translation towards an ideal of sameness.[62] As it seems to the Finnish poet and translator Leevi Lehto, this representation of translation, or Derrida's 'classical model', still holds today. Indeed, in his view, it is stronger now than in the nineteenth century: 'our present global language situation' – he says – 'dominated as it is by the rise of national states and corresponding national languages', promotes 'a naive conception of a "democratic" "equality" of languages. Translation has come to be seen as "transferring contents" between languages'.[63]

There is no doubt that all these forces have contributed to abstracting and solidifying the channel view, Derrida's classical model, which, in previous work, I have called 'Translation Rigidly Conceived'.[64] Yet, as the differences between Sakai, Young, Lehto and Cronin's arguments suggest, the channel view cannot be tied to a particular historical narrative. Equally, it cannot be wholly separated from any act of translation, however prismatic the practice or intent. Whenever there is a question of translation, the channel view looms. This is so even in the radically multilingual environments adduced by Young later in his essay, where 'the individual languages concerned may not even be classified as languages': as soon as there is a recognition of linguistic difference, followed by an act of communication, then a channel is metaphorically brought into being.[65] Leevi Lehto offers a nuanced account of the environment of translation as an alternative to the image promoted by nationalist ideology: 'perhaps communality is better understood as an exposure to the language of the other, one that you will (never) understand completely, never "master", but that at the same time, precisely for this reason, speaks to you'.[66] Yet here too, in this space of multiple differences, prism and channel are superimposed: Lehto's parentheses enable the possibility of understanding to haunt 'will never understand', while the language that is not mastered can still 'speak to you'. In our contemporary circumstances, just as much as when

Dryden and Barrett Browning were writing, the prism and the channel metaphors cannot but co-exist: attention to their overlaps and switcharounds can help us trace the work being done by translation, as well as the claims being made for it.

Take, for example, the Belfast poet Ciaran Carson's recent volume *From Elsewhere*, which consists of translations, and 'translations of the translations as it were', from the French poet Jean Follain.[67] Carson, who grew up in an Irish-speaking family, with a father who was a devotee of Esperanto, has made poetry from fractures within language and the blending of languages throughout his career. In poems such as 'Belfast Confetti', political violence unleashes aggressive verbal energies ('Suddenly as the riot squad moved in it was raining exclamation marks'), while 'Second Language' presents English, from the point of view of the infant Carson, as something sumptuously, rebarbatively strange: 'Wordy whorls and braids and skeins and spiral helices, unskeletoned from laminate geology'.[68] Translation is intrinsic to this creative practice; and of course it is translation in a predominantly prismatic vein, attentive to the textual variety among which it operates, and to the particularity of any form of language which it brings into being. In his 'Introduction' to *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri: A new translation by Ciaran Carson*, Carson writes:

> Translating ostensibly from the Italian, Tuscan or Florentine, I found myself translating as much from English, or various Englishes. Translation became a way of reading, a way of making the poetry of Dante intelligible to myself. An exercise in comprehension: 'Now tell the story in your own words.' What are my own words? I found myself wondering how one says what one means in any language, or how one knows what one means. I found myself pondering the curious and delightful grammar of English, and was reminded that I spoke Irish (with its different, curious and delightful grammar) before I spoke English.[69]

And yet – no less of course – these prismatic emphases co-exist with channel-style claims: the book is titled *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, with the Irish-English text shadowing the Italian pretty much line for line, and aiming especially to 'get something of' Dante's 'music', a desire not so very different from Dryden's to make Virgil 'speak'. With its localised, up-to-date idiom and frequent reminders of Northern Irish political violence, the translation mines the impossible conjunction of channel and prism, finding there a source of restless imaginative energy.[70]

In turning to Follain, Carson chose a writer with a shorter and less plural translation history than Dante's. Nonetheless, selections of his poems had been put into English several times before. In the introductory 'Apropos' at the start of *From Elsewhere*, Carson recalls that when he came across Follain and 'looked him up on the internet one of the first things I found was a version of the first poem in the present book, "*Soulier renoué*: Shoelace Tied"'.[71] Other people's translations continued to play a part in Carson's work with Follain: the 'Acknowledgements' note that 'my translations of the poems of Jean Follain would no doubt have turned out differently had I not consulted translations by Kurt Heinzelmann, Heather McHugh, W. S. Merwin, and Christopher Middleton.'[72] Follain's many poems are each typically about twelve or fifteen lines long, unrhymed, and unpunctuated except for a full-stop at the end: they present scenes or small sequences of events from ordinary life, though there is no observing or narrating 'I'; often they are located in the Normandy countryside in the decades following the First World War. They are, as Carson says in the 'Apropos', both 'humble' and 'resonant'; this combination seems to have been what most attracted Follain's several anglophone translators.

