Political (Mis)Use of Translation: Poetry Pseudotranslations in Occupied France (1940-44)

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During the German Occupation of France (1940-44), literature in French was produced alongside translations of foreign authors. The latter, supported by the *Aktion Übersetzung* ("Action Translation"), were particularly favoured for both cultural and ideological reasons, as demonstrated by the programme of prioritized translations ("liste Matthias") launched under the aegis of the *Institut Allemand de Paris* from the very end of 1940, that aimed at translating around 500 German works into French across all areas, including literature, history, philosophy, law, and art. Almost half of these were effectively completed by 1944.

Poetry and poetry translations featured prominently in the literature of the period, as several studies already conducted within the TSOcc research program have shown:[1] as they were easily memorizable and distributable, and could contain encrypted allusions that were undetectable by the layman, French and foreign poems were amongst the immaterial weapons in the resistance in France, both legally and clandestinely. This paper, which draws upon previous studies of poetry pseudotranslation in France,[2] discusses the potential political uses of supposed poetic and fictional translations during World War II. If pseudotranslation may have been used in times of war to compensate for the lack of available literary texts, the poems that were pseudo-translated provide a fascinating testimony of the concerted construction of an image of the "Foreign," the fictional product necessarily having to reproduce some of its typical traits in order to convince the reader of its authenticity. They also allow the questioning of poetic pseudotranslation as a powerful vector of stereotypes, whilst approaching as much as possible the ideological stakes of writing under constraints.

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1. *L'Honneur des poètes II—Europe* (1944): Context

The anthology *L'Honneur des poètes II—Europe* was clandestinely released by the Éditions de Minuit in May 1944. It is a sequel to the initial work *L'Honneur des poètes*, published in July 1943 under the direction of Pierre Seghers, Paul Eluard, and Jean Lescure, who collected poems by twenty-two authors writing under pseudonyms, including Eluard, Aragon, Tardieu, Desnos, Guillevic, and Ponge.[3] The Éditions de Minuit, founded in 1941 in the Paris underground by Jean Bruller and Pierre de Lescure, already had several prestigious texts in its catalogue in 1944, including its first release, *Le Silence de la Mer* by Vercors (alias Jean Bruller), which had a considerable impact in France and abroad. The project of honouring poets was certainly in tune with the times in a France thirsty for poetry, as Lottman highlights: "Dans les jours qui suivirent l'entrée des Allemands à Paris, les gens se précipitèrent sur les œuvres classiques, et particulièrement la poésie—'une patrie, c'est surtout un langage'" (265).[4]

Nevertheless, *L'Honneur des poètes II—Europe* cannot be simply understood as the continuum of the initial publishing project of 1943; the May 1944 volume is doubly original. On the one hand, it is a question of opening the floor not only to French poets but also to European ones, as demonstrated by the title of the work. Moreover, upon the completion of the book, Lescure declared, "Il faut insister sur cette grande idée de l'Europe" (qtd. in Lachenal 46).[5] On the other hand, it is obvious that this European opening also adheres to political and ideological incitations:[6]

> L'idée d'Europe est venue à Paul lorsque nos sentiments internationalistes ont rencontré le développement des nationalismes et le rôle prodigieusement moteur qu'ils jouaient dans la Résistance. […] Quand nous nous en sommes avisés, il fallait prévenir les conséquences désastreuses de la victoire des nationalismes. On se souvenait de Versailles. D'où l'Europe. Non pas comme politique, plutôt comme fraternité. (qtd. in Landes 54)[7]

What drives and preoccupies Lescure and Eluard, the organizers of the anthology, is not simply their engagement against fascism, but also the rise of nationalism in the ranks of the resistance poets themselves, such as Aragon's defence of "French Europe" invoked in *Fontaine* in his famous "Leçon de Ribérac" (1941) in contrast to Eluard's support of a "people's Europe." It was already evident that poetry is not simply there "for itself," but also serves precise political purposes; it can be, perhaps, the most efficient of propaganda weapons.

