Advocacy and Collaboration: Stanley Burnshaw's *The Poem Itself*

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Overview

This essay draws on approaches from genetic criticism and the sociology of collaboration to investigate how Stanley Burnshaw advocated for a method of 'truly literal' translation and commentary in his anthology *The Poem Itself* (1960). Burnshaw's archive provides insight into the relations between concept, practice and the dynamics of social interaction in collaborative translation. The concept of literal translation offered a commonly accepted term that was subject nevertheless to variable interpretation by both Burnshaw and his contributors over the course of the project. His initial proposal and specimen contribution on Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Don du poème' prioritised syntax ahead of other verbal features. His subsequent editing of German contributions focused instead on semantic implication at the expense of syntax. At each of these stages, conflicts of interpretation led to a published text that aggregated competing views rather than resolving them. Burnshaw's later translations of Mallarmé with Henri Peyre reached a stable agreement about the practical application of the concept of literal translation. This agreement led to a more coherent text but persisted with a tendency to record verbal features rather than to account for their function within a reading experience.

Introduction[1]

When *The Poem Itself* was published by Pelican Books in 1964, the back cover announced that its editor, Stanley Burnshaw had 'found a way to let the English reader grasp the sounds and rhythms of foreign poetry, and not merely the sense' (Burnshaw,

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1964).[2] Offered as a form of primer in poetic modernism, the anthology presented a selection of poems in French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Russian from the previous 150 years, each accompanied by a prose translation and commentary. 60 years later, a reader picking up the anthology might be underwhelmed by the claims on its jacket. The casual reference to 'merely the sense' passes hastily over the interpretative work of the translator. Burnshaw's title hardly helps, with its promise of the poem itself, recalling W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley's notorious claim in 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946) that if a poet has succeeded 'then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do' (1954, p. 4). The title seems to date the anthology as a period-piece from a time when the New Criticism held sway, concealing its value-laden interpretative gestures behind a claim that the poem was self-sufficient.

If *The Poem Itself* looks dated, a reflection of its time and a certain critical hegemony, the records of its production, held in the Stanley Burnshaw collection at the Harry Ransom Center (University of Texas at Austin), tell a more complex story. The title was a late addition to the project; Burnshaw's initial proposal sternly warned potential contributors to avoid 'New-Critical discussions, sectarian interpretations, or anything more than what a reader actually requires if he is to get to the poem' (Burnshaw, n.d.i). As his warning suggests, Burnshaw, a poet and publisher, stood at a distance from the academic world inhabited by his contributors. He was mistrustful of the practices, abilities, vanities and pet obsessions of people on whom he nevertheless relied to provide the translations and commentaries for his anthology.

Burnshaw's correspondence reveals repeated acts of advocacy as he attempted to formulate and direct the work of associate editors and individual contributors who did not always share his views about the principles and practices of the anthology, what he described as its 'method' (1964, p. xi). That advocacy was performed across kindred but nevertheless distinct cultural and institutional settings of the commercial publishing house and academe. Burnshaw was not always well-disposed to his contributors, complaining after an 'unspeakable' visit to the Modern Language Association annual conference, where he went to seek recruits, that 'never had I taken

[2] *The Poem Itself* had previously been published in the United States by Holt, Rinehart and Winston in 1960.

in so much hot air' (Burnshaw, 1959a). The method of *The Poem Itself* was not 'found', as its blurb claimed, but worked for, produced in an extended process that involved explanation, cajolery, persuasion and negotiation. That process was both cultural, involving ideas about translation and poetic tradition, and social, as Burnshaw attempted to promote a collaborative enterprise that involved over twenty contributors.

Translation is typically a collaborative activity, which is shaped by diverse hands (Cordingley and Frigau Manning, 2017, p. 1; Cordingley, 2020, p. 210). Michael P. Farrell has produced detailed studies of the dynamics of social interaction in artistic collaboration. He sees a rise of 'pseudo-kinship groups' among artists with increased urbanization in the nineteenth century (2001, p. 12), which create their own ad hoc social relations, a pattern of behaviour that is shared by other disciplines such as science and politics (2001, p. 2). He provides a model for articulating the types of exchange that are involved in a project like *The Poem Itself*, where Burnshaw's textual proposition becomes involved in varied forms of social relation. Farrell defines a collaborative circle as:

> A primary group consisting of peers who share similar occupational goals and who, through long periods of dialogue and collaboration, negotiate a common vision that guides their work. The vision consists of a shared set of assumptions about their discipline, including what constitutes good work, how to work, what subjects are worth taking on, and how to think about them (2001, p. 11).

The group's vision encompasses a range of intellectual positions, practical ('how to work') and theoretical ('how to think about' subjects). Farrell opens out social elements of advocacy, such as dialogue and collaboration, which are involved in establishing this vision. A vision is not simply shared from the outset (or 'found' as the blurb of *The Poem Itself* claimed) but created and put into practice over an extended period. Advocacy here involves both a cause and the ways that someone creates the social relations that will help them to further that cause. Farrell elaborates on typical stages of this process and the dynamics that are involved in them. Collaborations typically begin with 'a balanced exchange process' of work or self-disclosure 'characterized by reciprocity and gradual escalation of both critical and supportive interaction' (2001, p. 152). These exchanges perform a variety of functions. They serve to 'validate one

another's identities as serious professionals' (2001, p. 152), allowing members to build trust (2001, p. 123) and 'evolve norms that encourage open communication and wide-ranging exchanges' (p. 20), leading in the most successful cases to a stage of 'instrumental intimacy' characterized by a 'merging of cognitive processes' (2001, p. 23).

Farrell focuses on the microsocial aspects of cultural collaboration, showing how acts of advocacy are drawn into interpersonal relations and negotiations which then shape artistic products. Members of a group can take on executive (2001, p. 24) but also more informal roles, which establish 'relatively stable patterns of behaviour that come to be expected of each member' (2001, p. 21). The translation method of *The Poem Itself* was developed through exchanges between Burnshaw and his associate editors on the volume, Dudley Fitts and Henri Peyre, and put into practice by over 20 contributors who were answerable to their section editors and, in some cases, directly to Burnshaw himself. The executive arrangements for each section varied, meaning that Burnshaw was involved with individual contributors in different ways.

