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The Coindreau archives: A translator at work

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Though it is not entirely new, interest in genetic criticism is still too recent within translation studies to have inspired more than specialized and fragmentary work. The field is almost entirely devoted to poetry translation, and, if the rough drafts of poet-translators like Saint-John Perse, Paul Celan or Philippe Jaccottet have recently been the subject of critical studies, these primarily undertake a comparison between the translator's process and the poet's work.¹ Only in 2014 did a special issue of the journal *GENESIS* allow us to celebrate the marriage of genetic criticism and translation studies without restrictions or exclusions, and in a way that involved translators who are not poets and even translators who are not writers – non-literary translators, whose drafts the journal reproduced in number, and in colour. Even more recently, the journal *Transalpina* dedicated an issue to the genesis of translations in the field of Italian literature (Agostini-Ouafi and Lavieri 2015), and the journal *Linguistica Antverpiensia* sketched the outline of 'genetic translation studies' (Cordingley and Montini 2015: 1–18). In theory, this new subject seems inexhaustible to a scholar of translation studies; in practice, alas, translators' drafts remain rare and limited, for the most part, to the twentieth century. In fact, we can lament with Fabienne Durand-Bogaert that most translators 'do not bother to preserve the traces of different angles of approach that led them to adopt a particular lexical or syntactic choice' (Durand-Bogaert 2014: 8). Certain specialized archives nonetheless offer researchers a vast terrain to explore – the Lilly Library at Indiana University, the Literary Translation Archive at the University of East Anglia, the Beinecke Library at Yale University, the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas at Austin and the Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (Institute for Contemporary Publishing Archives [IMEC]) near Caen, which has collected an archive of translators' manuscripts over the years. The addition of this kind of material to the scattered archives of poet-translators immediately proves its value, even in the sheer abundance of manuscripts. Instead of (or in addition to) examining and commenting on the hazards of poetry translation, which are fascinating but highly specific, we can observe a long-distance effort, following the translator at work through dozens of years and comparing his methods with those of his contemporaries.

On the topic of English to French literary translation, the dossiers archived at IMEC are at once copious and disappointing; their contents are often limited to press packets,

correspondence between editors and translators that privileges legal or financial questions over literary ones, non-annotated galleys and other printed versions. But the IMEC archives also contain several notable, and even remarkable, exceptions, which are undoubtedly best illustrated by the Coindreau papers. Over several examples, taken almost at random from the profusion of the archive, it becomes apparent that Coindreau's drafts can lead to many forms of work – from the most particular to the highly systematic. They permit a great diversity of approaches, whether the goal is to illustrate this or that hypothesis suggested by a comparison between the original and the published translation or to shed light on his method of working. Lastly, they allow us to see the translative process at the very moment it is taking place, and not as translators describe it in retrospect, with more or less objectivity and sincerity, when they are questioned after the fact.

Born in 1892, Maurice Coindreau taught French at Princeton University from the 1920s to the 1960s, and to avoid getting bored, 'he translated' (cited by Gresset 1992: ii).² Over the course of his career, he translated some fifty novels, including thirteen from the Spanish – Goytisolo, Sánchez Ferlosio and Quiroga – and the rest from American English, with a marked preference for novelists from the Southern United States like Faulkner, Dos Passos, Capote, Styron, Steinbeck, Hemingway and many others he introduced in France. As a faithful, regular translator for Éditions Gallimard, he was both a prospector and an unparalleled scout, a true ambassador of transatlantic literature – so much so that Sartre could say, 'American literature – that's the literature of Coindreau' (Gresset 1992: xv).

The source–draft–target sequence

The Maurice Coindreau archives preserved at IMEC include (in the realm of English) the drafts of a dozen novels and short stories, representing, in many forms, up to four or five successive states of a translation, with a first attempt in a notebook with paper and pencil, corrected in red, then typed and corrected once or twice more before establishing the definitive version. By itself, studying these successive states has much to teach us about Coindreau's translative method; however, the 'compulsion for comparison' (Berman 2009: 65) that drives all translation studies scholars encourages us to add two more documents called the 'source' and the 'target'. The source is the original edition Coindreau used, which in most cases is the first American edition. The target is the first published edition of the French translation, before any subsequent revisions.³ This way, each text presents itself in three successive versions; for William Goyen, whose novel will be our first example, we have *The House of Breath* (first American edition, in italics), 'La Maison d'haleine' (translator's draft, in quotations) and *La Maison d'haleine* (first French edition, in italics). Where the traditional comparative approach only examines the original text and the published translation, we propose to introduce the translator's drafts between them. In the source–draft–target sequence, the translative process occupies, for once, the central position – in terms of chronology, certainly, but also in the text's genetics, because Goyen's original is as definitive as Coindreau's published version.⁴ Here, only the operation of translating

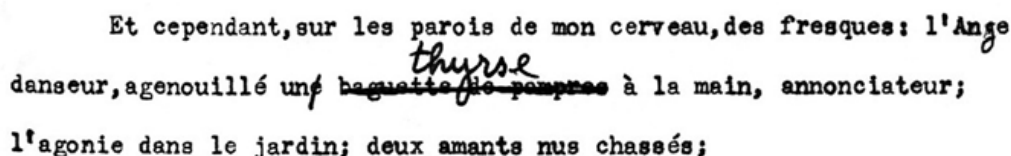
is fluctuating and temporary – alive, in effect, as witnessed by the many states of its perpetual metamorphosis.