While collecting texts for *L'Honneur des poètes II*, Eluard was undercover in the Lozère region (Saint Alban), in Dr. Bonnafé's clinic, as he had been since October 1943. Collecting the poems, indeed finding foreign poets, including Greek, Polish, and Serbian authors, was difficult, especially at a time when communication, particularly communication abroad, was practically impossible. On multiple occasions, Eluard and Lescure expressed the worries they were facing in bringing their project to fruition:

> Mais c'est horriblement difficile d'avoir des poèmes étrangers. Crois-tu que tu pourrais en chercher ou en faire chercher ? Il faudrait surtout la Norvège, la Hollande, la Grèce, la Croatie, l'Italie, la Bohême-Moravie. (qtd. in Lottman 46)[8]

> Faites-lui parvenir, de préférence en mains propres, votre poème (urgent) pour le 2e vol. de *L'Honneur des Poètes*. Egalement *toutes suggestions* à ce sujet. Il y aura des poèmes étrangers. Il m'en faudrait un, polonais. (qtd. in Scheler 291)[9]

> Cette préface? Cette réunion de poèmes? François en a-t-il trouvé de périphériques? (qtd. in Scheler 293)[10]

> F. m'a promis des poèmes polonais. Il me faut à tout prix des grecs et des hollandais, des beaux. […] Ce fascicule s'annonce bien. (qtd. in Scheler 323)[11]

A quick glance at the table of contents of the collection shows that, despite its European ambition, the volume still mainly contained examples of French poetry. Nine European countries—Greece, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Norway, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Italy, and Belgium—are represented, with an average of one poem from each country, except for Bulgaria with two and Belgium with six:

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As part of their collecting efforts, Eluard and his colleagues called upon contacts dating from the pre-war surrealist period, foreign poets still living in Paris or in France, such as Monny de Boully, Amy Balakoff, Georges Spyridakis (nephew of the Greek Prime Minister E. Venizelos), Bonalumi, Marcel Thiry, or Pierre Seghers.[12] But in November 1943, they still required poems from Norway, Holland, Czechoslovakia, and Poland:

> Le rassemblement de ces poèmes a été difficile. D'abord nous n'avions aucun moyen de prospecter la poésie européenne. Il fallait nous contenter des européens vivant à Paris ou, en tout cas, en France. Ils n'étaient pas forcément poètes. Nous dûmes convenir assez vite que le projet était irréalisable. C'est sans vergogne que l'on entreprit de faire écrire par des Français des poèmes étrangers. (Lescure, qtd. in Landes 139)[13]

From this letter, we learn that Eluard directly ordered a "Norwegian poem" from Robert Desnos, André Frénaud provided the Czech and Polish poems (see Scheler 323; Landes 55), and Eluard improvised as the Dutch poet.[14] This use of pseudotranslation by French poets to compensate for the lack of texts is bittersweet when one remembers that the initial purpose of this volume was to transcend French conventions and open up to a truly European dimension. However, and particularly in times of war, can one create a credible foreign poem with political purposes in mind? What are the characteristics of these literary fakes that constitute them as "translations" in their own right?

2. Poetry, Politics, and Pseudotranslation

To support the idea that one is reading a "real" translation, and to defuse any possible suspicion straightaway, there is nothing more efficient than to add "translated by…" This is not a new phenomenon, as demonstrated in the nineteenth century by Prosper Mérimée and the poems of his *Guzla*, attributed to the so-called Illyrian bard Hyacinthe Maglanovitch.[15] Here also, each "false" translator systematically indicates the imagined foreign origin for each poem. Faced with urgency, the editors did not even take time to imagine the names of these supposedly foreign authors. The table of contents shows that the Polish and Norwegian poems are attributed to an anonymous deportee, while the Czech and Dutch poems are labelled only with an X. Only the non-fiction writers—Monny de Boully, Amy Bakaloff, and Georges Spyridakis—are identified, sometimes with pseudonyms. For example, Marcel Thiry and Pierre Seghers are respectively identified as Alain de Meuse and Robert Ruyters, the latter being the patronymic of a famous Dutch general. What are the characteristics of these four pseudotranslations, both in terms of content and form?

