

THE GHOST WHO CAME FROM BABEL: ON THE SUBJECT OF NON-TRANSLATION

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As far as linguistic “com-munication” is concerned, the “global” has a double, largely contradictory aspect: exhaustive cataloguing, or a potential interaction of meaning in or from all languages, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a unitarian and totalitarian reduction of all meanings to the means of one single language, real or virtual. After the Mallarmean “defect”, “lack” or “failing” of languages due to their severalness, another gap now undermines the linguistic field, and this is the threatening loss of that very plurality, “logodiversity”, to the growing hegemony of English. We are no longer struck by an a-semantic con-fusion of languages, by the anomy of the terms of exchange, that the thundering word of God objecting to the promiscuity of human knowledge has made arbitrary and opaque. The so-called “free-trade” requirement of unlimited convertibility of all currencies to monistic English (*m*)*unus*, makes these currencies redundant, “superfluous” and obsolete: there is no interest in exchanging one peso for one dollar, or vice versa, when *peso* has become just another name for *dollar*. In such a space of “com-munication” or “Commonwealth” —absolute equivalence or synonymy—, no exchange whatsoever is needed or indeed possible: colourless green notes sleep furiously. Beyond history, in the realm of simultaneity and ubiquity, the materiality of the completely transparent signifier is effaced by the fixed signified, itself reduced to a standard, listed denotation. Storage replaces story, compression replaces comprehension.

Translation has never been as fast, secure and easy as it is now, because everything is at hand in the one place. There is no spacing out, no interlinguistic vacuum across which weighty signifiers might be translated and could resist displacement. Perfect instant translation, which characterizes the sphere of reference of the virtual, is the latest avatar and/or simulacrum of *non*-translation: all obstacles being supposedly removed, the agent or agents of its effortless, magic operation, are rendered invisible. Located behind us in a glass cabin along with the machines and the wiring, they unload the substitute interchangeable text directly into our brains through the earphones or earplugs. Is there a subject of such non-translation, or rather

do we need it and do we construct it at all? Who, where and on what conditions could presently make sense of it? And, if we do meet and recognize such a subject, how is our other face going to face it, how will it fare against it? The (possible) present subject of non-translation appears, in its very concept, as a startlingly undeleted trace of oblivion, returning from the repressed, a ghost from Babel. If we do not want it to write our destinies under hand, we should serve some difficult questions on it: if we let it question us, it will force us to share its pre-historical wisdom or die. But a ghost is never completely new, it is an appearance of past appearances, that somebody somehow has forgotten or pretends to have forgotten.

What I shall therefore attempt in this paper is first of all to track and revive some other, past ghosts from Babel belonging to different but not totally heterogeneous chronotopes, in order to restore a family tree, however discontinuous, for that shapeless, silencing "Thing" that haunts and blurs our present conversation, as it tries to dis-simulate its interlinguistic nature and thus make it superfluous and vane.

Has anyone noticed that I am speaking/writing in English? Is it a problem, a solution, mere fact, or yet an indifferent state of things?

Where definitions are unfortunately lacking or, even more unhappily, tend to proliferate, induced by a circular propensity, I shall start again from an anecdote and a few paradoxes and *topoi*.

The Anecdote:

Some thirteen years ago in Valencia, soon after the first Gulf war, as my friend Jenaro Talens was presenting a session of the "Speed and Communication" international conference of which he was the co-convenor for the UIMP, he suddenly ripped off the simultaneous translation headphones he was wearing and shouted angrily: "¿Que esto no funciona? ¿No hay traducción?" He had not realised that these were his first words in Spanish: there was no need for a translation into English; a translation of his speech into English had not been *possible*, since he had been speaking in English all the time! Retrospectively, a few months later, I introduced the published version of my own paper, "proto-history", with these words:

One of the reasons why this paper is written in English is that simultaneous translation is at work in all possible utterances in the contemporary information framework. English, when spoken before a Spanish audience and simultaneously translated, widens the gap that exists between Spanish and Spanish, perhaps enough to make this gap perceptible as an obstacle to communication.