Burnshaw's papers hold substantial records of these exchanges, revealing different attitudes to translation and different construals of Burnshaw's proposition, which resisted, diverted and transformed his intentions. Genetic Criticism, which emerged from the Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes (ITEM) in Paris, founded by Louis Hay in 1968, provides methods for organizing, classifying and analysing this archival material. Genetic critics make a methodological distinction between the genetic dossier and the *avant-texte* of a published work. The genetic dossier is defined by Jean Bellemin-Noël as 'the collection of documents that have been used for the writing of a work', arranged by the critic in the sequential order of its production (1977, p. 9).[3] This is a work of assemblage and classification that provides the basis for the construction of the *avant-texte*. The *avant-texte* is 'a particular reconstruction of what preceded a text, established by a critical approach with the help of a specific methodology' (1977, p. 9); that is, it subjects the assemblage and classification of the genetic dossier to critical interpretation. For Pierre-Marc de Biasi the *avant-texte* has

[3] My translation.

no existence ‘outside the critical discourse that produces it’ (de Biasi, 2004, p. 43). Genetic criticism does not offer an all-inclusive critical approach, or ‘recipes’ for analysis (Bellemin-Noël, 1977, p. 9); instead, it provides a method for making archival material available for further critical approaches that will bring specific questions to bear on it.

Genetic critics have produced sophisticated methods for classifying the archival material of the genetic dossier. De Biasi provides a detailed typology of genetic documentation, relating specific document types to different stages of the writing process — provisional, exploratory, preparatory, structuring, research and compositional. These stages provide a way of accounting for shifting configurations of conceptualisation and the activity of writing, or ‘textualization’, over the course of a project (de Biasi, 1996, pp. 34–5).

The holdings for *The Poem Itself* at the Harry Ransom Center are substantial. 62 folders in five boxes contain material by Burnshaw, his associate editors, contributors and typesetter, comprising handwritten, typewritten and mimeographed letters, proposals, outlines, plans, schedules, notes, a specimen contribution, drafts and proofs. The material is organized according to a loose operational logic in folders dedicated to preliminary correspondence, financial correspondence, general correspondence, page proofs by language, individual poets, some individual translators and the appendix.

This organization cuts across the chronology the work’s production, obscuring a narrative of its development. A chronological dossier of the material reveals that the main genesis of *The Poem Itself* took place in two stages. An initial pre-compositional phase was dedicated to conceiving, planning, recruiting for and providing an initial determination of the project. This stage involved a proposal, a specimen contribution on Stéphane Mallarmé’s ‘Don du poème’ and the responses of potential collaborators. There followed the compositional phase involving the selection of poets and poems, and editorial exchanges over successive drafts of the contributions. While this phase involved the textualization of the initial proposal, it also carried through debates about the conceptualization of the project and the relation of conceptualization to practice. Each of these phases involved shifting forms of advocacy on Burnshaw’s part as the

project developed, and examples of compliance and resistance on the part of his contributors.

The relation of conceptualization to textualization, or practice, is a persistent concern of Genetic Criticism, whether openly stated, as in de Biasi's typology, or as a metaphorical implication of its critical vocabulary. Daniel Ferrer's notorious statement that a manuscript is an 'operational protocol' for making a text (2011, p. 43) attempts to extrapolate the status of principle and guideline from the raw material of textual genesis. De Biasi employs similarly connoted metaphors of politics and power, as a draft stage of textualization becomes a 'regulatory and causal authority' for a project, which will 'police all further transformation of its form by the activation of its own controls' (1996, p. 30). The correspondence in which Burnshaw and his contributors articulate and dispute textual choices and principles makes forms of guideline explicit. These exchanges provide direct evidence of conceptualization, of cultural ideas about poetry and translation. They also present strong implicit evidence of social interaction, as Burnshaw and his interlocutors negotiate the passage of their beliefs and interpretations through draft stages to the published anthology. Ferrer and de Biasi employ metaphors to extrapolate power struggles from single-author manuscripts — protocols and authority are established that can police and control the direction of a project. Burnshaw's papers present actual struggles for power between different actors. They reveal the ways that his advocacy for the project becomes embroiled in different forms of social relation and competing cultural ideas and practices.

Classification of the different phases of the genetic dossier allows one to place the exchanges between Burnshaw and his contributors in a chronological sequence. In order to make that narrative critically meaningful, however, to allow the genetic dossier to speak as an *avant-texte*, I wish to unpack that process in terms of social and cultural questions. Drawing on critical approaches from the sociology of artistic collaboration and reflection on the concept of 'literal' translation, I will ask: How does Burnshaw define his project in theory and in practice at different stages? And how do social interactions with his collaborators shape the published work? My aim is to show how Burnshaw's advocacy for the project, and the adoption and transformation of that advocacy by his contributors, interwove cultural beliefs about text and translation with executive and personal social relations.

Conceptualization and recruitment

Burnshaw first approached potential contributors for the anthology in February 1958, sending a letter and mimeographed proposal (Burnshaw, n.d.i) to Harry Levin and Dudley Fitts in the hope that they would take charge of the French and Spanish-Latin American sections respectively (Burnshaw, 1958a; 1958b). Levin was an academic specialist in comparative literature based at Harvard, Fitts a sometime poet and active translator, who had produced *An Anthology of Contemporary Latin American Poetry* (1942). This opening contact with Levin and Fitts provided an account of the project's initial formulation, situating it as a response to encounters with a succession of previous publications and practices. Burnshaw recounted his 'frustrated experiences' with an environment in which 'there was virtually no concern with literal faithfulness; translations of poems were "recreations" by a translator poet who could do almost anything he fancied' (1958a). He decided that 'the only feasible way of getting to poems in a language that one didn't command was by learning to pronounce (only approximately, of course) the lines of the original and "simultaneously" reading a truly literal translation'. Yet 'truly' literal translations proved hard to come by. Citing editions of Mallarmé, published by New Directions, and Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by C.F. MacIntyre, he concluded that it seemed difficult for even 'literal translators to stay literal. Their EARS and IMAGINATIONS tend to push them towards breaking the rule […] and into changing the sentence structure of the original'. Aside from the problems of literal translation (and translators), Burnshaw also concluded that further explanation would be necessary to guide the reader to the poem. The Penguin series of national poetry anthologies, which accompanied the source texts with what it described as 'plain prose translations' (Cohen, 1958, title page), could be 'strange and forbidding'. He therefore turned for a further model to Wallace Fowlie's critical book on Mallarmé where 'the literal translation alone will not move any but the most zealous reader to within reach of the poems'. If he was to get to the poems, 'he must read the literal translations together with Fowlie's interpretative comments' (1958a).