The first poem, from Poland, is entitled "Tout a goût de cendre" ("Everything tastes of ash"):

POLOGNE

TOUT A GOÛT DE CENDRE

Tout a goût de cendre chez nous,
Les cendres assaisonnent notre maigre soupe,
Nous les mâchons et remâchons
Nos ruines et nos souvenirs.

Mais il y a temps pour les souvenirs
Et bien peu de temps, camarades,
Pour préparer demain.
Nos jours sont trop courts pour la lutte.

Il n'est deuil si cruel qui ne s'éclaire,
Larmes de pleureuses que la vengeance ne sèche,
Criminels qui ne rencontrent leur bourreau.
Nous fermerons l'horizon
Et déjà l'envahisseur tremble et s'inquiète
De ce goût de cendre qu'il a, lui aussi, dans la bouche.
Déjà l'envahisseur tremble et s'inquiète
Du masque de cendre posé sur le visage de la Pologne.

Camarades, tenez-vous prêts!
Nous arracherons le masque sombre.
Les temps de la Pologne sont proches
Et ceux d'Allemagne sont déjà révolus!

(*Traduit du polonais.*)

This poem alludes to a context of destruction. The text is written in heterometric verse, which does not formally distinguish it from the other poems in the collection. Here, the notable element is the effect of geographical distance: the "chez nous" of the speaker, to be understood as opposing the "here" (in France), is explained several verses later in the expression "sur le visage de la Pologne" ("on Poland's face"). There is both a will for distancing from and inscribing in the present: the allusions to war and to its consequences are numerous—"lutte" ("battle"), "deuil" ("grieving"), "criminels" ("criminals"), "bourreau" ("torturer"), "envahisseur" ("invader")—and in the last two verses, the two antagonists are clearly named: "Les temps de la Pologne sont proches / Et ceux de l'Allemagne sont déjà révolus!" ("The time for Poland is near / And that of Germany is already over!")

The poem "Prague," labelled as "traduit du tchèque" ("translated from Czech"), mixes prose and free verse. Its narrator seems to wander through the streets of Prague thinking about "le Destin" ("Destiny"), "l'absurde ardeur de la vie" ("the absurd ardour of life"), "l'injustice," "la trahison" ("treason"), "la Haine" ("hatred"). The poetic voice is ambiguous: at times "je," at others "nous," the narrative voice

seems to be that of a Praguer familiar with the names of the places he evokes, such as "Mala Strana," "les Dientzenhoffer," or "l'église de Matthieu d'Arras."[16] However, the poem could also express the experience of a tourist discovering the Czech capital. Here as well, the spatial distance and exotic effects prove important to support the foreignness of the poem, whose backdrop invokes pessimism and anguish.

The following poem, more concise than the previous examples, is "Ramage," presented as "traduit du néerlandais" ("translated from Dutch"). Composed of three strophes of irregular lengths in free verse, the poem has a more optimistic tone; the lexical fields of both fertility—"comme un fruit entre le ciel"—and maturity "Tu es celui qui mûrit/Et qui prospère"—stand out noticeably here. It affirms the primacy of life, as in the lines "Nos enfants seront sauvés / Avec eux la vie grandit" ("Our children will be saved / With them life grows"), in a context that is still not devoid of threat. Indeed, the final three verses introduce a dissonance of a more political tone: the double anaphor of "malheur à qui" ("woe to him") and the final word in its climax, "l'Enfer" ("hell"), seem to suggest that happiness and harmony on earth are fragile goods, for which relentless engagement and struggle are necessary.

The fourth poem, "La ferme" ("The Farm"), represents Norway. This poem tragically depicts a farm whose inhabitants and animals have been exterminated, the perpetrators of these crimes clearly identified as "les Allemands." The lexical field is full of violence, blood, shouting, and revenge. The reader follows all the more the poetic voice of a "je" that is intended as autobiographical, as evidenced by the recurring phrase "le chemin de notre ferme" ("the path of our farm"), and written in a certain "couleur locale." Examples of the latter include "le solide couteau de Norvège" ("the hard knife of Norway"), "le jour du solstice" ("the day of Solstice"), and "les moissons et les fêtes de mon pays" ("the harvests and feasts of my country"). The historical context of the brutal invasion of Norway by Germany in April 1940 makes this scene realistic, as does the hope of revenge and, finally, of getting back to normal, which is formulated at the very end.

