The Art of Translation

Not all good literature suffers in translation. It's told that the Germans have done especially well by Shakespeare, with all his quips and quiddities. It must require a great deal of self-confidence to translate a classic. That would go double for, say, "The Wasteland" or "Ode To A Nightingale". To translate poetry well, one must be both a good translator and a good poet. Not so with expository prose. Any novice can give a faithful translation of a scientific article, though he may not be able to write a good one. Even digital computers can be programmed to do a straight word-for-word translation plus a syntactical rearrangement to make the translation more readable. I wonder if Finnegan's Wake has been translated and whether it was worth the effort. Would the translingual nature of some of the passages make the job harder or easier? Indeed, when the reader of the original must be multilingual anyway, how much demand would there be for a translation of Finnegan's Wake?

Flights of fancy obviously pose the toughest problem for translators; as with puns and other linguistically "inside jokes", the translator is required not merely to reconstruct but to construct anew. Take the first stanza of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky": "Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe: / All mimsy were the borogoves, / And the mome raths outgrabe. In The Annotated Alice by Martin Gardner, complete translations of "Jabberwocky" are given. They are good; they appear to capture the spirit of the original perfectly. Here are a pair of samples (first verse only).

Le Jaseroque
Il brigue: les toves lubricilleux
Se gyrent en vrillant dans le guave
Ennimes sont les gougebosqueux
Et le momeade horsgrave.

Der Jammerwoch

Es brillig war. Die schlichte Toven
Wirnten und wimmelten in Waben;
Und aller-mümsige Burggovnen
Die mohnen Räth! ausgraben.

The French translation, by Frank L. Warrin, is a little freer than Robert Scott's German translation, but how could it be done better? *(O jour frabbeja! Calleau! Callai!)* A good translation is the consummate achievement. To write "Jabberwocky" is to paint a masterpiece. To translate its seven stanzas successfully is to reproduce the masterpiece, holding the paintbrush in your teeth.

**Translators' Dilemmas**

Puns are one of a translator's occupational hazards. Another is the artifact or custom with no referent in the language of translation. The word *purdah* in its primary meaning -- seclusion of women from public observation -- did not join the English language till the 19th Century. Had East Indians written domestic novels in Clive's day and had he translated them into English, he would have had three options: adulterate the text with explanations; use a large number of footnotes; or leave the readers mystified. As communication improves, cultures tend to become less diverse, but translators will always have their problems. Suppose translation were your livelihood and you wanted to translate some of Horace's pastoral odes and a few of Martial's epigrams into English. Suppose many of the odes combined beautiful descriptive Latin with the rustic Latin of the hinterlands that Horace imparted to his shepherds. Suppose further that one or two of the epigrams were written, like the rest, in Latin, except for the last line, in which Martial rendered the nub of the epigram in Greek. How would you attempt to capture letter and spirit in English? Depending on which side of the Atlantic you hailed from, you might make your shepherds speak like a hill-billy or ridgerunner, or a Yorkshire farmer whose "bus" rhymes with "puss" or perhaps a Zummerzetshireman. Horace might feel that the dialogue thus rendered lacked the elevation of the original. Lord Byron found, I think, the perfect solution. The shepherds speak in Bobbie Burns Scottish. As for the Martial epigram, Dudley Fitts appears to be the only translator to have hit on the answer ("Ad Procellium Sobrulum"). Where others have fudged it by translating the entire epigram into English, Fitts translates the last line into French. As Greek was the status language of the Romans, the language of the literati (and those who...
wished to be numbered among the literati), so stands French in most of the Western World. But then how would a Frenchman translate the epitgram? By rendering the last (Greek) line into Latin? Possibly to a Frenchman (as to an ancient Greek) the only status language is his own.

The Definitive Translation

There is no such thing, of course. Time eats away at a good translation and makes it mouldy. The 19th Century translations of the great Greek dramatists, of Molière and Cervantes, all of them lack the contemporary flavor imparted by contemporary translators such as Louis MacNeice or Morris Bishop. An obsolete or archaic translation bears for the modern reader a charnel atmosphere that was not present in the original. So another fact of life that any translator of a creative masterpiece must face is that though the original work may endure, his probably will not.