Raymonde Debray Genette (1979) has established a distinction between 'endogenesis', the process of writing, and 'exogenesis', sources that are external to a writing project, but which nevertheless contribute to it. For de Biasi, these sources

offer ‘dialogic elements, which give a motivational and heuristic kick-start to the endogenetic process’ (1996, p. 46). Burnshaw offered his potential collaborators a thorough account of the exogenetic impetus for his project, the sources he was reacting to, modifying and adapting. This account performed both a conceptual and a social function. Farrell notes that collaborative projects form around a shared hostility to established practices: they are not merely innovative but reactive, ‘provocative toward those in authority’ (2001, p. 14). Burnshaw invited his contributors to join a cultural-political intervention in current translation practice. His proposal began to clarify what that intervention involved conceptually. His interest in the source poem focused more on sound than semantic content. He also took a step towards clarifying the formal criteria of his ‘truly literal’ translation as primarily a concern for syntax (‘the sentence structure of the original poem’). Both in terms of work to which he was reacting and detail of conception, the translations received greater attention than the commentaries at this stage, which would act as a form of supplement to help the reader engage with the translations.

The social exchanges that shaped *The Poem Itself* turned on a cultural argument around what Burnshaw described as his ‘truly literal’ translation method. While literalism has been a persistent concern throughout the history of translation, it has also been a mercurial one, a ‘relative’ term (Shuttleworth and Cowie, 2014, p. 95), which ‘has meant different things to different people’ (Chesterman, 2017, p. 238). Andrew Chesterman produces a working definition of literal translation that is contingent upon the priorities of the translator: ‘literal translation is one that is formally closer to its source than some other translation of the same source chunk, on given criteria’ (2017, p. 240). The description ‘literal’ will only be meaningful once one has established criteria of the formal properties one wishes a given literal translation to prioritize, relative to other possible or actual translations.

This ‘comparative’ perspective (Chesterman, 2017, p. 240) is implicit in a number of accounts of literal translation, which use the term to distinguish between different stages of the translation process. For J.C. Catford, literal translation ‘may start, as it were, from a word-for-word translation, but makes changes in conformity with TL grammar’ (1965, p. 25) while Birgitta Dimitrova sees it as a way of ‘playing it safe’ in a first or intermediate draft (2005, p. 53). Literal translation is never entirely present —

it is something aimed for or (more commonly in these accounts) something that is being left behind. For Douglas Robinson 'most so called literal translations are in fact compromises with the ideal' (1998, p. 125) while George Steiner describes it as 'the least attainable' of all approaches (1992, p. 324). Burnshaw's advocacy for a 'truly literal' translation is thus a quixotic project, but not a meaningless one. It provides an impetus for the anthology as a reaction to existing practice but without providing a stable definition and criteria. Its manifestations in practice will shift as one moves from Burnshaw to his associate editors and contributors, and from one stage of the project to another.

The initial reaction to Burnshaw's proposal was lukewarm: Levin did not feel qualified to contribute while Fitts thought its sonic concern was a 'fallacy' (Levin, 1958; Fitts, 1958a). Burnshaw persisted nevertheless with a specimen contribution on Mallarmé's 'Don du poème', which he sent out to Fitts, Levin, and Henri Peyre, a French scholar at Yale and President of the Modern Language Association whom Levin had suggested as his replacement. The specimen provided a concrete example of how the theoretical proposition might work as practice. Burnshaw invited Peyre to compare his translation to the prose version that appeared in *The Penguin Book of French Verse* (Burnshaw, 1958c). A comparison of the opening lines in the two translations gives an early indication of the form and priorities of Burnshaw's 'truly literal' translation method.

> Je t'appporte l'enfant d'une nuit d'Idumée!
> Noire, à l'aile saignante et pâle, déplumée,
> Par le verre brûlé d'aromates et d'or,
> Par les carreaux glacés, hélas! mornes encore,
> L'aurore se jeta sur la lampe angélique (Burnshaw, n.d.ii).

> I bring you the child of an Idumean night! Dark, with bleeding wing and pale, its feathers plucked, through the glass burned with spices and gold, through the icy panes, still dreary, alas! the dawn threw itself on the angelic lamp (Hartley, 1965, p. 189).

> (1) I bring you the child (offspring) of an Idumean night. (2) Black (dark), with wing bleeding and pale, (its feathers) plucked, (3) Through the window burnt

> with spices and gold, (4) Through the icy panes, alas, still bleak (dreary), (5) Dawn hurled itself upon the angelic lamp (Burnshaw, n.d.ii).

One can see that Burnshaw's translation is similar to Hartley's for Penguin. The most conspicuous innovation is his use of brackets, which perform a variety of functions: to indicate a figurative expansion of the denotative translation, as in '(offspring)'; to mark off explanatory insertions that clarify syntax, as in '(its feathers)'; and to offer alternative translations, as in '(dreary)'. There is a less discriminating tendency to use brackets to hedge his bets, preserving some of Hartley's choices, such as 'dark' and 'its feathers' but subordinating them to his own choices. Burnshaw also makes a more persistent effort to calque syntax, replicating Mallarmé's post-modifier with 'wing bleeding' and the position of *hélas* in line 4.

The accompanying commentary discussed 'Don du poème' in terms of Mallarmé's verse drama *Hérodiade*, perhaps taking a lead from the account in Fowlie (1953, p. 142), drawing on key statements of Mallarmé's poetic theory such as '"To paint not the thing but the effect it produces"' (Burnshaw, n.d.ii). He provided a setting for the poem's narrative action and an explanation of principal themes such as the poet's fear of creative impotence. Aside from a passing reference to 'indefiniteness' of punctuation, formal features received scant attention.