In fact, is not actual translation, or at least the space-sharing of two texts that purport to cover the same semantic field, the only contrastive device that allows a text to become distinct and thus communicable?

Paradoxes and Topoi (two non mutually exclusive categories of statements):

1. The practical difficulty and theoretical impossibility of "translation" have efficiently combined to make its *denotatum* extremely elusive, whether as performance or as perception. Not only does the rating or grading of texts-as-translations suffer from an extreme relativism that may lead to sheer undecidability, but even the oft-asked minimal question "Does this qualify as a translation?" cannot be answered but by a profession of doubt: "It depends what you mean by translation...". The subject, an entity for which I am not tempted to burn any candles, is (paradoxically?) triumphant—an all-embracing site of self-fulfilling desire—, when it shows off its power of "dis-knowledge".

Now, if we want to work our way around this quagmire of uncertainty—a far from candid patch of self-confessed ignorance on the part of practitioners and critics alike—, we might try to narrow down our focus on the thus far informal object of inquiry by using the hard shovel of obversion. We shall ask: "What is it that cannot, in any case, qualify as translation?"; or, in a more classificatory manner: "If there are two bags each for texts and operations of text-production, what can we definitely and without rescue put in the bags of non-translation?". This question involves the elucidation of some positive qualities of the objects selected, so that any object that is "a" and/or "b" is non-x. To put a simple example, we could propose that any textual object which is in no respect *similar* to another separate object is not a translation of the latter. We could also propose that an object which is in any respect *identical* to another separate object is not in this respect a translation of the latter (not any more than the latter can be a translation of the former). Multiples, perfect individual copies, twins, and mirror images all fall into this category. Non-translation would at least include the two domains of radical dissimilarity and identity, plus the class of objects without

others (“hapaxes”) and the class of embedded and embedding objects (objects in a synecdochic relation).

We should note that, according to the criterion of non-identity “in any respect”, a perfect translation, whose semantic and/or aesthetic effects would be identical to those of another text, could not be its translation. This conclusion will perhaps ring an exhilarating note for some translators, a depressing one for others, but its purpose is merely to stress, without any value judgment attached, that the act of translation has somewhat of a self-defeating ultimate goal. If its subject, who or whatever it is, therefore appears as subject of and to effacement, does it mean that, conversely, the subject of non-translation should produce itself as a subject of “self-proferment”? This is one of the strings of thought that we shall encounter again later in this paper.

2. It is clear that both translation and non-translation can only be conceptualized in relational terms, between two texts of which one can be posited as having logical or temporal precedence over the other. But this precedence is doubly threatened by the very instant ubiquity of translation as a universal model of communication that supersedes older ones, such as tradition, handing down (down the lane of time and the chain of generations) or revelation (reception and acceptance from a pre-existing repository of knowledge). Translation as smooth sliding and easy fitting into a lateral slot: replacement while you wait —and you have to wait so little that you won’t even be able to gulp your instant coffee in real time. On the one hand, there is no original (the “other” text, strictly contemporary to the text in question, the text in the class, if you want, cannot stand for an origin of it). On the other hand, there are only originals (self-originated, self-produced and self-referring texts). Thanks to omnidirectional intertextuality, all texts not only contain links, but are exclusively made of links to all other texts equally made of links to all other texts, which, in internet jargon, means that:

a) they all loop back on each other in a stochastic manner, just like bad dictionaries;

b) they eventually turn out to be all the same, i. e., there is only one single, infinitely reversible and reshapable text, Vac’s logo, the *logos* of Vac,¹ divine again, vacuumed and ultimately void, inhospitable to the human subject.

¹ A favorite metaphor of Rukmini Bhaya Nair, running through her strikingly interdisciplinary book, *Narrative Gravity: Conversation, Cognition, Culture*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002.