The House of Breath, William Goyen's first novel, is at once the portrait of a 'fallen splendid house', of a small, Southern town, and of the author himself. In poetic, sometimes hallucinatory prose, Goyen constructs a complex narrative whose mystical element is apparent from the opening lines:

[A]nd then I walked and walked in the rain that turned half into snow and I was drenched and frozen; and walked upon a park that seemed like the very pasture of Hell where there were couples whispering in the shadows ... Yet on the walls of my brain, frescoes: the kneeling balletic Angel holding a wand of vineleaves, announcing; the agony in the garden; two naked lovers turned out ... (1950: 1)

Alors je marchai, je marchai sous la pluie qui tournait à la neige, et j'étais morfondu, transi; et j'arrivai dans un parc, fidèle image des prairies de l'Enfer. Des couples y chuchotaient dans l'ombre ... Et cependant, sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange danseur, agenouillé, un thyrses à la main, annonciateur; l'agonie dans le jardin; deux amants nus, chassés ... (1954: 21)

A classic comparison of these two published versions, the original and its translation, already reveals a number of interesting points which might help to outline Coindreau's translative poetics – on the condition, of course, that these elements prove to be recurring, which is to say distinguishable in the whole of the book and not just in this one passage. One can see here, for example, that Coindreau opts for the *passé simple* and the imperfect at the expense of the *passé composé*; avoids the calque 'je marchai et marchai';⁵ omits 'half'; prefers, over the adjective 'trempé', the rather outdated 'morfondu'⁶ of a more formal register; creates two sentences where the English only has one; substitutes a simple apposition after a comma for the explicit comparison 'that seemed like'; recovers an 'and' by adding it later; respects the elision of the verb in the phrase 'on the walls of my brain [there were] frescoes'; shortens 'wand of vineleaves' into 'thyrses'; follows the word order of the English whenever possible; and so on. This type of survey, based on a rapid examination of the source–target sequence, makes up the usual material for translation studies scholars. Yet, between the English original and its French translation, we can benefit from inserting Coindreau's typed manuscript. Here (Figure 11.1) is how the second part of the passage above appears:



Et cependant, sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange
danseur, agenouillé un ~~baguette de vin~~ ^{thyrses} à la main, annonciateur;
l'agonie dans le jardin; deux amants nus chassés;

Figure 11.1 IMEC, Michel Gresset collection, Maurice-Edgar Coindreau subcollection (hereafter cited as CND), box 3, Translations 1952–57, 'La Maison d'haleine' by William Goyen, typescript, fol. 1.

Transcription:⁷ Et cependant sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange danseur, agenouillé, une ~~baguette de pampre~~ <thyrses>⁸ à la main, annonciateur; l'agonie dans le jardin; deux amants nus chassés ...

Not only does this typed account carry the traces of adjustments, corrections and even typographic indications ('font size 14' '12 Garamond'), as much as signs of the imagined page it will one day moult into, but it is also preceded by an earlier version (Figure 11.2), handwritten in this case, which has also been corrected several times:

The image shows a handwritten manuscript snippet with several lines of text. The text is written in cursive and includes several corrections. The visible text is: "Et cependant sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange danseur, agenouillé, tenant une baguette de feuilles de vigne, annonciateur; la torture dans le jardin; deux amants nus, chassés; et sur le dôme". There are several lines of text that have been crossed out or corrected, with some words written in a different color or style to indicate changes.

Figure 11.2 IMEC, CND 3, Translations 1952–57, 'La Maison d'haleine' by William Goyen, manuscript, fol. 1.

Transcription: Et cependant sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange dansant eur, agenouillé, ~~tenant une baguette ornée de pampres feuilles de vigne~~<de pampres à la main>~~feuilles de vigne~~, annonciateur; ~~la torture~~ <l'agonie> <la torture> dans le jardin; deux amants nus, chassés ...

So we find ourselves in the presence of a diverse succession of states, with some fixed and some still unstable, revealing with singular clarity something that is ordinarily left unseen – the passage of one language into another, but also of one text into another. In these first lines, one drawn-out example will allow us to observe the methods through which 'holding a wand of vineleaves' is transformed into 'un thyrses à la main'. There are four sets of successive corrections on the manuscript, plus one last, decisive correction on the typescript. A diachronic, linear transcription makes apparent, in italics, the modifications made in five successive states of the adjective 'balletic' and the phrase 'holding a wand of vineleaves':

- V1. Et cependant sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange *danseur*, agenouillé, *tenant une baguette de feuilles de vigne*, annonciateur; la torture dans le jardin; deux amants nus, chassés ...
- V2. Et cependant sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange *dansant*, agenouillé, une baguette *ornée de pampre à la main*, annonciateur; la torture dans le jardin; deux amants nus, chassés ...
- V3. Et cependant sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange *dansant*, agenouillé, une baguette *ornée de feuilles de vigne* à la main, annonciateur; la torture dans le jardin; deux amants nus, chassés ...
- V4. Et cependant sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange *dansant*, agenouillé, une baguette *de pampre* à la main, annonciateur; la torture dans le jardin; deux amants nus, chassés ...