Responses to the specimen were detailed and unsparing. Peyre acknowledged that the translation replicated the syntax and movement of the poem but not its music, rhythm or the 'rare effects of its words'. The commentary read 'like a paraphrasis', failing to reflect on rhythm and various semantic features: the suggestiveness of words, images, and the recurrence of familiar lexical items (Peyre, 1958a). Fitts found the translation 'risible in the extreme' and the commentary a paraphrase, chiding Burnshaw, 'it is naughty of you to dismiss the real difficulties […] '"cold feet", "angelical" (dawn? or the lamp?), the odd shift from passé défini to indéfini; the whole damn AURA of the poem' (Fitts, 1958b). Peyre wondered, 'Is the conception of the work as a whole sound, practically speaking?' (Peyre, 1958a).

Peyre's observation, that the translation replicated the syntax of the poem but not its other features, presented an early example of the troublesome conceptual ambiguity

of Burnshaw's 'truly literal' translation. Burnshaw had satisfied one formal criterion but not a host of others that were valued by one of his potential contributors. Peyre's objection also raised questions about the status of the translation, which entail consequences for the reader's approach to it. For Lionel Trilling, the translation of *The Poem Itself* has a clear status: it 'frankly avows its merely ancillary intention' as a route to reading a foreign language (1984, p. 96). However, Clive Scott has challenged the view that translation can ever be truly ancillary in this manner. In analysis of Francis Scarfe's Baudelaire translations for Penguin of 1964, he observes that while prose translations 'usually make no claims to ontological independence' (2000, p. 147), they nevertheless cannot avoid embodying various formal devices, such as punctuation, rhythm and syntax, which generate literary effects (2000, pp. 149–50). The Penguin prose translations of poetry, which provided a model for Burnshaw, were commonly nudged in different formal and interpretative directions. Michael Hamburger sometimes attempted to reproduce Hölderlin's metrical effects 'where the rhythm or meter of a line seemed inseparable from what it states' and Hartley adopted 'as literal a rendering as is compatible with reasonable English prose', conceding that a poet like Mallarmé 'is bound to impose an interpretation', which led to a 'more approximate' practice (1965, p. xxxviii). A 'truly literal' translation is hard to pin down, and Burnshaw found himself confronted at the outset of his project with objections to his choice of criteria and his reluctance to acknowledge the ontological independence of his translation, the types of verbal experience that it embodied.

The criticisms of Peyre and Fitts extended to ways that the commentary accounted for verbal experience. Burnshaw responded to Peyre's suggestions by appending them to a revised version of his commentary. Objections to the translation were answered in part by a paragraph that largely repeated Peyre's observations, declaring that 'some of our English equivalents are too bare' (Burnshaw, n.d.iii). Yet these Peyre additions are oddly stubborn chunks of text, literally stuck on the end of the earlier version with tape. They enumerate rather than evoking or explaining the areas of the poem that Peyre felt required more attention.

Nevertheless, both Peyre and Fitts agreed to collaborate on the project as associate editors. A practical model for the anthology had been established, at least provisionally, but the specimen remained an equivocal document: Peyre and Fitts

acquiesced to the method of translation, but their criticisms remained unanswered with the commentary a clunky cut-and-paste response to Peyre that relied heavily on paraphrase and a truncated account of the semantic evocation of Mallarmé's language. The revised model was a precarious compromise that left divergent views about the poem and its translation unresolved.

Antagonistic textualization: Burnshaw, Hugo, Jaszi and Sebba

I will now focus on exchanges between Burnshaw and the contributors to the German and French sections. Burnshaw worked out his method in these parts of the anthology. The advocacy represented by the specimen entry on Mallarmé's 'Don du poème' was tested, extended and adapted as new hands took on Burnshaw's proposition with a wider variety of poems. These exchanges provide evidence of competing practices and conceptualisations of the project. They also reveal different forms of social interaction. Burnshaw came to a working agreement with Fitts and Peyre on 'Don du poème', which acted as a provisional compromise but hardly dispelled substantial doubts about his method. Burnshaw would then launch into the project with German contributors who had not been part of these early discussions.

Correspondence for the German contributions to *The Poem Itself* is concentrated in the period December 1958 to September 1959, immediately following Fitts and Peyre's approval of the Mallarmé specimen in October 1958 (Peyre, 1958b). This section of the anthology was the least settled in terms of executive arrangements and personal relations. Burnshaw trusted his associate editors for French (Henri Peyre) and Spanish-Portuguese (Dudley Fitts), drawing on the relations that they had established through the conceptualisation of the project. When John Frederick Nims was brought in as a Spanish contributor and associate editor for the Italian section, Burnshaw wrote approvingly that he was 'excellent in Italian and Spanish' (Burnshaw, 1959b). Burnshaw was less convinced by Howard Hugo, however, who took care of the German section, stripping him of his associate editorship after exasperated exchanges ('you delaying bastard') (Burnshaw, 1959h). Burnshaw had a greater direct involvement in editing the contributions for the German section than he did for Spanish-Portuguese and Italian. He was less familiar with these contributors than with his associate editors and the discrepancy between his knowledge and their expertise

was also wider. While Burnshaw worked directly with French, he confessed to Gregor Sebba that he was relying on the German dictionary and 'my own imagination' for the Rilke contributions (1959f). His exchanges reveal competing ideas about how the contributions should be produced at a point where he and his collaborators were still working out what the early conceptualisation of the project meant in practice.

Burnshaw's editorial interventions at this stage concentrated on the translations ahead of the commentaries. One of the chief methods for promoting his reading of text and translation was to introduce parenthetical insertions, as he had done for the Mallarmé specimen. One can see his approach illustrated in his comments on a short passage of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 'Die Beiden' (The Two) where an unnamed male protagonist is described riding a horse:

> Er ritt auf einem jungen Pferde,
> Und mit nachlässiger Gebärde
> Erzwang er, daß es zitternd stand (Burnshaw, 1964, p. 134).

The typescript shows Jaszi's initial translation of these lines:

> (6) He rode upon a young horse, (7) And with a negligent gesture (8) He forced it to halt trembling (Burnshaw, n.d.iv).

Burnshaw made the following suggestions for amendments to the choice of 'negligent' in a letter:

> Line 7: 'nachlässiger' might also suggest careless or quite careless, might it not? A 'negligent gesture' in English isn't quite right. The weight of the word would seem to be 'offhand' in the sense of something that didn't require effort, thought, etc. It was all so simple etc. If I read this right, you ought to introduce 'effortless' or 'careless' somewhere in this line, either in parenthesis (suggest its alternate equivalent) or in square brackets (suggesting its force by explanation). Thus: 'And with a careless [lit. negligent, suggesting effortlessness]' (Burnshaw, n.d.v).