Time is not the only factor that determines the quality of a translation. Most important is how successfully the translator conveys the emotion of the author as well as the sense of his words. Obviously, this is of much greater consequence in the case of a piece of poetry than in something such as The Annals of Tacitus. Suppose then we take a short poem, say "Epitaph on Lykas, A Thessalian Hound" by Simonides (556-468 B.C.). Read the versions of three contemporary translator-poets, and decide which is "best".

Bitch-hound, hunter, even your dead white bones
Terrify the beasts of the field,
For your bravery is common knowledge
From huge Pellaon to far Ossa
And on the dizzying sheep-paths of Kithairon.


Although your white bones waste in
The grave, I know the wild beasts
Still shudder when they remember
The power of Lykas the Huntress on great Pellaon,
And far seen Ossa, and the
Lonely alps of Kithairon.

(trans. by Kenneth Rexroth, Poems From The Greek Anthology, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, Univ. of Michigan Press, 1962)
Surely I think the wild beasts fear your white bones,  
Even though you lie here dead, Lykas, brave huntress!  
Your valor great Peilon knows, and mighty Ossa,  
And the wind-swept lonely ways of high Kithairon.  
(trans. by Dudley Flitts, Poems From The Greek Anthology, New Directions, 1956)

The translations differ obviously, not only in choice of words (is Simonides talking of sheep-paths, trails, or peaks of Mount Kithairon?) but in mood. The first is defiant, almost an Homeric tribute to a dead Hero(ine); wistfulness is more evident in the second version and dominant in the third. But only Simonides could tell us which is best, and even then his evaluation would be entirely subjective. If I knew Ionic (I don't; it's all Greek to me) and were steeped in Simonides' culture, I doubt even then that I could divine his precise mood from a few short lines. And if I could, what then? A poet can write a poem that means X to him and Y to everyone else. In that case, I'd say the poem meant Y.

The Epithet Game

Going from the sublime to the ridiculous, let's revive the game of the forties known as "epithets" or "hinky-pinkies". I'll give a brief phrase (e.g. "ill-natured taxi driver" or "Dracula and Frankenstein") and you translate it into a rhyming adjective-noun combination (e.g. "crabby cabby" or "gruesome twosome"). Before we start, that reminds me of something: who played Frankenstein in the American film version? No, you're wrong. Colin Clive played him. Boris Karloff played Frankenstein's monster. File that away in your trivia cabinet and try these epithets (answers at end of this issue):

1. Ardent employee  
2. Unimaginative surface decoration  
3. A cactus that goes out of its way to needle you  
4. A world of igneous rock  
5. Bolsterous policy meeting  
6. Dismal chorus  
7. Childish wall-painting  
8. Brackish nut-confection  
9. Fanatic slave  
10. Fruitful interval of time

Strictly for the Birdwatchers

Richard Field, Jr., of Malibu, California, amateur ornithologist and maker of malapropisms (bird-watcher and word-botcher, you might say) sends this challenge: "Dear Dave: Except for your de-
partInent, I enjoy Word Ways immensely. I enclose a tidbit for your readers, and I hope both of them have fun with it. All seriousness aside, I think it's near-fetched to assert that it's a tour-de-force, to corn a phrase. It's a crossword puzzle in which each word is a bird. I expect that few of your readers will avoid the temptation of peeking in the answer section and I doubt that any of them can produce another crossword of comparable size and keying and with so unified a theme." Well, thanks, Dick, Old Pal, but I'll be surprised if I don't have an out-Fielder among my readers (both of them).

