

Translating the Reflections in *War and Peace*

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The reflections on history that thicken into the long essay at the end of *War and Peace* are the novel's orphan children. They have never found a stable home among the novel's admirers and critics; they have never seemed to fit with the ostensibly "glorious" fiction that ensures the novel's greatness. It is thus hardly surprising that they have not been accorded the care which they might have received had they been considered an independent work of thought, worthy in its own right. While it is indeed highly unlikely that they should have been so considered, it is nonetheless undeniable that the reflections are sufficiently interesting and important, at least within the context of the novel itself, to merit much closer attention, particularly from translators. This brings me to the chief point of my investigation; namely, to assess whether the standard Maude translation along with the recent ones by Anthony Briggs and by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky render the reflections into English with the rigor they merit.

A preliminary point is in order here: Just what are these reflections? When I refer to them as such, I mean the relatively sustained abstract "digressions" that emerge first in Book Three of *War and Peace* and which culminate in the Second Part of the Epilogue. Specifically, aside from the latter text, the passages I have examined for the purposes of comparison are, in Book III, Chapters I, X and XI of Part One, Chapter I of Part Two, and Chapter I of Part Three; in Book IV, Chapter I of Part Two; and in the First Part of the Epilogue, Chapters I through IV.

My assessment of the translations turns on two primary considerations that would be germane to any abstract writing of this sort: 1) the precision and consistency of translation in regard to key terms; and 2) the success with which the translators have managed to convey the syntactic relations of the original. Let me linger a moment on this latter point.

One of the more interesting aspects of the novel's reflections on history is that they deploy a fairly complicated rhetorical strategy, one seeking to simplify while not fully concealing the complexity of the matters with which the reflections deal. The practical manifestation of this rhetorical strategy is alternation between more complicated agglomerations of thought and what amounts to a nineteenth-century equivalent of point-form summary, between syntactically dense, almost Germanic, sentences and those marked by Gallic celerity, directness and finesse.

This very pronounced quality of the reflections has contributed significantly to their mixed reception. The popular formulations, with their condensed, aphoristic style, offend the more serious student of Tolstoy's thought who might be deterred by the surface, as many scholars have been. The more complicated explorations are then ascribed to mere clumsiness or, indeed, to the author's intellectual incompetence, his lack of the appropriate learning or talent for the abstract.¹ But wariness is more appropriate. Like his immediate models, Arthur Schopenhauer and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Tolstoy is hardly a straightforward writer. The frequent alternation

between suggestive argument and aphoristic pungency hints at the more recalcitrant issues of narrative the reflections address. Such issues have been made explicit elsewhere by scholars such as Boris Eikhenbaum and Gary Saul Morson.²

Translation of the reflections is thus a delicate balancing act in which terminological precision must be matched by a corresponding respect for the rhetorical approach they express. To anticipate a line of critique that will emerge more clearly in my brief review, the temptation to read the reflections in a more popular vein, to be seduced by their popularizing rhetoric, has led some translators to run roughshod over more subtle distinctions in the original thereby perpetuating a questionable prejudice and obscuring, if not fully concealing, the breadth of the Tolstoyan text.

I

As I have noted, terminological precision is a basic necessity in translation of abstract writing. And while Tolstoy does labor to use simple, direct language, he is also careful to rely on several crucial, highly freighted terms to delineate the more probing aspects of his thought. He could hardly have done otherwise given the task he sets for himself. The claim that Tolstoy was a somewhat desultory writer, rambling, repetitive, and rhetorically crude—for here is the “voice of nature” or “non-style” as the cliché holds³—may have its merits, but it seems off the mark when applied to the reflections on history. I shall attempt to show why by examining three important terminological groupings in the reflections, those dealing with the will, the infinite and consciousness.

In each case it should be evident that I am dealing with fine distinctions that one might consider pedantic or rather too fine. But these fine distinctions are the very lifeblood of sophisticated abstract writing, and Tolstoy is no stranger to them. His terminological precision has almost

always been neglected, this neglect having encouraged inadequate readings of the reflections.