Burnshaw’s response to this one word indicates an approach to ‘truly’ literal translation that focuses on semantic implication. The results are expansive. Although he describes ‘negligent’ as not ‘quite right’, he nevertheless proposes to preserve it in brackets along with further explanation. There is uncertainty at this stage about how Burnshaw wishes to use these brackets. He suggests enclosing ‘effortless’ or ‘careless’ in brackets but then his example presents ‘careless’ as the primary translation with other options (his own and Jaszi’s) then placed in parenthesis. The status of the additions is further complicated by the suggestion that they can either be presented as alternative semantic implications (in round brackets) or as explanation (in square brackets). For a method that aimed to deliver readers to an experience of poetry these are quite different orders of engagement with the particularity of the text.

This expansive focus on one aspect of the text, its semantic implication, has consequences for another textual feature that had been a formal priority of the specimen Mallarmé contribution: syntax. One can see these competing priorities at work in Burnshaw’s suggestion for the final line of the sequence:

> *As for line 8, might quivering’ be added to trembling, in parenthesis? There is something about trembling that carries the idea of extreme shock to the horse. Quivering has something less of this shock, and the horse becomes less focal, as it were; the limelight remains where it should be, on the man.*

Burnshaw suggests that the fearful implication of ‘trembling’, which focuses on the horse, can be mitigated by a parenthetical insertion of ‘quivering’, which will then redirect the focus of the phrase to the gesture of the man rather than the horse. The line would thus read: ‘He forced it to halt trembling (quivering)’. This suggestion presents the two terms ‘trembling’ and ‘quivering’ within a specific syntactic arrangement, which carries implications for the ways one might read the line. One can read parenthetical insertions syntactically in different ways: this and that meaning; this particular aspect of that meaning; this or that meaning; this rather than that meaning. When a reader encounters brackets, they are left to work these relations out. If they do manage to arrive at Burnshaw’s suggestion that the parenthetical ‘quivering’ tempers the ‘extreme shock’ of ‘trembling’, it will take them time. This use of the bracket as a form of qualification or afterthought then truncates the implication that the

reader might have derived from ‘trembling’, correcting it as an incomplete or misleading word choice. The reader is asked to do a lot of work on the ways that the horse is evoked, and it is doubtful whether the parenthetical clarification then helps direct attention to the man. Clive Scott argues that a prose translation that makes no claims to ‘ontological independence’, that would ‘rather not have to exist’, ‘falsifies, even if unwittingly, its own capacities’ (Scott, 2000, p. 147 and 154). Prose translation embodies meaning in textual forms, whether it wants to or not. If it aims for the status of a glossary, it will ‘remain inert at the textual level’ (p. 155). In the case of Burnshaw’s use of brackets, which favour semantic implication at the expense of syntax, the result is not so much inert as expansively, intricately involved for the reader.

The example from ‘Die Beiden’ grapples with a relatively unremarkable piece of German text. It indicates the proliferative nature of Burnshaw’s method, the ways that its expansive attention to semantic implication burdens the syntax of the translation. The different word choices of Burnshaw and his contributor are not so much negotiated as accumulated, leading to an accretive textual process that is hard work for the reader at the receiving end of it. The translations of Rilke presented a more challenging textual example and a starker conflict between Burnshaw and his contributor. With Howard Hugo a negligent associate editor, Burnshaw had to deal directly with the German contributors. He wrote to Hugo to say that he would edit Gregor Sebba, who was providing the Rilke translations and commentaries (Burnshaw, 1959c), confiding that he was worried about his contributions, which were ‘skimpy of speculative and discursive comment’ (Burnshaw, 1959b). Mistrustful of his academic contributors, Burnshaw was then liable to push his readings hard. That mistrust was reciprocated, meaning that Sebba was disposed to push back and Burnshaw would later refer to their ‘furious correspondence’ (Burnshaw, 1959h).

When Sebba sent Burnshaw what he described as a ‘rather rough’ translation of the first of Rilke’s *Duineser Elegien* (*Duino Elegies*) (Sebba, n.d.), Burnshaw replied that he had ‘labored over the literal translation in an effort to improve it’ (Burnshaw, 1959f). Sebba sets out some of the challenges of the *Elegies* at the start of his commentary:

> Even the German reader must struggle with their uncommon use of common words, with their sentences that tear open to let displaced parts of speech press

> into the gap, with their obscure allusions and mystifying or wildly farfetched metaphors (Burnshaw, 1964, p. 153).

Translation and commentary would have to confront a wide range of challenging stylistic detail: nonstandard use of everyday lexis, unconventional syntax, private allusions and cryptic figurative language. Sebba quotes Rilke's own characterisation of his poetry as a language of '"condensation and abbreviation"' (Burnshaw, 1964, p. 153). In the following passage, Rilke confronts a lack of consolation in divine, human and animal spheres:

> Und so verhalt ich mich denn und verschlucke den Lockruf
> dunkelen Schluchzens. Ach, wen vermögen
> wir denn zu brauchen? Engel nicht, Menschen nicht,
> und die findigen Tiere merken es schon,
> daß wir nicht sehr verläßlich zu Haus sind
> in der gedeuteten Welt (Burnshaw, 1964, p. 150).

Burnshaw's edited version took the following form:

> (8) Wherefore (and so) I **constrain** myself [hold my breath] and swallow down the call-note (9) of deep-dark sobbing. Alas, whom, after all are we able **to use [turn to]?** Not angels, not men. (11) and the **wisely perceptive (knowing)** animals do indeed notice (12) that we are not very **trustingly** at home (13) within our interpreted *world [the world as we human beings understand it] (Burnshaw, 1959g).*

Sebba's response to this edit amounted to a comprehensive and detailed rejection of Burnshaw's reading of the German and aspects of his translation method. I have highlighted the choices that he contested in bold above. Burnshaw had misread the literal, denotative meaning of words in line 8 '(literally: I hold myself in check; it seems to me that "contain" comes nearer to it than "constrain")' and line 12, which confused *sich verlassen* ('means indeed: "to trust somebody or something"') with *verlässlich* ('means reliable, worthy of being trusted because one is dependable') (Sebba, 1959). Burnshaw's interpretation of individual lexical items obscured higher order semantic

considerations such as tone: '"findig" means resourceful, clever, shrewd, knowing one's way about, being nobody's fool. There is an undertone of irony here'. Burnshaw's use of brackets in line 10 was a distraction ('I would omit "turn to", because it deflects from the principal meaning'). Shortly after this passage in line 18, Burnshaw's use of brackets for an explanatory insertion upset the tone which could be conveyed without the intrusion: 'Here is one place where the elegiac tone of the poem <u>can</u> come through by a verbatim translation. "Oh, and (then also) night, the night…" sacrifices the tone for an explanation which the comment will make anyway' (Sebba, 1959). Sebba's corrections to Burnshaw's editing stretched across extent of the translation.