Field's Cross-bird Puzzle

1. Bobolink
2. Strigiform, marshy habitat
3. European thrush
4. Ground forager, Certhidae
5. Strigiform, forest habitat
6. Plover

A Game of Crash

Yin and Yang engaged in a game of Correspondence Crash. (For details, see Mary Youngquist's article in Logomachy in this issue.) The paramount rule to remember, if you plan to participate, is that target and shot words must all appear as initial, self-contained entries in The New Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary. Considering the fact that even with a non-crashing opening salvo of five words, one's statistical expectation is one crash (or about 96% of a crash), both players were lucky. The second salvo, consisting of words #6 through #9, will be the last one unless Yin and Yang fail to exploit their information. Which player has the edge?

Yin's First Salvo
1. ANGRY 1
2. HEMAN 1
3. OTTER 1
4. PUNCH 1
5. SOUND 1

Yang's First Salvo
1. STARK 1
2. FLYER 1
3. BARON 1
4. RECAP 1
5. BRAIN 0

Our Own Little New Yorker

From the Los Angeles Herald Examiner: "UCLA may be the perennial NCAA basketball champion, but the word apparently hasn't reached Pittsburgh... The Bruins will be in the preliminary game of the four-team Steel Bowl Tournament in December when they play both William and Mary."
(For an encore later in the season, the Bruins will simultaneously take on Washington and Lee.)

Assorted Contributions

Premiere Kickshavian Mary J. Youngquist of Rochester, New York collects "elemental words" and would like to see how many more the readers can produce. SATED is an example; it is a valid word and remains so (SULPHURATED) when the element is substituted for its symbol. Likewise with the pair FEY - IRONY. Metallic sodium can be cut with a knife. If you ever tried it, no doubt you smelled the NASCENT. For reduplication potency, it's hard to beat NAZI - NEONAZI - NEONEONAZI, etc. Until you supply more examples, that about covers the subject. As the brandy said to the soda, "See you later, CATER."

Mary also collects "name chains" such as Emory Upton Sinclair Lewis Carroll Baker. Stretching the spelling restriction a bit, she invites you to come up with a longer chain than the following, which extends from mother to son: Eve Marie Saint Patrick Henry Poor Richard Benjamin Franklin Roosevelt Grier Carson Kanin Abel!

Miss Youngquist also has a prodigious collection of "spooner-rhymes", isomorphs (minicrypts) and lots of additional gems which will be displayed regularly in this department. For the present, modesty compels me to run Mary's doubly acrostic ode (with no apologies to Joseph Addison).

Upon Finding Word Ways in the Mailbox After a Hard Day's Work

Kick off at once those two toe-pinching shoes,
Into a glass pour a drink over ice,
Curl up with Word Ways ensconced on your lap.
Key up your wits for unusual views.
Sharpen your pencil and focus your eyes,
Heed not the door if intruders should rap,
Allow a few hours to puzzle and muse.
Word Ways gets my votes -- a chorus of ayes,
Such fun takes priority over a nap.

John Standish of Burial Hill, Plymouth, Mass. answered Alden Myles of the same city (see the November 1970 Kickshaws) and among the comments that will pass postal regulations we have: "Had Myles spent less time with Rot Rum and more with the Big Web, he would have found that 'VE is not the only two-letter unconjugated verb. What about 'LL and 'RE? Also the 'A' in A PINCERS belongs to Webster's, not to PINCER. Two other examples in which Webster's
"A" intrudes on a plural that may also be used as a singular: A FIREWORKS and A INNINGS... Myles probably couldn't even come up with a common English word containing the combination ACHACH. If you need a clue, I'll tell you this much: Myles gives me a pain in the belly."

Now, now, Gentlemen. I'd like very much to find out both your addresses so that I can acknowledge your contributions personally. Ralph Beaman of Boothwyn, Penn, offers the most practical suggestion. He advises me to obtain them from one of your mutual friends: Priscilla Smith or Capt. John Mullins.

Mary Epstein of Montclair, New Jersey suggests as another Answer searching for a Question: A. A Greek letter. Q. What's nu? Remember Mary's deferential adjectives in the May 1970 Kickshaws: adjectives like battle royal which sometimes follow their nouns? He has now found an adjective in Webster's Third which apparently always follows the noun it modifies. Can the reader identify it? (Technically, adjectives following their nouns are called post-positive.)