Will

Of all the key terms deployed in the reflections, one of the most important and difficult is произвол. In the pivotal opening chapter of Part Three of Book III, where the narrator proposes an outlandish calculus of history,⁴ he says that one must attain to the art of summing up the произвола of men, their uniform strivings or tendencies (влечения). The problem is that will denotes a directedness, a purposivity, that is absent in the Russian. For произвол indicates much more directly a “freedom from” than a “freedom to,” the latter more appropriately associated with will, the former with the Latin *arbitrium* or the German *Willkür*, (both of which must be distinguished from their purposive counterparts, *voluntas* and *Wille*).⁵ The fact of the matter is that произвол points to a sort of raw possibility that the calculus of history itself transforms into actuality, into a direction or *telos*. Hence, to use an inherently purposive word like will to describe its precondition is clearly inappropriate. But the problem remains as to what terminological choice might be more felicitous? Is there a better equivalent for произвол in English? Obviously, by referring to Latin and German, I have already suggested that it is difficult, if not impossible to find an English equivalent. The translator is thus compelled to engage in paraphrase or terminological innovation.

In this respect, only Briggs’s translation seems to recognize the problem clearly. Both of the others use “will” without further ado. Briggs chooses to engage in paraphrase, referring to произвол in one instance as “arbitrary human actions” (912). Briggs tries to capture the absence of purposivity that distinguishes the Russian and, in doing so, he comes a good deal closer to the Russian, even though recourse to paraphrase is risky, for the translator thereby reveals his pres-

ence too baldly. Yet I do think that this is one of those relatively rare circumstances where it is in fact incumbent on the translator to intervene boldly lest an important point be irremediably obscured.

Another significant problem regarding use of the word “will” is the conflation of will and want in a crucial passage from the Second Part of the Epilogue. This passage is one of several in Chapter VIII of the Second Part of the Epilogue that seem to have been inspired largely by Arthur Schopenhauer’s *Prize Essay on Freedom of the Will*. In Chapter VIII the narrator states:

To understand, observe, and draw conclusions, man must first of all be conscious of himself as living. A man is only conscious of himself as a living being by the fact that he wills, that is, is conscious of his volition. But his will—which forms the essence of his life—man recognizes (and can only recognize) as being free.⁶ (1291)

Schopenhauer writes in his *Prize Essay*:

...for self-consciousness is immediate. However that should be is our next question: What does self-consciousness contain? Or: How does a person become aware of his own self? Answer: wholly as a *willing being*. Everyone, in observing their own self-consciousness, soon realizes that the object being observed is at all times their own will.⁷

If one reads the Maude translation, one is likely to be confused or misled, especially if the distinctively Schopenhauerian concept of will remains without clarification. Yet, by using the Russian for raw wanting, the participle *хотящий*, the narrator does indeed clarify Schopenhauer’s meaning, his interpretation of willing as an arational motive force, an urge without origin or end. This clarification, obscure in the Maude translation, receives somewhat more emphasis in the two recent ones. Briggs renders the crucial

sentence thus: “A man’s sense of being alive derives from his yearning, which means being conscious of his own will. But there is only one way that man becomes conscious of his will, the very essence of his being—he conceives of it as free will” (1342). Pevear and Volokhonsky are clearer:

A living man knows himself not otherwise than as wanting, that is, he is conscious of his will. And his will, which constitutes the essence of his life, man is conscious of and cannot be conscious of otherwise as free. (1201)

It is quite evident that both Briggs and Pevear and Volokhonsky try to capture the relation between yearning or wanting and will, that is, the connection between desire and will. And if one admires the simplicity of the Maude translation, its failure to address the issue effectively is a troubling drawback. Still, the problem for Briggs and Pevear and Volokhonsky consists precisely in their equating yearning or wanting with will. Why is this equation so important?