Burnshaw's reaction revealed moments of pique: 'I disagree with you completely and totally and quite unperturbed by the Oxford dictionary' (Burnshaw, 1959i). Sebba challenged Burnshaw's reading of the German text, his choice of English to render that reading and his use of brackets. Burnshaw's response was to double down on them. For most of Sebba's objections to the previous example (to 'constrain', 'wisely perceptive (knowing)' and 'trustingly') Burnshaw suggested the inclusion of matter in brackets rather than conceding entirely to Sebba's suggestions: 'I suggest you include in square brackets [literally hold myself] and of course also keep your word "contain"; 'why not put in square brackets that they see through us. "Shrewd" is not sufficient, I feel'; 'how about doing this "…are not very reliably (trustworthily) at home"?' (Burnshaw, 1959i). Burnshaw's suggestions either incorporated Sebba's explanation for his choices into the translation or acted as a compromise, preserving his own choice that had been rejected by Sebba, as in the case of 'trustworthily'.

Burnshaw's use of brackets can be understood as a form of advocacy for his 'truly literal' translation method. It attempts to account for the polysemy of lexical items, albeit at the expense of the reader's syntactic experience, the ways that meaning unfolds in a temporal verbal sequence, which had been one of the priorities of the anthology's initial conception. Within the broader method, however, there is a further, more personal advocacy at work, a determination to find ways of representing Burnshaw's own interpretation of the text, based on the dictionary and his 'imagination', in spite of the objections of his contributor. It represents a translation method and a social impasse, a reluctance to broker the gap between different points

of view. Farrell describes a ‘merging of cognitive processes’ (2001, p. 23) as the end point of successful artistic collaboration. Burnshaw’s use of brackets maintained a form of cognitive antagonism, leaving a textual record of competing interpretations. In the published version, many of his suggestions were abandoned. Yet expansive and explanatory brackets still proliferate here and elsewhere in the German section, leading to a cluttered experience for the reader.

‘Sample “attacks”’ on textualization: Burnshaw and Peyre

Work on the French section with Henri Peyre began at the same time as the German section in December 1958 but continued beyond it to the end of 1959. Burnshaw’s correspondence with Peyre drew on the experience of the fraught exchanges with his German contributors. He confided that ‘with Hugo and the other Germans’, he had needed to revise ‘pieces to the extent of a total rewriting’ (Burnshaw, 1959d). Burnshaw also had substantial direct involvement with the French section. Peyre was not only the associate editor for French, but also the principal contributor, providing translations and commentaries for 11 of the 13 poets included in his section. Burnshaw then acted as his editor in a practice that was distinct from the Spanish and Italian sections where most of the work took place between associate editors, Dudley Fitts and John Frederick Nims and their Spanish or Portuguese and Italian contributors respectively.

Peyre’s detailed response to the Mallarmé specimen established an active role for him in the conception and formulation of the project, involving him in early rituals of recognition. Unlike Hugo and the other German contributors, he had already begun to form a collaborative working relationship with Burnshaw before the editing of his own contributions. Peyre was effusive in his praise of Burnshaw, describing him as a ‘martyr of poetry’ (Peyre, 1959c) and was also willing to play a compliant role, confiding that he would expect a ‘scolding’ from Burnshaw’s editing (Peyre, 1959b). Burnshaw reciprocated the admiration, responding to an early sample of Peyre’s contributions that he was ‘delighted’: ‘I can tell you my reaction in a word: Magnifique’ (Burnshaw, 1959d).

After the unresolved conflicts and compromises of the German section, Burnshaw was still working out the collaborative method of *The Poem Itself*, instructing Peyre that 'by far the best procedure' was 'for you to do a few sample "attacks" on the problem and for me to react to these, and then for you to consider my reactions and then to do the whole job as you see best' (Burnshaw, 1959j). In spite of Peyre's earlier involvement in the proposal and specimen, Burnshaw felt the need to set out the translation principles of the anthology again, referring back to his experience with the German section. 'I have been insisting on literalness', he declared, although some contributors had 'found this a hard line to hew to', slipping into '"poetical literal renderings"', requiring a firm reminder from Burnshaw of the 'basic plan' of the anthology (Burnshaw, 1959j). He represented the ensuing exchanges as follows:

> But then they have said, in effect, that there is no literal way of saying what such-and-such a word or phrase means; and I have said in reply: 'Indeed there isn't always a satisfactory equivalent, and that is why we have been resorting to interpolated words and phrases or even sentences' (Burnshaw, 1959j).

This is a curious revision of the actual exchanges that Burnshaw had with his German contributors. His correspondence with Sebba shows conflict arising not from contributors slipping into 'poetical renderings' but from Burnshaw pushing his own interpretations and word choices, irrespective of a range of semantic considerations. Burnshaw's revisionary dramatization of these exchanges side-stepped his substantial conflicts with the German contributors, attempting to return to the terms on which he had first proposed the project to Peyre and Fitts as a correction to a prevailing culture of poetic '"recreations"' (Burnshaw, 1958a). It is less an account of his experience than a retreat to the initial conceptualization of the project before it came into contact with challenges to his method.