Henry James once observed that summer afternoon were (to him) the two most beautiful words in the English language. Philip M. Cohen of Fort Myer, Virginia has been collecting melodious words for several years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>egg nog</th>
<th>shrivel</th>
<th>limitrophic</th>
<th>lepton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gremlin</td>
<td>rhapsody</td>
<td>barquentine</td>
<td>barallipton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carloca</td>
<td>zinfandel</td>
<td>nimbostratus</td>
<td>raffstoler (Fr.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opodeidoc</td>
<td>jeremiad</td>
<td>taploca</td>
<td>dévergondage (Fr.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eclectic</td>
<td>chimies</td>
<td>sequin</td>
<td>topnambour (Fr.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He likes proper names, too: Akiba Rubenstein, Estes Kefauver, Howard Alan Treesong, Bolivar Shagnasty, Anshe Kene Seth Haggedolah.

Philip Cohen also points out that the removal of a few words from the end of certain proverbs can change their meanings in startling ways:

Familiarity breeds.
You can't have your cake.
All work and no play makes jack.
People who live in glass houses shouldn't.

He reports that scientists analyzing the moon rocks have just discovered a new chemical compound, barium-disodium-sulfide, BaNa₂S.

What sort of monkey business is this?
Richard Field, Jr. notes that standard numerical prefixes have been extended to the twelfth power of ten according to the following table (billion and trillion are understood to be in the American, rather than the English sense):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thousand</td>
<td>KILO</td>
<td>10^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Million</td>
<td>MEGA</td>
<td>10^6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billion</td>
<td>GIGA</td>
<td>10^9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillion</td>
<td>TERA</td>
<td>10^12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, advises Dick, assuming the standard average of three generations per century, a generation is a gigasecond (or a second is a nanogeneration). By the same token, a trillion pins make one terapin, a billionth of a goat is a nanogoat, a thousand kilometers is a micrometer, a billion lows make a gigalow, the tithe of your spouse's labor devoted to the service of others is a decimate, 10^-12 fluid ounces of liquor is a picobooze, and the U.S. installs a new megaphone every year.

Onomatopoetic License or The Apian Way

The songbird that goes "tweet-tweet" for us frills "cui-cui" for a Frenchman. That's possible; animal language does vary with geography. But I often wonder what intricate design causes German train whistles to go "tof-tof" instead of "toot-toot". And when it comes to describing the sound of the stimulated heart, the language barrier widens to an uncrossable chasm. When our hearts go "pit-a-pat" or "pitter-patter" Japanese hearts go "doki-doki", and somehow, their rendition of a temporary palpitation seems more faithful than ours.

"My heart leaps up when I behold
Exquisite Genevieve Bujold."

And it does it with a Japanese accent. But to return to the topic of animal language, consider the bizarre experiment entomologists performed by way of further confirmation of Von Frisch's generally accepted theory that bees communicate the location of food sources to each other by means of a "dance". Foragers returning to the hive after discovering a new nectar supply perform a series of gyrations, and from the general tempo of the dance, the frequency of changes in the direction of rotation, and perhaps from other cues, their hive-mates are able to determine with good accuracy the distance of the food source from the hive and its azimuth with respect to the sun. A few years ago, researchers noticed that a French and an Italian strain of the same species of bee had rather different directional dances. A group of the French workers were color-marked and after a motor trip across the Alps were introduced into the Italian hive. Their
visas, of course, were in order, i.e. they had been thoroughly steeped in the odor of the foreign hive. The outcome was as expected: the French bees consistently misinterpreted the Italian dances (all in about the same way) and vice versa. Can you visualize the scene? If not, allow me to limn it for you. Scene: A hive outside of Turin. A Lyonnaise bee (played by Simone Signoret) is confronted by an Italian bee (played by Anna Magnani). For French and Italian dialects write your nearest Swiss Embassy:

Italian Bee (noticing French Bee's empty pouches and standing with middle legs akimbo): What's the matter, stupid? Can't you understand Apish? I danced "two kilometers southwest" not "three kilometers east".