The narrator emphasizes that we come to know ourselves as desiring, as desire—we become (aware of) ourselves only in so far as we are desiring, wanting. In this latter respect, Pevear and Volokhonsky capture the ambiguity of the participle in English, that we are both lacking something and respond to that lack through action: that is what it means to live in a world.⁸ Hence, we are pulled along by a force, our wanting, which we do not originate and therefore cannot control. To equate this kind of force with will is at best problematic. In German, as in Russian, the connection between wanting and willing still has semantic validity, retaining an ambiguity Schopenhauer exploits with malice in his principal work where he undermines the notion of will essential to Kant’s ethics. But, in English, to want and to will are arguably much further apart, will having so many associations with a process of disciplining oneself, of exercising control over oneself, that the

ambiguity is hard to appreciate, if not entirely lost.

This is a shame because the all-important notion of freedom hinges on what the narrator means by will. If will really means desire, then the highest freedom is the untrammelled pursuit of satisfaction of that desire. If, however, will means will as a form of discipline, then the highest freedom is in fact the freedom from desire. Here we have two kinds of freedom, the freedom to desire and the freedom from desire, that find their narrative correlate in the contest between Napoleon and Kutuzov, between war and peace, the active life of transformation and the passive life of contemplation. But it quickly becomes manifest in the Second Part of the Epilogue that the kind of freedom at issue is the former not the latter, freedom to and not from desire, a freedom that can easily be shown to be unfree because it is inherently reactive: it is an enslavement to the things of the world. Only the desire for death can overcome that enslavement.

None of the translations alludes to this problem or addresses the semantic compatibility of want and will in Russian that is likely more attenuated in English. To be fair, however, at least Briggs and Pevear and Volokhonsky make the problem visible with clarity, something that cannot be said for the Maudes. At this point, one might object that I am placing an unfair burden of interpretation on the translator, and, to a certain degree, that may be so. But I am not asking the translator to solve a problem or cut a sort of Gordian knot. To the contrary, the knots are those aspects of the text which show the most promise of shedding light on its otherwise hidden currents. Thus the burden a translator must discharge is to ensure that the knots are visible, that the translation not cover them up or bury them under an ostensibly correct or "smooth" surface.

If neither the Maudes nor Briggs nor Pevear and Volokhonsky could be accused of smooth-

ness in this part of their respective translations, it is equally clear that they have not managed to convey what is at stake in the narrator's characterization of the will and the concept of freedom bound up with it.

Infinite/infinity

The infinite is central to the arguments set forth in the reflections on history. Almost all the arguments hinge on a primary claim, whether the infinite can be known or not. The argument against causes, for example, has its origins in Aristotle's argument against the possibility of knowing an infinite causal chain; the calculus proposal emerges from the same conceptual framework.⁹

One finds no fewer than three terms to describe the infinite in the reflections, and these terms constitute another important semantic knot for the translator. Two, *неисчислимый* and *бесчисленный*, emphasize the infinite as uncountable, and in ways that must be carefully distinguished. The other term the narrator employs, *бесконечный*, is much more general, stressing the lack of a limit just as do the Greek and Latin terms, respectively, *to apeiron* and *infinitum*. The difference here is not trivial: to perceive the infinite as a limit is of ancient provenance, whereas to perceive the infinite specifically as denumerable or non-denumerable has a lot to do with the rise of a modern, explicitly infinite, mathematics. That Tolstoy was careful in his use of these terms, if perhaps not overly so, can be illustrated by reference to the opening chapter of Book III.

That chapter announces the argument against causes by suggesting that historical events are not the products of one overarching will (*воля*) or a privileged set of causes but rather of a quantity of interlocking causes which cannot be counted. Now, in this chapter the narrator emphasizes the problem of counting the causes by employing two terms, *неисчислимый* and *бесчисленный*, which are not synonymous as I hinted at above. The

difficulty is this: *неисчислимый* describes a quantity that cannot be counted out, presumably, one that cannot be counted out in full, a quantity which is denumerable but not enumerable—the counting never comes to a stop. *Бесчисленный* is more radical, describing an absolute infinite, one that is not even denumerable, that could feature any order no matter how arbitrary, that submits to any counting rule and therefore cannot be subject to a count, regardless of finality.¹⁰

The difference between the two is hardly subtle, as any reader of Borges understands. Rather, it is the difference between claiming that a given quantity is simply “too large” and claiming that one is unable to make any claim—in the case of the former one can count forever, in the case of the latter one cannot even begin to count. Denumerable infinity is orderly, whereas non-denumerable infinity is not at all so, being beyond order and disorder, and that “beyond” can be thought only as a sort of chaos.