Peyre responded with an effective blend of compliance and resistance to Burnshaw's proposition. He was willing to go along with the polemical impetus of Burnshaw's objection to poetic recreation, assuring him that he wished to 'avoid high flown, personal vision' and 'falsely poetical' work (Peyre, 1959a). However, he was also able to challenge the practices that Burnshaw had established in the German section. When Burnshaw suggested using interpolations in brackets as he had done with the

German contributors (Burnshaw, 1959d), Peyre set out his objection. While he felt that 'all your contributors should bow' to 'the policy of literalness', he maintained that '<u>literalness may not mean fidelity and to be excessively prosaic</u> is as much of a betrayal as to be poetical' (Burnshaw's underlining). In the case of a poet who 'is primarily a musician like Verlaine', he felt an exception could be 'tolerated' (Peyre, 1959c). In a further letter, he declared, 'my <u>one</u> plea to you is: in a very, very few cases, I believe the musical element of the poetry should be stressed in the commentary, and be conveyed in the translation' (Peyre's underlining), citing Baudelaire's 'L'Invitation au voyage' and Verlaine's 'Bruxelles'. In these cases, 'we might make a slight exception of literalness (which would be prosaism) and render the musical value of the poem' (Peyre, 1959d).

Burnshaw referred repeatedly to keeping 'our promise to the reader' as a justification for his 'truly literal' translation method (Burnshaw, 1959j). His discussions with Sebba turned primarily on the semantic implication of German words and phrases rather than the reader's experience of the translations. This approach led to translations that made considerable syntactic demands on the reader. Peyre adopted Burnshaw's conceptual focus on the reader and then used it to challenge the use of brackets: 'On the rather <u>lavish</u> use of alternate renderings and square brackets which you recommend, I would also formulate timid doubts', elaborating that 'it can take up much space, slow down the reading, sound heavily didactic. It underlines too crudely the possible ambiguities of the text' (Burnshaw's underlining) (Peyre, 1959c).

Where Burnshaw had continued to advocate for his method and his translation choices with his German contributors, he conceded willingly to Peyre's objections:

> I've thought about all the points you raise and I agree with them completely, and especially with your reservations about some of my suggestions and proposals. It would be sorry indeed if my principle of literalness were to compel our contributors to become excessively prosaic (Burnshaw, 1959k).

He now concluded that 'alternate renderings in square brackets and parentheses can surely be horrible if overused' (Burnshaw, 1959k). Brackets are almost entirely absent

from Baudelaire's 'Le balcon' and the poems by Verlaine, and generally used more sparingly in the French section.

Peyre prompted Burnshaw to a more open, responsive reflection on his advocacy for the project. He confessed that he was 'learning much about the method in the course of all this editing' (Burnshaw , 1959m) and exclaimed at one point, 'How dreary it would be if everyone followed that Mallarmé specimen!' (Burnshaw, 1959l). His exchanges with Peyre also paid greater attention to what he described as the 'interpretative-explanatory-helpful commentary' (Burnshaw, 1959j). His editing of the German section had concentrated primarily on the translations. Burnshaw made a common criticism throughout the anthology that the commentaries failed to address formal properties and the 'poem qua poem' (Burnshaw, 1959e). Peyre, by contrast, had done 'admirably in pointing to the poetical qualities and in helping him [the reader] to understand the sense of the poem' (Burnshaw, 1959j).

One can see this more harmonious collaboration between editor and contributor in Burnshaw's close involvement with the further Mallarmé contributions. After editing Peyre's translations and commentaries, he wrote to say that he had 'indulged' his interest in the poems, 'adding and changing with great audacity' (Burnshaw to Peyre, 8 December 1959, 5/3). Burnshaw 'entirely retyped' the typescripts of these contributions so it is hard to ascertain with precision where he intervened (Burnshaw, 1959m). The correspondence presents no evidence of conflict. Burnshaw praised Peyre's Mallarmé commentaries as 'a perfect example of our method at its most effective' and 'extremely well discussed in terms of […] poetic effects' (Burnshaw, 1959m). For his part, Peyre thought that Burnshaw's editing of these contributions was 'excellent', declaring that he had 'greatly improved, clarified, strengthened what I had meant to say' (Peyre, 1959e).

Mallarmé's 'Le vierge, le vivace, y le bel aujourd'hui' provides an example of a translation and commentary that realized Burnshaw's advocacy at the level of method and personal interpretation to both his and his contributor's apparent satisfaction. It can therefore be assessed as a point where his initial conceptual proposal to address both the syntax and the sound of the poem reached a stable agreement as collaborative practice. The commentary describes the poem as 'an image of mystifying

intent' (Burnshaw, 1964, p. 54), an interpretative challenge. The interpretative comment is interspersed with a translation that is broken down into sections. The opening of the poem is presented thus:

> Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui
> Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre
> Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
> Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui!
>
> …
>
> The first stanza is both an exclamation and a question. It seizes us by the surprise of the three resplendent adjectives of the opening line, and when we come upon the *nous* of the second, we are directly involved. (1) *The virgin, the vivid and the splendid new day* – this new day bristling with life – (2) *Will it tear for us with a stroke of its drunken wing* (3) *This hard forgotten lake haunted beneath the frost* (4) *By the transparent glacier of flights that have not fled!* (Burnshaw, 1964, p. 54).

Burnshaw wrote to Peyre to say that in his editing, he had placed 'the interpretation closer to the literal translation' (Burnshaw, 1959m), a practice that had worked elsewhere in the anthology, although Peyre himself had earlier suggested this practice 'to prepare the reader for the translation coming next' (Peyre, 1959d). The commentary provides an interpretative framework for the translation rather than a supplement to it. In the initial conception of the project, the commentary had a secondary status with Peyre's suggestions for 'Don du poème' appended as an afterthought. Here the commentary guides the reader towards particular aspects of the opening stanza, such as syntactic ambiguity (a period that is both exclamation and question), grammatical form (use of adjectives), and the experience and position of the reader ('surprise' and the use of *nous*). The figurative interpretation of the opening line ('this new day bristling with life') further integrates the guiding voice of the commentary with the experience of reading the translation. It directs the reader and leaves them with less work than the cluttered practice of brackets that Burnshaw pushed with the German contributions. Although this is a dense poem, the

arrangement of translation and commentary provides a more legible and more coherent reading experience than the entries for Hofmannsthal and Rilke that I discussed earlier. One consequence of this greater coherence is that the link to the source text is weakened. Where, at least in theory, *The Poem Itself* proposed that the reader should integrate the matter of the translation and commentary in a reading of the source text of the poem, here the reader can gain a reasonably integrated experience by moving between translation and commentary independently of the source. Clive Scott argues that in spite of the claims of much prose translation, as a form it cannot avoid a degree of ontological independence from the source text. This arrangement of translation and commentary creates a form of ontological independence for the reading experience in English.