French Bee: Don't tell me your troubles, sister; I've seen better Apish danced by Swiss-Germans, and now that I think of it, they weren't even bees -- they were wasps. Next time you come back from a forage, how about just drawing me a map?

Italian Bee: Izzatso? I suppose that kosotska you and your friends perform is Apish. Listen, why don't you and those busy-bodies that brought you here go back where you came from? You've been nothing but bad news since they first smuggled you in . . .

French Bee: Oh, go curdle some Mozzarella.

The pitch rises to fever, the Italians rise en masse and eject their French cousins, the entomologists retire in disorder, the dramatist fortifies himself with a pair of stingers, and the publisher breaks out in hives.

Anagram Classification

In the February 1970 Word Ways, A. Ross Eckler listed examples of each of the 120 possible anagram permutation patterns for five-letter words. Thus if we designate the original word 12345 (no repeated letters permitted) any of the 120 possible permutations (except the identity permutation 12345) represents an anagram pattern. The pattern 21453 is represented by the pair AMONG - MANGO. In this case the same pair serves to represent two different patterns, for if MANGO is denoted 12345, then AMONG illustrates the 21534 pattern. The permutations 21453 and 21534 are mutually inverse. Some permutations, such as 12453, are self-inverse. You would get the 12435 pattern from the pair BUGLE - BULGE regardless of which word you designated 12345.

Ross exhibits several six-letter anagram patterns and invites the
It ve extended the investigation in the other direction -- to four-letter words. The rules are harder, however. The words must be initial, self-contained entries in The New Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary, and the word (except in the case of the identity permutation 1234) must precede its anagram in the dictionary, nullifying the two-birds-with-one-stone feature. Here is as far as I've got:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern Word</th>
<th>Anagram Pattern Word</th>
<th>Anagram Pattern Word</th>
<th>Anagram</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1234 WORD</td>
<td>2314 SWAP</td>
<td>3412 CHIT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1243 LIEN</td>
<td>2341 EVIL</td>
<td>3421 PEST</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1324 BLOT</td>
<td>2413 ANTE</td>
<td>4123 ACHE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1342 VEIN</td>
<td>2431</td>
<td>4132</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1423 FATE</td>
<td>3124 HOSE</td>
<td>4323 DEAR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1432 SPOT</td>
<td>3142</td>
<td>4312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2134 AMEN</td>
<td>3214 BORE</td>
<td>4213 LEAP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2143 BALE</td>
<td>3241 RITE</td>
<td>4231 PART</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three gaps. I can't fill them, but I feel certain that somebody out there will. Note that 3142 is the inverse of 2413, so that if it weren't for the alphabetical condition, NEAT - ANTE would serve. Note also that the other two gaps 2431 and 4132 are inverse. If it weren't for the two restrictions, CURE - ECRU would complete the list. ECRU, however, is not in the M-WPD. I have a hunch that few anagrammatians will resist the temptation to complete the list. Have at it, then, and win a free subscription to Collier's Magazine.

A Challenge

The Word Buff offers a pangrammatic cryptogram which is deceptively difficult to solve (both Darryl Francis and Ross Eckler failed to do so). Can Word Ways readers do it? Let me know your results; I'll publish the full answer in the next issue.

NS QSSZ QCFLRPHS ZZF AECH XCBRBRFSZ YECRQZO CE XREYS KBCRZO CA TBB XBRHJSCRO AHHSO; CRE BMDSO SISEGNPSES QSSZ QC WRTKDOTBIZE FC OPCN CQS PMO VR OF KCQKSEQ CISE HCZSEQ OSBA ZSOFERKF HSFPZGO; RQKOCFCBBSSJ CCCUS, ZERYO (XCF, OXSSZ), SFK.