Hence, the conclusions which may be drawn from the narrator’s use of these differing descriptions of the infinite are likely not trivial. They point to one of the basic questions to which the novel gives no firm answer: Is the world orderly or not? And this is a question of great consequence, of course, for it has everything to do with our sense of the world’s accessibility. If the causes are countable, but unendingly so, they still have an identity of sorts that repetition can guarantee. If they are not even countable, their identity is never certain and can never be ascertained.

The translations are hardly in agreement about this use of terms. Pevear and Volokhonsky are at their weakest here. They translate all these terms by “infinite,” and thereby deny the reader with no Russian access to the complexities they entail. The Maudes are more aware of the differences but they do not render them correctly; indeed, they reverse the meanings of the terms, translating *неисчислимый* as “incalculable” and *бесчисленный* as “countless.” Moreover, they

translate *бесчисленный* by “infinite” as well in the very same paragraph where they translate it as “countless.” Briggs is more careful but he too reverses the meanings of the terms while showing consistency in regard to their translation. Nonetheless, of the three translations, Briggs proves to be the surer guide if only because his consistency at least makes it clear that there is an issue to be addressed, that there is terminological refinement at work.

Consciousness

Consciousness is a decisive concept in the Second Part of the Epilogue. It helps to explain the distinction the narrator draws between necessity and freedom.

The narrator claims that we know ourselves dualistically, as subject and object. When we observe or explain ourselves we present ourselves to ourselves and to others as an object according to the determinations which apply to all objects. To the extent we can provide a clear and complete account of ourselves, we reveal how little freedom we have. This is because the condition of possibility for providing such an account is that the determinations which apply to all objects are firm and unalterable; in other words, they are necessary. But the narrator also holds that a clear and complete account of ourselves is not possible. He thereby affirms the crucial inference that “something” must be determined, this basis or “substrate” itself remaining undetermined since it is the condition of possibility of determination. The basis for determination necessarily subtracts itself from the final determination.

The narrator is, however, not content merely to infer, which would be to imply the hegemony of reason as the source of knowing. Instead, he maintains that we can know or intuit this subtracted basis and, following Schopenhauer, he insists that this knowing or intuition reveals ourselves to ourselves as desiring: strictly speaking, we “are” desire. The narrator simplifies the

point by stressing that we know through two different sources, reason and consciousness, the former being dependent on the latter.

This way of pitting reason against a revealed truth, an ancient contest, is filtered, however, through the lens of Kant's philosophy and, in particular, through that peculiar Kant which Schopenhauer creates for himself as both inspiration and foil. The difference between reason and revealed truth is marked by different ways of referring to knowledge: reason observes and represents, whereas consciousness intuits; that is, consciousness apprehends directly without reliance on mediating agencies like reason. These distinctions, perhaps tolerably clear in the Russian text, are not so clear in the translations. This can be seen by examining Chapter VIII of the Second Part of the Epilogue, where the narrator introduces his distinction between reason and intuition. The main problem is that the translations do not clearly indicate in what way the verbs of knowing associated with consciousness and intuition, like *сознавать*, differ from those associated with reason, like *наблюдать* or *представлять*.

As they approach the distinction between reason and consciousness in Chapter VIII, both the Maudes and Briggs miss the subject-object distinction entirely in the key phrase "*предмет наблюдения*," which they translate respectively as "subject of observation" and "subject for observation." These are perfectly natural but misleading translations. Pevear and Volokhonsky are the only ones to get it right.