These four poems share certain points that support their being "translations." On the one hand, as we have seen, there is the reference "traduit de" supported by the staging of geographical *realia*, notably thanks to toponyms); on the other, the first-person narrator "je" ("I") bears all the traits of a "local" speaker and thus sounds foreign to a French audience. It is essentially on this effect of exoticism that the authors rely to convince the readers of the authenticity of these "foreign poems." More than as translations, Jean Lescure spoke of them as "textes-pastiches," thus underscoring their being "ironical fakes" (Landes 139).[17] Lescure probably had in mind the important production of resistance poems, sometimes of poor quality, that appeared underground and which various clandestine journals echoed at the time. The three "pseudopoets," Frénaud, Eluard, and Desnos, probably also imitated and mocked implicitly here the tone of some—second-rate—militant texts that denounced the German atrocities and called to fight.

Nevertheless, these particular kinds of translations often betray their "real" ori-

gins. For instance, André Frénaud, author of the so-called Polish and Czech poems, who privileges long texts in his own work—sometimes close to "versets" and often switching with no transition to prose—has proceeded in the same way in his poem on Prague, supported moreover by his real knowledge of the Czech capital. Eluard prefers concise and slightly litanic repetitions, as well as unexpected imagery such as "Terre moirée, irisée / Gaie comme un coq" ("Moiré, iridescent Earth / Gay as a cockerel"), which is not without recalling the famous "La terre est bleue comme une orange" ("The Earth is blue like an orange") from his surrealist years (in *L'Amour la poésie*, 1929). The surrealist stamp can be even more clearly felt with Desnos's use of expressions such as "l'été aux larges yeux" ("the large-eyed summer"), "l'hiver aux paupières closes" ("the shut-eyed winter"), and "l'été aux longs regards" ("the long looking summer") to create a striking literary interference in a poem that presents itself as a translation from Norwegian. We find in this poem a good example of an "authorial intertextuality" between two texts in fact produced by the same author, fully in line with the authorial strategies usually ascribed to self-translations.[18] Even under the mask, Desnos remains deeply, stylistically speaking, Desnos. He even seems to have got over his task as a "translator" by introducing only a few, rather unconvincing, references to the Scandinavian world. One feels that urgency has taken precedence in the creation of these texts, with Frénaud going as far as suggesting to Eluard to recycle in a rush one of his own poems written in 1938 at the time of the Sudeten affair, when Hitler annexed the German-speaking territory of Czechoslovakia to his Reich, and to falsely attribute it to a Czech poet of their entourage. Not content with being *in fine* a fictitious translation, the "Czech poem" was in fact written by four hands: Frénaud, who had been in Prague a few years beforehand, provided the essential material of the text (Prague's *realia*) while Eluard brought in some finishing touches,[19] "ce qu'il a fait en supprimant la moitié du texte original et ajoutant quelques vers pour terminer en vue de rendre l'attribution vraisemblable" (qtd. in Landes 55),[20] the whole poem being finally attributed to a "poet" whose name is not quoted. The trickery is complete.

However, and in spite of what Paul Eluard and Jean Lescure announced and intensely desired in their correspondence, anti-fascist German poets remain unaccounted for in the *Europe* volume, not even appearing in pseudotranslations. How can this be explained? Do we see here the hand of Louis Aragon, author of the preface, who exalted the "voix française" and for whom the presence of German writers in a French collection could have been problematic? It seems that at that time already, the ideological stranglehold of the communists on the Résistance had become a reality, to the point that Jean Lescure had ironically suggested to Eluard that the volume should be called "Tandis que j'aragonise" (see Landes 139).[21] In fact, Lescure considered the possibility of Aragon's omitting German poets from the definitive manuscript as a "hypothèse plausible" (see Landes 140). Still, German poetry appears in the collection where one does not expect it: in the epigraphs chosen for the poem "Par-dessus le toit" ("Over the roof") by La Valentine (alias Gabriel Audisio), in

which each sequence is accompanied by a short quotation from German writers such as Uhland, Hölderlin, Schiller, Goethe, Lenau, or Bürger:

IX

Und immer höher schwoll die Flut.
(Et le flot montait de plus en plus haut.)
Bürger.