One can see that in this entry, Burnshaw and Peyre maintain the focus of Burnshaw's initial proposal on syntax and sound. Burnshaw stated that 'the syntax cannot fail to discourage even a hardy reader' as he edited Peyre's Mallarmé contributions (Burnshaw, 1959m). Syntax is a well-established focus of the critical literature on Mallarmé. For Jacques Derrida, the interpretative challenge of his poems, their 'undecidability' derives not so much from 'the richness of meaning, the inexhaustible resources of a word' but 'a certain play of the syntax', citing a notorious comment that was attributed to Mallarmé, '"I am profoundly and scrupulously a syntaxer"' (1992, p. 114).

Malcolm Bowie notes two remarkable syntactic features in the passage I have cited above. The grammatical status of *vierge* and *vivace* is ambiguous: they can be read as nouns, as 'phantom presences' that are resolved as adjectives qualifying *aujourd'hui* as the line unfolds. The pronoun *nous* could also be read as a direct or indirect object, thus either *ce lac* (this lake) or the reader could be torn by the drunken wing. As I noted earlier, the Peyre-Burnshaw entry is conscious of syntax. Where Hartley's translation of the opening line ('The virginal, living and beautiful day' (p. 85) chooses the clearly adjectival 'virginal' and 'living', *The Poem Itself* offers the more ambiguous 'The virgin, the vivid…'. Yet the ambiguity is mitigated by the commentary, which pre-empts the syntax in this case with reference to 'the three resplendent adjectives'. While the commentary notes the way that 'nous' involves the reader, the

translation chooses to explicitate the indirect object, thus removing the reader from the violent implication of *déchirer* (to tear).

The coherence and interpretative efficiency of the commentary and translation mitigate the disruptive effects of syntactic ambiguity in Mallarmé's poem. In his own commentary on 'Le vierge, le vivace . . .', Bowie notes that the difficulty of the poem provokes readers to adopt different forms of 'defensive reaction': to 'make it into a picture' and to 'superimpose upon the picture a simple allegorical grid' (1978, p. 10), the swan as the poet and so on. The poem is thus 'tidied up' and 'rigidified' (1978, p. 10). One can see these tendencies in the ways that the Burnshaw-Peyre commentary deals not only with syntax but sound, one of the primary concerns of Burnshaw's initial proposal for the anthology. For Bowie, the poem's 'arresting and intricate' pattern of sounds resists interpretation; it is liable to attract a reader's attention before they seek 'to acquire anything more than a minimum supporting drift of sense' (1978, p. 10). Clive Scott refers to this mnemonic aspect of poetry as ensuring 'the survival of a text in its non-interpreted, or pre-interpreted, integrity' (2000, p. 153). *The Poem Itself* consistently attempts to interpret this element of the poem, explaining it, in one of Bowie's 'defensive gestures', as confirmation of the poem's setting, its 'picture': the sound *i* or *ui* 'has something of the angular sharpness of ice itself'; lines 'begin to tighten in an ice-like gloom'; and 'longer words, with an accumulation of *i*'s' produce 'an impression of vast, desolate plains of ice' (Burnshaw, 1964, p. 55). The initial proposal for *The Poem Itself* aimed to deliver the reader to the source text so that they could experience, among other things, the sounds of poems in foreign languages. The commentary here relates sound directly to referential meaning, making sense of it but, as with the poem's syntax, leaving the reader scant leeway to make their own sense of the movement from reading experience to interpretation.

The Peyre-Burnshaw commentary does provide the caveat that its interpretation is partial, enjoining 'the interested reader who may prefer a different reading to ours' to remember Robert Frost's statement that '"a poet is entitled to all the meanings that can be found in his poem"' (Burnshaw, 1964, p. 54). Although its approach conforms to the 'defensive mechanisms' that Bowie notes – a reliance on setting and allegory – it nevertheless brings out a range of ways of conceiving the swan — as a symbol of 'unattainable perfection', of 'vigor', a 'pure, solitary ideal', a 'proud dream' and a

‘martyr’ (Burnshaw, 1964, pp. 54 and 55). The poem solicits these approaches even as it disrupts them and there is only so much that can be said in a two-page spread. Yet an approach that would be attentive to the experience of the poem needs to account for aspects of the reading experience that either resist interpretation (as in the case of sound for Bowie and Scott) or that challenge it. Bowie describes Mallarmé’s poetry as a ‘sense-making system’ (1978, p. 12). Burnshaw claimed in similar terms as he edited the commentary for ‘Le vierge’ that he had ‘called attention to the sort of meaning-search that goes on nowadays’ (1959m). However, the impulse to clarify and explain frequently overrode that experience of reading and sense-making.

Reflecting on literal translation practices at the time of Burnshaw’s anthology, Daniel Weissbort describes *The Poem Itself* approvingly as ‘useful’, if nevertheless dependent on ‘an unavoidably elaborate apparatus’ (2010, p. 115). The degree of elaborateness and difficulty varies considerably from one section and from one contribution to another. The archive gives access to the social and cultural factors that led to these varied manifestations of Burnshaw’s advocacy. Some of the most elaborate, and demanding, translation occurs in the German section where Burnshaw was still working out his method. This stage of the project was characterized by the least stable executive and personal social relations, where trust was scarce on both sides. The reader is left to manage as best they can with translations that bear the trace of antagonistic readings of the poems’ semantic implication. Burnshaw’s advocacy for a method of translation was here overtaken by advocacy for his own interpretation of the poems. This move was masked in his revisionary account of these exchanges to Henri Peyre, which attempted to return to the initial conceptualization of the project. Peyre’s ability to combine emollience with firm resistance created a more legible translation practice and coherent reading experience across translation and commentary, albeit one whose interpretative efficiency could be pre-emptive. Burnshaw drove his advocacy under the banner of a ‘truly literal’ translation. His editorial exchanges show not only how textually diverse the concept can be in terms of practice but also how that diversity answered to particular working relations with different contributors. Burnshaw’s papers provide a historical example of the translator’s advocacy, of the ways that collaborative social interactions animate and shape the passage from conceptual proposition to textual practice.

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