The look of Carson's volume in some ways recognises and in other ways occludes this company. Follain's name does not figure on the cover or title page: the book appears as

From Elsewhere by Ciaran Carson. Still, this implicitly registers the presence of the other versions, since poet-translators tend to feel able to present translations under their own name when the source-writer is already well known: what matters in the new publication is its fresh re-making of the material more than its origin. Then, when we look inside the covers, we find a text that is itself plural, as the 'Apropos' announces: 'this book consists of translations from the French poet Jean Follain, faced by "original" poems inspired by those translations: spins or takes on them in other words. Translations of translations as it were.'[73] The layout displays prismatic energies; but it also sidelines writing other than Carson's: of Follain's French, only the titles survive, and the acknowledgement of the other translations appears only at the very end of the book. On the left-hand side of the page-spread, where the source would be printed in a traditional parallel text, is a poem in English presented as a translation. This seems to probe the idea that an 'original' can ever simply be there on the page, separate from what a reader is making of it, and suggests a thought like Charles Martindale's: that it is translation which determines 'what counts as being "there" in the first place'. On the other hand – and on the right-hand page – are the 'translations from translations as it were', also called ' "original" poems'. This begins an exploration of how 'translation' and 'originality' can relate, in ways that question the dominance of the poet-translator. Are the translations of translations further from the Follain poems, or somehow closer, like a reflection of a reflection?[74] Are the poems original-in-inverted-commas because they are in some sense original Carson, or in some sense original Follain?

Carson's explanation in his introductory 'Apropos' (quoted above) is designedly hazy. The second array of poems are 'spins or takes' – but which? They are 'in other words' – but is that because they are written in other words, or because they are, in other words, spins or takes? The poems/translations too invite a questioning response. In '*Sans courage*: Without Courage', Carson, translating Follain, describes someone returning home and climbing up to

… the attic rooms

almost empty except for childhood.

The corresponding '"original" poem', which is titled 'Translation', gives us a boy leaning out of an 'attic window' overlooking countryside that he dreams of flying over, and then descending, having been

changed in the meantime

that is elsewhere.[75]

So this '"original"' which is called 'Translation' echoes the '*Elsewhere*' of the volume's title, and offers an image that matches Carson's description of his translational practice in the 'Apropos': 'I find myself in the other of Follain, questing and fetching the poems from another language, from the elsewhere of his territory.'[76] 'Fetch', Carson has explained, is a complex word, whose meanings include 'bringing from a distance', 'tacking' (in the nautical sense) and creating an 'apparition, double, or wraith'.[77] This exploratory work of translation is, then, in harmony with the theoretical assertions that we have encountered in Martindale, Robinson and Sakai: one cannot know what is there to be translated until it has been found by translation.

Though each of Carson's '"original"' poems differs in many way from its preceding 'translation', there are always one or a few shared words – a snippet of word-for-word (indeed, identical) translation between them to anchor the wandering process of the 'fetch'. In '*Sans courage*: Without Courage' and 'Translation', the word is 'attic'. These links, perhaps passageways, create an opening for our own, readerly inhabiting and fetching of the double

textuality of the work. We are invited to see 'Translation' as a translational elaboration of the connotations of 'attic' in '*Sans courage*: Without Courage', an 'opening' of an aspect of that poem, not so very different from Dryden's openings of Virgil.

In another pair of fetches, '*Muraille:* Yard Wall' and 'Trompe l'oeil', the shared words are 'pinned', and 'hold everything together' (slightly altered to 'Everything held together'). In the 'translation', a split stone in a wall holds everything together, and a man is pinned to the wall as he dies; in the '"original"', collage items such as 'a snapshot of a soldier' and 'a woman's calling card' are 'held together' and 'pinned' to a board. The second poem seems to belong very much in Carson's own imaginative world, where everything is always already textual – the more so because it draws on an unexpected source: a note alerts us that '"Trompe l'oeil" is based on a passage from T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth*', though it does not say which passage. The most likely candidate turns out to be the description of a trompe l'oeil collage:

> Collage—and *Portrait of a Young Girl* is collage epitomized, for all that the stick-ons in it are illusions in oil—represented the *triumph* of room-space. Not for nothing was its key material wallpaper. The space it conjured was now literally put together from the little bourgeois's belongings: his newspaper, his sheet music, his matchbox, his daughter's scrapbook, his friends or dealers' calling cards.[78]