I am supposed to deliver this paper in English; this paper, as programmed by the conveners, is supposed to be delivered by me in English. As far as this paper as programmed is concerned, I am thus supposed to be a speaker, writer, thinker of/in English. Talking of translation, not talking in translation. Does it mean that this paper is an example of non-translation and I am its subject?

The answer is not simple even from the point of view of the self-conscious or self-analytical speaker, as Douglas Hofstadter shows it so well in his chapter "How Jolly the Lot of an Oligoglot",² let alone from the standpoint of the hearer, whether she/he is a fluent communicator in English or not, and moderately or extensively plurilingual or not.

In any case, the possible applicability of the non-translation label, with all its hermeneutic and pragmatic consequences —yet to be explored, is not primarily dependent upon the relative mastery of a language medium by the interactively involved actors of a particular act of text-based communication. It can arise whenever it is believed or a suspicion is raised that another text, in a different linguistic medium and relevant to the production and full exploitation of the present one, exists somewhere or may or should have existed somewhere at some time; and its relation to the present text is not treated correctly by the speaker of the latter, or its very existence is either unduly hidden or falsely implied, suggested or stated. Keeping this in mind, I shall draw a first, non-exhaustive list of seven apparently heterogeneous categories of acts of speech that are likely candidates to the status of non-translations.

1) all segments marked and/or perceived as linguistically foreign/alien to/within the dominant language of a text, written, oral, or written-oral in any combination;

2) all non-linguistic realia and icons (such as photographs or sounds) within a text that may indifferently be imported into it from a previous location in a source text or from a non-textual reality slice;

3) all occurrences of different languages in a truly bi- or plurilingual text;

4) spurious or apocryphal translations (self-proclaimed translations/versions without a proven source text, with no source text, or with a source text other than the one alleged) as in *Don Quixote*, *Casanova's Icosameron* and Pierre Louys's *Songs of Bilitis*;

² Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Le Ton Beau De Marot: In Praise of the Music of Language*, Basic Books, New York, 1998.

5) quotation/presentation of utterances in a language that is not the one they are known or supposed to have been uttered in (as found in so many travelogues, exotic fictions and documentaries, or in fantasy fiction), dubbing being an extreme example of this case; and the same is true of Julius Cesar's English in Shakespeare, or the French monologue of Don Carlos in Victor Hugo;

6) suppletive translations (for example, the Latin Vulgate of the Bible for the Roman Catholics), that is, texts that are known to be translations but have generally substituted their sources; these sources being lost or inaccessible, or so remotely relegated to the historical background that they are all but forgotten and neglected;

7) gross mishandling or misrepresentation of the source text by the text that purports to translate it: mistranslations (amounting to nonsense, contrary denotative meaning or irrelevant meaning), arbitrary or incoherent genre shifting, uncompensated omissions, and additions or interpolations apparently unmotivated by the will-to-mean of the source-text....

Should we want to determine how the above seven classes differ between them with respect to their ways of negating translation, we would find that there are essentially two main modes of negation: opposition and denial. Some non-translations *reject* the act of translation as unnecessary, impossible, immoral, unaesthetic or counterproductive; others *deny* it, by feigning it, ignoring it, skipping it or overlooking its requirements. Rejection and denial do not crystallize into or with quite the same subject formation. Rejection makes for/goes along with a subject that faces alterity in one way or another and externalizes conflicts, leaving the other where it belongs or welcoming it inside its home without family consent; but denial befits a subject that internalizes conflicts, builds an inner scene to keep the other under control in the fortress or keep it at bay in the vast plain under the walls of the self. We shall get a better view of this as we investigate examples from the list in some detail.

But, thus speaking (in English), am I rejecting or denying translation? Am I opposing, pre-empting the eventual mind transfer of my thoughts into English, by others, that would have been the final fate of this work? Or, by exaggerating as best I can the global-Englishness of my theoretical musings, am I trying to block the return of my thought to a pre-English, pre-global framework that would happen with a French or Spanish translation? Or yet, am I wretchedly denying the myriad acts of self-translation from my precociously as-good-as-complete French into the forever

incomplete English tongue-in-cheekness seceded from the fanfares and fun fairs of the old continent, the myriad acts of self-translation that have hopefully turned me into an unlikely national passport holder? Native or non-native? No longer native or not yet native? Which of the two is a liar and which a traitor? (The liar does not translate, the traitor does: I say that I don't, do I?)