The translations of a key paragraph indicating that consciousness is an "independent" source of knowing show a considerable degree of uncertainty about how to interpret the text. For one thing, just what consciousness is becomes a problem. The narrator chooses the phrase, "*совершенно отдельный и независимый от разума источник самопознания*," an exceedingly complicated stab at definition that needs to

be glossed carefully. The three translations offer three different renderings of the grounding word *самопознание*: the Maudes have "self-cognition"; Briggs has "self-awareness"; and Pevear and Volokhonsky have "self-knowledge." What is at issue here? The next sentence clarifies the context: "*Чрез разум человек наблюдает сам себя; но знает он сам себя только через сознание*." From this point of view, "self-knowledge" is probably the best rendering of *самопознание* if only because cognition is arguably too intellectualist, while "awareness" is not sufficiently comprehensive. Nevertheless Briggs's choice seems perfectly defensible in so far as "*сознание*" can be equivalent to consciousness in the weak sense of a sort of self-awareness. But, in the final account, self-awareness likely does not adequately stress "knowledge" as a kind of *знание* close to its counterpart in the Latin *conscientia*, or, indeed, even in the German *Be-wußtsein*, as a term of art in post-Kantian thought.

This is surely a problem because Tolstoy means to suggest that all things are present *more latente* in consciousness; reason merely brings them to light in a certain way, as law-abiding, discrete things. Put differently, consciousness is a knowing in the aspect of immediate intuition or vision. It is therefore a superior knowing, an independent one, because it is complete, "full," in and of itself. Reason cannot do what it does without that fullness. As I have suggested, reason must always already assume immediate access to fullness, and it can never re-produce that fullness via observation or representation: what binds all things together in their Being cannot be confined to any one being.

The accent on intuition is what all the translations fail to make clear, and it is not terribly unusual that they do so since paraphrase is much more likely to capture the complexities of the text than an exact single-word translation. But one should ask in this respect whether paraphrase or at least some nod to the difficulty is in no case

appropriate; the complicated character of the term, the basic task that has been entrusted to it, are factors which should weigh heavily in the translation.

II

The rhetorical variety and complexity of the historical reflections are most strikingly evident in the Second Part of the Epilogue, a circumstance which seems appropriate to the more expansive argument contained in it. The primary quality I wish to emphasize is the careful modulation of complexity in the Second Part of the Epilogue where one finds, amid intricate arguments, pithy summarizing. Here the somewhat popularizing aspect of the novel comes to the fore. But Tolstoy was ultimately not seeking to popularize his novel. The surface is not mere surface but clearly points to the depths as well.

While examples are legion, for the purposes of my brief review it might be best to return to Chapter VIII where alternation between more substantial argument and aphoristic paraphrase is much in evidence. If one scans that part of the chapter running from the short paragraph beginning “Узнав из опыта и рассуждения...” to that beginning “Представить себе человека...,” one can see in starkest relief the alternation between the summarizing phrases and the more difficult argument they bracket. Now, there is nothing particularly unusual about proceeding in this manner, even Kant in his otherwise forbidding *Critique of Pure Reason* occasionally salts his most recalcitrant arguments with simple summaries—like the famous, all-encompassing sound-bite: “Thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”¹¹ But in the case of Kant, this is the exception, whereas for Tolstoy it is virtually the rule. And this rule is further bolstered by Tolstoy’s tendency to use relatively simple figurative analogies for the more abstract points he makes. These are also easy to find in the

Second Part of the Epilogue: one has only to think of the locomotive or the herd of sheep.

There are thus basically three different modes of argument in the Second Part of the Epilogue that reveal a sophisticated rhetorical strategy. Specifically, Tolstoy clarifies the most abstract and detailed expositions of his thought by adorning them with aphoristic formulations, which seem to make the more abstract arguments accessible by giving them a proper border and limitation (*aphorizein*), and with the support of perhaps even more accessible figurations. In doing so, Tolstoy follows Nietzsche’s celebrated advice: “The more abstract the truth you wish to teach is, the more you must seduce the senses to accept it.”¹²

This rhetorical strategy can be quite elaborate and has been paid little attention in the critical reception. It is thus of some importance to examine the translations to see if they have not committed some of the more familiar offenses against Tolstoy, such as “simplifying” his prose by changing his careful paragraph structure, cutting up his sentences and eliminating repetitions.