Celui de la colère, et plus il montait, plus
Ce flot nous élevait sur les iniquités.
Pas un soir qui ne tombe avec du plomb fondu
Jusqu'au niveau de la fenêtre, et nous nous en irons
Sur les coulées du feu sans en être brûlés
Pour devenir les anges purificateurs,
Les précurseurs, les messagers de la brûlure.

Should this be read as an indirect tribute to the poetic German soul of the Romantic period, which the Nazi regime did not hesitate to exploit for its own sake? A few texts initially planned for *L'Honneur des poètes II* may also have found their way into the anthology *Les Bannis* (*The Banished*), published in 1944 by the Éditions de Minuit and exclusively devoted to German poets, such as Heinrich Heine, who had been censored out of the "official" anthology of German poetry in French released by Stock one year earlier.[22] In the same way, the *Eternelle Revue*, created underground in late 1944 by Eluard and edited by Louis Parrot, would continue publishing translations of Heinrich Heine, Erich Kästner, Stephan Hermlin, and many other unjustly ostracized German poets, thus "redeeming" the "Honneur" of these writers.

In the end, both poetry and translation were clearly hostages of intentions that superseded them. Poetry had been on the cutting edge of the literary life of wartime France, according to Jean Ballard's opinion that a "dimension inconnue du verbe lui permet de circuler sans passeport à travers les miroirs du monde visible" (qtd. in Paire 258).[23] However, both poetry and translation, which were sometimes meant to build a certain image of the Foreign, especially German,[24] have often been deliberately (mis)used for political purposes.[25] This is especially true of the four pseudotranslations in the collection, whose strategic role in the "Europe" section of the volume should not be underestimated. The real stake of *L'Honneur des poètes II* was indeed to impress the Germans by making them believe in the existence of an "internationale de poètes" in all of the countries occupied by them, ready to speak up and rise against their common enemy. In this perspective, it did not matter whether the translated texts were authentic or not: the main point was to "make many" of them and to offer to the readers the largest palette of foreign countries possible.

However, Paul Eluard's and Jean Lescure's initiative missed its target. Hampered by several problems and shortcomings, suffering from hand-to-hand distribution to avoid interception by the post, and coinciding unexpectedly with D-Day in Normandy on June 6, 1944 and all the excitement that followed, the volume had

little critical echo in France, with the exception of one review by Jean Lescure in *Les Lettres françaises* in June 1944, which focuses more on the still-imprisoned French poets such as Robert Desnos and Jean Cassou than on the so-called "foreign poets." A page of history was turned, and the new priorities of the time called for other actions in which the role of poetry proved definitely less important or strategic than before.

Notes

1. The international research program TSOcc (Traductions sous l'Occupation, France-Belgium 1940-44), supported by the Institut Universitaire de France (IUF), is ongoing at Nantes University under our supervision (www.tsocc.univ-nantes.fr). Several articles dealing with the role of poetry translation in times of war have already been published, including Lombez, "D'une anthologie l'autre" and "Translating German Poetry into French under the Occupation," and Tautou, "Traduire et éditer R.M. Rilke sous l'Occupation."

2. See, for instance, Lombez, "La Traduction fictive," "Dissimulation et assimilation poétiques."

3. Lescure's and Eluard's parallel project to produce a new anthology gave rise to *Domaine français*, published in Switzerland by the Éditions des Trois Collines in late 1943 and reprinted several times before the Liberation.

5. "It is necessary to insist upon this great idea of Europe" (Letter from Jean Lescure to François Lachenal from early 1944).