Let me now return to a couple of pinpointable occurrences of non-translation rather than idly gauge its general mood.

A. My first case in point, belonging to class 1 non-translations in my list, will be the presence of linguistically “native”, non-English elements in Indian English or Indo-Anglian prose (fiction, newspaper stories, history, philosophy, criticism, political essays). Many studies of a linguistic and ideological nature have been published on the topic, especially about modern and recent Indo-Anglian fiction (from Narayan to Arundathi Roy). They develop an axiological perspective within a mindset that foregrounds questions of subalternity and empowerment, acculturation and appropriation, identity and hybridity. These “native” elements fall into two main linguistic categories: lexical and grammatical, since the phonetic aspects are detectable only through secondary oral performance. Most grammatical features, such as the erratic use and omission of articles, tend to be considered only from a socio-linguistic point of view, as errors, unconscious violations, symptoms of an insufficient mastery of standard English norms. Perceived as unintended noises, they thus characterize the “Hinglish” text as poor translation, that is a translation evaluated, and failed, as a technical exercise. Conversely, conventional high class English (free of “impurities”) is viewed as stilted, artificial and nostalgic. Just not making it to a high standard is not enough for a failed or a mediocre translation to qualify as non-translation. For the same reason, the lack of grammatical anomalies in the text will enhance the non-translation value of lexical peculiarities such as transcribed words from native languages, live or dead, classical or colloquial, protected or “corrupted”.

In today's Indian cultural sphere, non-English and non-standard English lexemes include words of different origins and formations. There are Vedic/Sanskrit words with reference to the Hinduist religion, philosophy and way of life; there are words from various modern vernacular indigenous languages, with reference to everyday objects, institutions, actions, arts and moods; there are Anglo-Indian (Hobson-Jobson) words with straight or ironical reference to the Raj legacy; there are also pidginised English words

belonging to various historical strata. Part of this vocabulary, for example, the words that designate typical, uniquely Indian plants, animals, food, garments, tools, rituals and arts, has no equivalent in standard English and constitutes non-translation by necessity, because it is "untranslatable" (one could give only periphrastic or analogic descriptions of its *designata*, such as the ones found in glossaries appended to Indian literature for the use of the non-Indian reader; e. g., "Indian bird of the same family as the crow"). If there is any subject of this kind of non-translation, it looks like a transcendent abstract subject, such as the human condition, rather than any concrete human being set in a concrete historical situation and material culture. Another part of this vocabulary has standard English equivalents such as "early morning tea", "Parliament", "temple" or "pitcher": its use appears as probably deliberate and motivated by one or more extra-linguistic considerations (exotic or national positioning of the subject, aesthetic effect, reality effect, populist ideology), often with a touch of overdetermination.

Moreover, this phenomenon occurs indifferently in documents "originally" produced in English (the Indian written press in English, Anglophone Indian literature, pan-Indian political speeches) and in documents given as equivalent English versions of others produced in the native languages. Should we say that it contributes to blur the difference between translation and non-translation? Or rather that non-translation, wherever it occurs, levels the difference between the translator and the receiver of the target text in that it presupposes or requires at least a measure of bi- or plurilingualism in this receiver? I think neither of these descriptions is sufficient or completely true. Non-translation is perhaps salutary in that it casts a shade of unintelligibility on the very languages we believe we know. A particularly interesting case is that of the English translations of U. R. Anantha Murthy's novels, all by prominent translators or co-translators, from Ramanujan to Judih Kroll. Anantha Murthy, beside being the most famous and controversial living Indian writer in a language other than English and a former President of the Sahitya Akademi, is a Professor of English who writes in his native Kannada, the dominant language of Karnataka. The English translations of *Samskara*, *Bharatipura* and *Bhava* maintain a similar proportion of untranslated Indian words, but, while the first one has "rather minimal [end]notes",³ the second displays a large number of footnotes,⁴ and the third leaves many Kannada and other Indian words out of its end glossary. Some

³ Presented by A. K. Ramanujan as "part of the translator's effort to 'translate' and a confession of failures".