To avoid undue concentration on one chapter, we might examine another important chapter of the Second Part of the Epilogue, Chapter X. Indeed, the sequence from Chapter VIII to the end of the Second Epilogue is of extraordinary rhetorical concentration: one sees with greatest clarity the alternation of levels and types of discourse not only within the chapters but among them as well.

Chapter X seeks to tie together the arguments set forth in Chapter VIII and the extremely complicated Chapter IX. This latter chapter introduces a sustained proportionality argument, asserting that our freedom is in proportional relation to the quantity of limiting factors of which we are aware or can ascertain. Because we cannot attain to a complete knowledge of these factors, we can never know ourselves to be completely unfree. Hence, proportion must prevail. Having devoted

Chapter X to this considerably more esoteric argument in support of the general thesis, that freedom and necessity are relative to each other and therefore cannot be eliminated, the narrator proceeds to reframe this thesis and come to a succinct summarizing conclusion about its greater implications.

The chapter has a very interesting, carefully wrought structure. It begins with a few relatively short paragraphs, moves into three more sustained discussions, then proceeds toward a recapitulation of those discussions which leads into a dramatic summary, a wonderful example of Tolstoyan shorthand I have cited in many contexts:

Reason gives expression to the laws of inevitability. Consciousness gives expression to the essence of freedom.

Freedom not limited by anything is the essence of life in man's consciousness. Inevitability without content is man's reason in its three forms.

Freedom is the thing examined. Inevitability is what examines. Freedom is the content. Inevitability is the form.

Only by separating the two forms of cognition, related to one another as form to content, do we get the mutually exclusive and separately incomprehensible conceptions of freedom and inevitability.

Only by uniting them do we get a clear conception of man's life. (1302)

The summary is followed by a few lengthier discussions that pull the chapter to a close. The paragraph organization of the chapter is telling. The discussion proceeds in five basic segments: introduction, expansion of the argument, first recapitulation, summary, second recapitulation, and closing bridge to the following chapter. This

structure is matched by another intriguing feature of the chapter.

Note the careful parataxis in the summary I have quoted. This paratactic disposition emerges out of a largely hypotactic argument, one prepared in the highly condensed discussions that precede the summary, if not also in the elaborate reflections of the preceding chapter. In this respect, the chapter features a fairly intricate interweaving of paratactic and hypotactic argumentation, the former tending toward apodictic declaration of findings, the other toward a more careful grounding of those findings; if the paratactic structure emphasizes, rather ironically here, the independence of the truths it proclaims (and is not all truth independent?), then the hypotactic grounding can imply the opposite, qualifying the claims it is meant to support.

The temptation and danger of translation in this context is to ignore the careful disposition of the arguments and their conclusions on the level both of sentence and paragraph organization. To ignore this intricate organization is a pernicious form of paraphrase; it is as pernicious as mistranslation or the obtuse translation of important terms.

Of the three translations, it is unsurprising that, in this respect, Pevear and Volokhonsky offend the least, for they attempt to track the structure and sentential syntax of Tolstoy's prose with the most exactitude. While the Maudes show little inclination to fill in the blanks as well, it is Briggs who seems the most willing to intervene mainly by changing paragraph boundaries, and this is unfortunate given the manifest virtues of his translation. His paragraph changes are, however, so slight and infrequent—two paragraphs in Chapter VIII, one in Chapter IX—and he is for the most part so careful to retain the staccato, paratactic structure of the argument in Chapter X, that one is led to suspect that the changes he introduces are of a more innocent nature, evinc-

ing no clear intent to repair or revise the edifice of the argument.