(note the presence of 'calling cards', 'put together', and the 'wall' in 'wallpaper'). This passage in its turn communicates with a section of Carson's 'Apropos', where we learn that the last entry in Follain's diary, 'dated 9th March 1971', reads:

> '*Dîner Vieux-Papier'. Le Vieux Papier* is an association devoted to the study of paper ephemera such as menus, playing cards, railway tickets, cheese labels, school exercise books, holy pictures, wine labels, theatre programmes, greeting cards, board games, diaries and the like.[79]

Finding its bearings among these intertexts, the '"original"' prompts thought about what translation can be 'into': not just English, and not just Belfast English, but Carson's particular language, itself prismatically interlaced with his readings and associations. As it is re-made in this medium, the realist visual scene presented in Follain is translated into the modernist genre of collage. The '"original"' also asks us to wonder how far, and how intricately, the meaning that has been translated, and thereby discovered, in the 'translation' might stretch: from the wall, via Clark's mention of wallpaper, to Follain's interest in old paper; from Follain's word for 'pinned', 'collé', to the mode of vision of Picasso's collages.[80] In the case of John Dryden we have watched translation drawing out meanings that were 'secretly in' Virgil, with an imagining of the author and his 'address' helping that to happen. Similar ambitions are at play in *From Elsewhere*, and similar discoveries occur. Dryden, as we have seen, was buoyed by writing among other translators, sometimes aligning with them and sometimes differing. Analogous feelings seem latent in the overlapping texts of the trompe l'oeil collage, along with Carson's distinctive word, 'pinned' as it differs from the agnate alternatives: 'stuck' (chosen by both W. S. Merwin and Christopher Middleton) and 'pressed' (Kurt Heinzelman).[81] In Carson's 'translation', the man pinned to the wall sees:

> columns of smoke rise
> from the fugitive horizons.

In the '"original"', what is pinned to the board is 'an airmail envelope', blue like

> the sky through a window
> that when everything
> else is collapsing
> opens.

The lines echo the open attic window in the '"original"' that is called 'Translation': here again we can sense the translator figure intervening in the elsewhere of the source text, inventing or perhaps uncovering a different, happier undertow to the ending, with the smoke clearing to reveal blue sky. The translational imagination opens this interpretation, and then – just as in Dryden – the process of opening appears as a figure in the writing. 'Opening', of course, being also Dryden's word.

Carson's *From Elsewhere*, then, is in many respects the epitome of a prismatic view of translation. It recognises itself as having multiple sources and as finding its place among other versions, and its translations all have shadowy doubles. And yet, simply by presenting itself as a work of *translation*, it inevitably brings the channel view into operation. When you look at the '"originals"', not as random poems, but as 'translations of translations', the question of *what* they are translating cannot but appear. In pursuing it, as we have been doing, we discover nuances and connotations that may not have been sufficiently unveiled in the 'translations'; and we see that they are being opened into a particular, unusual translational medium, not just 'English' but Carson's own language and imaginative world. In this complex environment, what counts as translation keeps shifting, just as it did for Dryden between his modes of metaphrase and paraphrase. At one moment we may think that the papers 'pinned' to a board translate a meaning latent in the man 'pinned' to a wall; and if

we track down the French, we might take both as translations of Follain's word 'collé'. On another occasion, the same sequence might seem to us something different from translation: version, departure, or invention. This provisional approach to the work of translation certainly downplays the channel view and opens it to question; but it cannot do away with it entirely, for if it did there would be nothing to ask questions about. Here, just as in every text that is offered or taken as 'translation', there is a co-existence of channel and prismatic frames.

Virtually the opposite stance to Carson's is represented by Lydia Davis, the translator of French novels – notably Proust's *Du côté de Chez Swann* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* – and writer of prose fictions. In Davis's novel, *The End of the Story,* translation figures as a a long, slow job, a matter of puzzles or problems that have solutions or answers.[82] Her essayistic accounts of translation likewise portray her as endeavouring to reproduce source texts 'correctly', 'closely and exactly', and to find 'the perfect equivalent'.[83] Her work on Proust involved correcting the 'lyricism and empty rhetorical flourishes' that seemed to her to marr the early and much-loved translation by Scott Moncrieff, so as to achieve 'accuracy and faithfulness'.[84] When, in *Madame Bovary*, she confronted a text with a long and plural translation history, the multitude of versions struck her as a record of error and shortcoming:

> In the case of a book that appeared more than one hundred and fifty years ago, like *Madame Bovary*, and that is an important landmark in the history of the novel, there is room for plenty of different English versions. For one thing, the first editions of the original text may have been faulty, and over the years one or more corrected editions have been published, so that the earliest English translations no longer match the most accurate original. (2) The earliest translators (as was the case with the Muirs rendering Kafka) may have felt they needed to inflict subtle or not so subtle alterations on the

> style and even the content of the original so as to make it more acceptable to the Anglophone audience; with the passing of time, we come to deem this something of a betrayal and ask for a more faithful version. (3) Earlier versions may simply not be as good in other respects as they could be—let another translator have a try.[85]

Yet when her own translations of Proust and Flaubert were published, they (of course) were not received as simply correcting or replacing the earlier versions. They were admired in some respects and dispraised in others, and took their place among each novel's prismatic translational array.