(See Anantha Murthy's, *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*, Oxford University Press, 1979, 2nd US edition, p. 149).

⁴ "Prepared with non-Indian readers in mind", writes the project editor of the "Macmillan Indian Novels in Translation" series.

of these words (*tamboora*, *yoni*) are readily intelligible for all Indian readers or even accessible to readers somewhat acquainted with the basic clichés of Indian culture, but many others, such as “have *darshan* of”, “*rudraksha beads*”, or, even worse, “*upma*”, “*kesibarath*” and “*idlis*”, all in the same sentence, will make hard guesswork for most Anglophone readers. In view of the context, the last three words quoted will be semantically reduced to “good home-made things to eat”; the alien, phonetically dubious signifiers will work as joint displaced icons of a delectable but strange experience for the taste buds. Symmetrically, in this passage of *Bhava*, Sitamma, who cooks these delicacies, does not understand the language of her host Tripathi, she needs and has a “constant interpreter”. The reader of the untranslated text elements is not as lucky as Sitamma; semantically orphaned, she/he is forced to pay attention to other aspects of the text, such as rhythm, narrative pattern, and so on. One definite effect of this kind of non-translation is to point to the ultimate strangeness and/or arbitrariness of all languages, and appeal to the uneasy, ghostly consciousness of the linguistic subject that she/he can never be at one with language, that we cannot trust our identity and our integrity to language, that language is just as much the realm of the other as the realm of the self. Here, the model subject of non-translation is a self-conscious one to whom a constitutive lack (*manque*) is restored. This disjointed subjectivity will be torn between a desperate drive to familiarize and reduce infinite otherness (learn all languages, for instance) and the temptation of an unachievable inner silence.

B. For my second example, I have chosen a case that mainly belongs to type 4 in my list (spurious translations) but also spans types 5 and 6 to a certain extent: this is Chrétien de Troyes’ *Conte du Graal*, also known as *Perceval*, a *roman* probably composed circa 1181. My attention has been attracted to it because, with very little knowledge of medieval French, I am presently teaching this piece of literature to students who have on the whole a modest knowledge of modern French and very few sound notions about Western medieval culture at all. We read mainly from one of the many modern French translations, as literal and inelegant as they come, that I can never be sure the students understand or *how* they understand it (remaining uncomfortably immersed under French high seas, or perhaps translating mentally into Arabic, that we do not share, and what variety of Arabic, dialectal or classical?). The teaching context substitutes a wide range of partial, inaccurate, erratic and unstable “translations” or rather non-translations for any source text, if there were one. But there is not even

an authorised source text in *langue d'oïl*, only shorter and longer copies that present many variants. Little is known of the author except the works attributed to him and their approximate dates, attributions that are themselves sometimes far from certain, so that the text of one work cannot even be checked against similarities in another work. What is it that is nevertheless taught and studied? The only possible answer lies —as usual, I believe— in the most vexing interrogation regarding the *Conte*: the writer who calls himself Chrétien in the prologue declares toward the end of his foreword that he has put in French verse as best he could a book of the Grail handed to him by his sponsor Count (*comte*) Phillip of Flanders:

Dont aura bien sauve sa poine / Crestiens qui entant et poine / Par lo camandant lo comte / A arimer lo meillor conte / Qui soit contez en cort real. Ce est li contes do greal / Don li cuens li bailla lo livre. / Or oez commant s'an delivre.⁵