III

Several of the preceding comments may appear to be mere cavils. To some extent that is what they are and must be, evaluation of competent translations being a largely caviling affair. For it should be said that each of the three translations is competent: one can get a sense of Tolstoy's thinking through them, if only a necessarily limited one. Hence, the question about the relative value of the translations boils down to such limits: Which one is the most limiting? Which one allows a more expansive exploration of Tolstoy's thinking? Which one comes closest to capturing the semantic polyvalence of the reflections on history?

Here I should lay my cards on the table. Translation is of course a notoriously problematic undertaking, and there is no translation that does not please some constituency of readers at the expense of another. If one chooses to translate with ostensibly faithful literalness, one will have to face the wrath of those who insist on the creative aspect of translation, on the fact that translation is a new creation, the original having come to life as such only through the medium of the translation. The underlying thought expressed by this latter approach is that there is no one original text, only texts. But this thought is fraught with difficulties since it tends to assume what it otherwise denies, for one has to posit a baseline identity for a text—a text—in order to describe texts. Plurality is always in thrall to unity: without the one there is no many. The faithful translator assumes precisely this identity. But, in doing so, he also seeks to “jump over his own shadow,” to present that original text as it is in itself in another language. While the ability to do so completely may seem ludicrous and lead to a rendering that hovers uncomfortably between two languages, the operative assumption, that there is an original—a

text—which is there to be conveyed, continues to prevail.

Which of these approaches is superior? To get some purchase on an answer to this question, it may well be best to emphasize the excesses to which each can give free rein. The creative translation is apt to turn liberty into license such that the gap between the translation and the original is so wide and clear that anyone with even a modicum of training in the original language may perceive it with ease. Literalness can make a fetish of the putative original text such that the expressive characteristics associated with the original language come to haunt that of the translation. The common result in these cases is that language of perfect ordinariness in the original becomes extraordinary in the translation, a sort of idiolect corrupting both the original and the translation.

Is there, then, a preferable excess? Nabokov suggested famously that “the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase,”¹³ and I think that there is much to commend in that assertion, although the product it sought to defend, a strenuously literal translation of *Evgeny Onegin*, is very radical indeed. What that product reveals is merely that there has to be some measure of restraint in attempting a literal translation, not a particularly striking observation.

If a flexible principle of restraint is paramount, then I would have to say that Briggs's translation may well be the most satisfying of the three since it tends to weave a path of restraint between the Maudes and Pevear and Volokhonsky. If one may argue that the Maudes tend to ignore many nuances in favor of Victorian smoothness, while Pevear and Volokhonsky's extreme of “bumpy” literalness achieves almost the same result, Briggs's often bold attempts to capture nuance without viciously interfering in the text must be applauded. I can think of no more difficult course, for it is quite clear that Briggs has an eye for the shifts in Tolstoy's

thought that neither of his other translators do, and that he tries his level best to convey those shifts without having to add a raft of annotations.¹⁴ This is an admirable approach that dispenses both with the aggression and pathos of fidelity that have become commonplaces of the modern art of translation.

Unfortunately, however, the matter cannot be concluded there. For, if Briggs does show a generally superior sensitivity to many conceptual nuances in the reflections, he is also inexplicably cavalier, if not just plain wrong, regarding the translation of relatively straightforward words in too many places. In Chapter IX of the Second Part of the Epilogue, for example, he makes two problematic choices, both essentially wrong. At the very beginning of the chapter, he translates *представление* with “sensation,” a translation for which I can find no justification. He then translates the same word in the following paragraph as “impression,” failing to make an obvious link—such repetitions being the hallmark of Tolstoy’s linking style—and thereby distorting the argument still further. These stumbles at the beginning of the chapter are reinforced by another at the end: Briggs translates *науки опытные*, “experimental sciences” as “biological sciences,” confusing the genus with the species. Now, one could be generous and attribute these stumbles to interpretive license, showing the danger of too aggressive intervention in the text which, as I have noted, is the risk a translator runs by engaging in paraphrase. Briggs does run this risk, frequently with success, but the existence of questionable translations alongside the better ones cannot be overlooked and compels me to give far more tortured advice than I would have liked.