In a story called *A Walk* (written after the Proust translation but before the Flaubert), Davis reflects on the misfit between her channel-style ambitions for her work and its prismatic reception. As Helane Levine-Keating has shown, the story draws on an encounter between Davis and André Aciman, the critic of her Proust translation for the *New York Review of Books*, who had lamented its failure to recreate what he called Proust's 'cadence', i.e. nuances generated by the style.[86] The translator and the critic are in Oxford, having attended a conference, and wander together through the town, an exploration which is throughout made suggestive of translation, as she finds herself 'following not only her own impulses but also his' and taking 'care not to walk too close' (after having 'kept too close', as he had put it, in her Proust translation).[87] The hints become louder when two moments of surprise discovery remind her of a passage from *Du Côté de chez Swann*, one that (as Levine-Keating has noted) mattered especially to Aciman, and was discussed by him in his introduction to *The Proust Project*, an anthology of extracts and responses to which Davis too had contributed. Davis, writing the story, quotes the passage twice, first in Scott Moncrieff's translation, then in her own; but the translator-figure does not mention the reminiscence to the critic-figure, and the critic-figure does not notice it for himself. Levine-Keating takes this

as an attack on Aciman, 'portraying this self-proclaimed harsh judge of translators as someone so caught up with himself that he is incapable of humor'; but it strikes me rather as a reflection on the disparities between two people who have much in common, including especially an intimate knowledge of Proust. The critic is not attacked, but rather observed; and the two extracts of translations, likewise, are not judged against each other, but simply left to sit there, displaying their paradoxical sameness-and-yet-difference.

In her contribution to *The Proust Project*, Davis had chosen a passage that was in itself repetitious, containing both a younger and a more mature description of the steeples of Martinville. She had asked 'why should Proust want to, in effect, duplicate a passage—write it twice over with only slight variations'; but she had not offered an answer.[88] *A Walk* poses the same question of herself, and pursues it to the story's last sentences, which are perhaps rather Proustian in their cadence. The critic and the translator are getting into separate taxis:

> As he stepped neatly into his, his last words to her, solemn and rather portentous, she thought, were ones that nobody, as it happened, had ever spoken to her before, but that she judged were likely to be correct, since he lived on the other side of the globe: 'We will probably not meet again.' He then made a graceful gesture of the hand that she later could not remember exactly, and whose meaning she could not quite grasp, though it seemed to combine a farewell with a concession to some sort of inevitability, and his cab moved slowly down the street, followed, soon, by her own.[89]

The passage sees understanding within misunderstanding, and the reverse: the translator meets the critic's view in judging what he says to be correct; yet what he says is that they will not meet again; and there is a sense in which (the story has shown) they have never met at all. She does not grasp his hand, and feels she cannot quite grasp the meaning of his gesture of

the hand; yet she is able to give a translation of what it seems to mean. They are in separate taxis but follow the same road. Like Dryden's version of Aeneas's vision of Creusa, and like Carson's opening of the window, the story offers an image of translation, which is to say of the untranslatability within translation, and the translatability within the untranslatable.[90] It sits alongside Davis's intent endeavour as a translator of other people's writing, not agonizing over it (like Barrett Browning with her two *Prometheuses*) but giving it a human emotional context, and situating its claims. The quest for 'the perfect equivalent' co-exists with a recognition of the imperfection of all human communication. The same perception is interesting to Carson, and also to other contemporary writers, as we saw in the Introduction, and will see again in later chapters: in some respects, this is an early 21st-century theme. But, as we have found with Barrett Browning and Dryden, it goes deep into the past as well. It is, simply, the paradox of all translation.

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[87] Davis, *Collected Stories*, pp. 579, 576.

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[89] Davis, *Collected Stories*, p. 587.

[90] My phrasing here aims to suggest both a debt to and difference from Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London and New York: Verso, 2013). In my view (as I hope this chapter has shown) nothing is ever either translatable or untranslatable: everything is always both.