For generations, critics have sought which book this could be. Not finding any trace of it, they have wondered whether such a book could exist in any case and, if it did not and could not, why Chrétien had made up such a fable, such a tale (*conte*) of a *conte du comte*, antecedent to his own *conte pour le comte*. The critics have come up with the necessity, for the credibility and public appreciation of any medieval storyteller, of presenting his new composition as a rewriting or remake of an already extant tale. The writer figure was both shouldered and shielded by a prior text whose *scriptor*, in turn, was only the vector and embellisher of a prior text. The original author of every possible text was God. On the one hand, you cannot but translate from God's word, who speaks/has spoken every word; on the other hand, it is a superhuman task to translate from God's word, only God could do it really well when perfection is required.

Instead of translating, transferring, bringing through the precious book unadulterated, the *scriptor*/reteller will then *rime* it in order to somehow compensate for the loss of pristine purity, simplicity and truth. Contrary to Latin poetry, riming and versifying are one and the same thing in the *roman* vernacular; pace Meschonnic, rhythm and rime or rhyme are one, in word and in deed. Riming, versing, does not adorn and enrich the original text of the tale told at the beginning of times, which can never be improved on, as much as it partly repairs the loss incurred over the passage of time

⁵ *Le Conte du Graal ou Le roman de Perceval*, "Lettres gothiques", Livre de Poche LGF, 1990, p. 30.

and the transfer from a heavenly to a secular space (*cour royale*). Rhyming attempts to make up the damaged *dit* and make up for the damage both by doubling the *dit* and doubling it over, not by duplicating it, which it would be sacrilege, demonic to try and is an impossible task in any case. The *livre*, a story of man as God's creature in the hands of God, is holy; it contains all commandments and the evidence that we have sinned, failed to keep the law, carry through our duty, translate our intentions into deeds, and so on. The *livre* is as heavy as an albatross tied to our neck. *S'en délivrer*, a far from gratuitous syllepsis, means "to free oneself" as in the prayer *délivrez-nous de nos péchés*, just as much as it means "deliver a message through speech". Rhyming, which is also counting the *conte*, is the best we can do to redeem, remunerate, mend or commend the "defect of languages in that they are several", severed from the one language of God's word, a severance that can never be healed by man's travail. Translation drags the dismembered body of the Verb across time and space, takes act of the severance, it confirms it, makes the gaps more gaping. Rhyming does all the opposite, it both reveals the scar in the form of the syllepsis, and sutures the wound, makes e *pluribus unum*. The rhyming couplet, two in one and one in two, so beautiful, should be seen, I think, not merely as a clever strategy for eschewing the difficulties of translation (it has its own pains), but as one of the best formal figures of non-translation, one whose mirror structure evokes the structure of its subject.

Despite the efforts of Romantic and post-Romantic nationalists—in search of literary as well as war heroes—to encapsulate various textual bodies (books, volumes) or aggregates (cycles, collections of fragments) into an individual author's work, and the post-1900 requisites of psycho-biography and psychocriticism, medieval textual production has successfully resisted all endeavours of the sort. It has now become commonplace to note that "whenever, in a prologue or an explicit, an author name appears to claim the paternity [of some text], it does not allow us to identify any subject",⁶ and "the author does not express himself as a subject, he relaunches the narrative or lyric memory of the social group whose interpreter he wants to be".⁷ Nevertheless, if "writing is not to tell oneself, but to take place in literature in order to reset its textual machine",⁸ the subject, in all the above sentences, still pre-exists the "text" or exists on its side, as a pre-linguistic or a-linguistic unsaid or unexpressed, it is endowed with will