6. In his foreword, François la Colère (alias Louis Aragon) also insists on the threat on civilization represented by a National-Socialist vision of Europe (8-9). Such a vision was echoed, for instance, in AlfredFabre-Luce's collaborationist *Anthologie de la Nouvelle Europe* published by Plon in 1942.

7. "The idea of Europe came to Paul when our internationalist feelings met the development of nationalisms and the prodigiously leading role that they played in the Resistance […] When we became aware of it, it was necessary to prevent the disastrous consequences of the victory of nationalisms. We remembered Versailles. Where Europe came from. Not as politics, more like a fraternity."

8. "But it is terribly difficult to get foreign poems. Do you think that you could search for or get someone to search for some? We mainly need Norway, Holland, Greece, Croatia, Italy and Bohemia and Moravia" (Letter from Jean Lescure to François Lachenal).

9. "Send him, your poem (urgent) for the second volume of L'Honneur des Poètes, preferably by hand. Also any suggestions on this subject. There will be foreign poets. I need a Pole" (Letter from Paul Eluard to L. Parrot, November 1943).

10. "This preface? This gathering of poems? Has François found any outsiders?" (Letter from Paul Eluard to Jean Lescure.) By "périphériques," Eluard means poems by anti-Nazi German poets or refugees near the French border, notably Switzerland, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

11. "F. promised me Polish poets. I really need Greek and Dutch ones, great ones. This booklet is looking good" (Letter from Paul Eluard to Jean Lescure).

12. Cf. Landes 54-55.

13. "Bringing together these poems was difficult. First of all we had no means of prospecting for European poetry. We had to content ourselves with Europeans living in Paris, or in any case, in France. They were not necessarily poets. We also had to agree early on the fact that the project was unachievable. It

is without shame that we began to have foreign poems written by French people."

14. Cf. Scheler 323 (note 1): "Quant aux poèmes hollandais, […] ce fut Eluard qui en écrivit un titré *Ramage*" (As far as Dutch poems are concerned […] it was Eluard who wrote one entitled *Ramage*).

15. On the role of poetry pseudotranslations in France, see Lombez, "La Traduction fictive."

16. Frénaud alludes here to the St. Vitus cathedral in Prague.

17. According to Gérard Genette's well-known approach in *Palimpsestes*, a pastiche is a hypertextual practice, a rewriting implying a second-degree reading, which Translation Studies has only lately taken into account. Edwin Gentzler insists, for instance, on the necessity of an "extended corpus" expanding the definition of what can be considered as a "translation," thus including this kind of literary practice. Without a doubt, pseudotranslation strategies could be further investigated in that respect.

18. Cf. Lombez, "Quand les poètes s'autotraduisent." See also Grutman and Ferraro.

19. The final stanza of the poem, obviously penned by Eluard, who enjoyed both emphasis and striking oppositions, reads: "Prague, nos rêves les plus profonds, nos rêves de toujours, cache-les un instant dans le cœur noir de ton clair avenir."

20. Which he did by deleting half of the original text and adding a few verses at the end, so as to make the attribution likely.

21. The pun on Aragon's name is obvious here, as well as the allusion, for a French reader, to Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying* (*Tandis que j'agonise*, translated in France in 1934).

22. Cf. Lombez, "Pour l'honneur des poètes allemands."

23. "Unknown dimension of the word that allows it to travel without a passport through the mirrors of the visible world."

24. The choice of contemporary German poets translated in the *Anthologie bilingue de la poésie allemande des origines à nos jours*, for instance, was intended, in line with the NS ideology, to praise the "real" German values of courage, strength, attachment to the homeland, and loyalty to the Führer. Interestingly, the image of the Germans found in the corpus of pseudotranslations discussed here is negative: they are mostly depicted as mass murderers, especially in the poems said to originate in Poland and Norway.

25. Cf. Tautou, "Traduire et éditer R.M. Rilke," *Histoire des (re-)traductions et des (re-)traducteurs de la poésie de Rainer Maria Rilke dans l'espace francophone*; see also Kalinowski; Lombez, "Traduire la poésie étrangère en temps de guerre."

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