The most literal and generally accurate of all three translations in regard to the reflections is that of Pevear and Volokhonsky. Since the literalness of this translation is not always revelatory, however, and the accuracy not infrequently edges toward an idiolect, the Maude translation still

retains a certain charm and authority: its phrasing is clearer even if it reflects the conventions of late Victorian prose. Briggs, the most audacious of the three, is also the hardest to judge. While his audacity is admirable and important to the extent that Briggs opens up aspects of the use of terms in the reflections not accessible in the other two translations, he also tends to err, a perhaps necessary but nonetheless disquieting consequence of his audacity.

Notes

1. The unfortunate myth that Tolstoy was somehow an astute if clumsy autodidact—a Pierre Bezukhov—still carries too much authority. One of Tolstoy’s deadliest responses to this view may be found in *Anna Karenina* in the first chapter of Book VIII. Silence was Tolstoy’s other response, a perfectly appropriate one.
2. I should like to make it clear that I am not advocating reading Tolstoy as an “esoteric” writer in the sense given that term by Leo Strauss and his acolytes. Strauss’s distinction between exoteric and esoteric levels of meaning in a text, the founding fiction or noble lie of his approach to philosophy, is ultimately so arbitrary—who decides what is exoteric and what is esoteric, and by which criteria?—as to obscure the simple fact that worthy texts create many different levels of meaning once one gets past enumeration of the most trivial facts. Translations should of course pay close attention to the multiplicity latent in any text, but they can only “incline not necessitate”: they can only try to be more sensitive to the original to bring out its range of meaning more adequately.
3. Gilles Deleuze, of all people, speaks of Tolstoy’s “non-style,” comparing Tolstoy to Beckett, a surprising and astute comparison. See Deleuze 370.
4. One may take umbrage at my attribution of such ideas as the calculus to the “narrator,” as ostensive author of the reflections. Some have done so claiming that I put a mask on the obvious author, Tolstoy, when there is no need or warrant to do so. But the fact is that the reflections are woven into a fictional text

where the narrator cannot be assumed to be any less a character or mask of the author than any of the other characters. One does not write novels if one wishes to speak directly, and one does not embed reflections within novels if one seeks to speak directly. Even the comic writer, who in a *parekbasis* reveals his identity, thus breaking the fictional compact, partakes of that compact in breaking it—there is no guarantee of “reality,” of some truth external to the text.

5. One may of course argue that “freedom from” is also purposive, and that is surely the case: teleology cannot be evaded so easily. But it is also surely the case that to reduce will to a striving not to restrict oneself is to engage in a radical dismantling of will whereby will somehow wills its own end—is that not what the will to complete “freedom from” must come to?

6. I use the standard Maude translation here, as elsewhere in this article, since it offers and has long offered a reliable starting point for the kind of investigation I engage in here. All page numbers refer to that edition unless otherwise indicated.

7. Schopenhauer 10. Translation modified.

8. Heidegger calls this sort of response *Sorge*, or care. See Heidegger 178-83.

9. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* at 72b7-16. Also see Jorge Luis Borges’s rather cunning short essay on the infinite, “Avatars of the Tortoise,” in which he remarks that the argument against an infinite causal chain arises directly from Aristotle’s famous critique of Plato, the so-called “Third Man” argument. See Borges 110-11.

10. See Michael Hallett 32-48.

11. Kant 193-94

12. Nietzsche 66. Translation modified.

13. Nabokov 127.

14. I might note in conclusion that this tendency is not untypically English. If one takes into account the two most recent translations of *Don Quixote*, one by John Rutherford, a professor at Oxford, the other by Edith Grossman, a celebrated translator residing in New York, a remarkable similarity emerges. While Rutherford is unafraid of glossing the original, Grossman strives to attain a fidelity that verges on the kind of dangerous fidelity occasionally practiced by Pevear and Volokhonsky.

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