⁶ Jean-Charles Huchet, *Littérature médiévale et psychanalyse*, PUF, Paris 1990, p. 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*

and force (momentum or impetus) long before it can become a function of the —rather anthropomorphic— “textual machine”. Not even the umpteenth reinterpretation of the scene of the three drops of blood on the snow will let the critic get rid of the intentional pre-existence of “Chrétien de Troyes”, who is supposed to “defend a certain concept of writing”.⁹ Writing (*écriture*) is loaded here with all the magic that it had in the roaring seventies in France; the author may be dead, but writing, in its transitivity, shelters its die-hard ghost, which badly wants a name to be recognized and forgiven. I propose, on the contrary, that we take to their ultimate consequences the accepted factual features of the medieval literary scene: the mal-leability, open-endedness, and unfinishedness of the text; the reduction of the author, if any is mentioned, to a mere sign that this is the craft of man and a contingent event; and the “secondariness of literature to itself”.¹⁰ All these features seem to be shared by what we usually and loosely call “translation”, but the medieval text producer has no text to translate from, he is caught between two impossibilities, between two objects of desire: the sacred text (i. e., nature as creation and the book of creation, indissolubly bound as image and word), and the pagan/profane text, the text from nowhere, from before revelation, now obliterated and illegible. So that the subject of the medieval text, without being itself a negative subject (a subject with a negative value, or a non-subject) is and can only be the subject of a negative process, the absolution of sin, the effacement of difference. On the ever receding horizon of this process, we ride towards the mirage of a body of text that would be at once the last and the first, and coincide with itself as if the story of man had never stood in between itself. We are at the antipodes of the artful production of difference, meaning as discrimination, that is the non-translation effect.¹¹

I began this talk by warning (myself as much as this audience) against the lure of generalized translation, the spell of unlimited equivalence. We are threatened to become the hostages of its inhuman oversubject, exchange-

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹ “In India, the word *public* is now a Hindi word. It means *people*. In Hindi, we have *sarkar* and *public*, the government and the people. Inherent in this use is the underlying assumption that the government is quite separate from the people’. [...] Even today, fifty-seven years on to the day, the truly vanquished still look upon the government as *mai-baap*, the parent and provider. The somewhat more radical, those who still have fire in their bellies, see it as *chor*, the thief, the snatcher-away of all things”. Arundathi Roy, “Public Power in the Age of Empire”, *Frontline*, vol. 21, issue 21, October 09-22, 2004.

able for a few cowries or a fat stack of notes. The ransom money, anonymously paid, will not buy us free because it is always used as evidence of exchangeability, of *our* exchangeability. I hoped therefore to discover in non-translation a counter-principle, a principle of resistance, an antidote to the all-pervasive appeal of global translation (seemingly so peaceful), a natural strategy to let a dual, non-identical subject develop its productive contradictions, maintain its incompatible allegiances, act as irreconcilable, irreducible and irredentist, as does the literary text in its principle, always fighting back the onslaught of monosemy. But in the course of this very incomplete inquiry, I have also found that, when non-translation is the prime mover of the text, its generalized *raison d'être*, the shaper of its structure and the force which prevents its foreclosure, it runs a high risk of putting sense on standby, floating in a timeless haze, endlessly roaming the waste forest of impossible recognitions. This subject of non-translation, prevalent in the textual system known as *Chrétien de Troyes*, is in the end very similar to the (anonymous) subject of global translatability, almost its *alter ego*. Until further notice, the only subject pattern that strikes me as a possible ally in the problem field of the transportability of signs and the accountability of transporters to human well-being, is the one afforded by local non-translation, as described in the section on the treatment and functions of indigenous words in English prose (class 1 non-translation, that we could perhaps relabel "patchy non-translation"). It has an intriguing modesty that makes it all the more efficient, but we would still have to study how far it can be extended and systematized without losing its virtue in classes 2, 3 and 7 (iconic imports, plurilingual text and source misrepresentation, respectively). Fortunately, beside the early twentieth century avant-gardes, Ezra Pound's *Cantos* or *Finnegan's Wake*, and all the Babelian games today in the making, we have huge disparate bodies of plurilingual texts yet to explore in medieval Occitan poetry and early Indian drama, for example. We also have an uninterrupted tradition of creative translation errors that make literature possible.

The twin pretence of speaking in English and understanding in some other language or languages is now coming to an end; there begins the more difficult practice of playing with languages without breaking them. I am finished. Res més.