V5. Et cependant sur les parois de mon cerveau, des fresques: l'Ange dansant, agenouillé, *un thyrses* à la main, annonciateur; la torture dans le jardin; deux amants nus, chassés ...⁹

The progression of these five versions reveals two modifications. The first, 'l'Ange danseur'/'l'Ange dansant', consists of replacing a substantive adjective with a verbal adjective. In grammatical terms, the two versions are as close (or as far) from the original, the qualitative adjective 'balletic'; in semantic terms, both deviate similarly from the original, which has no exact equivalent, and which could be translated by a paraphrase like 'propre à un danseur de ballet';¹⁰ it is therefore in phonetic terms that the difference between versions unfolds. It is quite remarkable that the 'danseur' of the first attempt (V1) is changed to 'dansant' in the first round of revisions (V2), then stays that way through the three rounds of edits which follow (V3–V5), only to be restored to 'danseur' in the published version, no doubt through a final correction in the proofs. The reasons which led to these variations, then to the final choice, are drawn from conjecture (was Coindreau aiming to avoid the three nasal vowels in 'ange dansant'? Or the homophones 'dansant'/'d'encens'? Or to reproduce the echo of the English suffix 'kneeling ... announcing' with 'danseur ... annonciateur'?), but they are almost certainly dictated by phonetic, and not grammatical or semantic, concerns.

The second modification, regarding the translation of 'holding a wand of vineleaves', consists of a series of variations that are both more numerous and more radical: 'tenant une baguette ornée de feuilles de vigne', 'une baguette ornée de pampre à la main', 'une baguette ornée de feuilles de vigne à la main', 'une baguette de pampre à la main', 'un thyrses à la main'. The first attempt offers an almost exact grammatical copy, with each English word translated, in the order of the original, by a French word of the same type: present participle + article + substantive + preposition + substantive. Then the present participle *tenant* is replaced by the adverbial phrase *à la main*, and moved to the end of the phrase (from V2 through V5, and in the published version); the *feuilles de vigne* evolve into *pampre* (V2), become *feuilles de vigne* again (V3), then *pampre* once more (V4) and finally *thyrses* (V5 and the published version). None of these versions is an error: a *pampre* is a branch of vine, while the *thyrses* is a staff wrapped in a vine branch (characteristic of Bacchus). It is tempting to imagine the mechanisms at work in Coindreau's mind. From one version to another, through each reading and rereading, the process could have unfolded like this:

I first translated word for word, in a literal way; as I reread my work, I found that *baguette de feuilles* to be a rather ungainly formulation – we would say that the baguette is *faite de* feuilles; perhaps it would be better to specify that it is *ornée de* feuilles; no, that's a bit too long, too explicit – better to get rid of *ornée* and return to *pampre*; but there's an even better word, *thyrses*, which translates three words in one.

We could lose ourselves in conjectures here (it would be an understatement to say the Coindreau archives invite them), asking ourselves why and how the exact

word finally emerged after so many hesitations (a tardy reminder? a conversation with some Hellenist? consulting a thesaurus?), or concluding that the choice is too elevated when compared with the original (after all, ‘thyrsus’ exists in English). But this essay is not the place for it – with these few lines taken from *The House of Breath*, we simply wanted to demonstrate how much richer and more informative the source–draft–target sequence is for the scholar of translation studies than solely examining the source and the target. A direct comparison between the first lines of *The House of Breath* and *La Maison d’haleine* would allow some to take note of the transformation from ‘a wand of vineleaves’ into ‘un thyrsé’, but it does not tell us anything about the process which precipitated this choice. On the contrary, the drafts of ‘La Maison d’haleine’ constitute a sort of supplementary genetic mediation, encouraging in what it reveals (or at least suggests) – an attentive ear for sound, a high standard for vocabulary, a taste for refined language, etc. The translation process at work, with its hesitations, its temporary corrections and restorations, is visible on every page of Coindreau’s drafts. Just as these written traces let us imagine the writer at work, so too do the translator’s additions and misgivings permit us to see him at work, to watch over his shoulder as he considers and implements the solutions, the variations, the choices that finally sketch out a plan of translation, a developing method.

The Coindreau method: A survey

One cannot draw the contours of a method or test its effectiveness by looking at a few lines. A more thorough analysis, largely outside of the purview of this study, seems necessary and desirable; for now, we will content ourselves with more precisely determining Coindreau’s method by analysing several significant passages. The following excerpt (Figure 11.3) is from *Wise Blood* (1952) by Flannery O’Connor, translated as *La Sagesse dans le sang*:

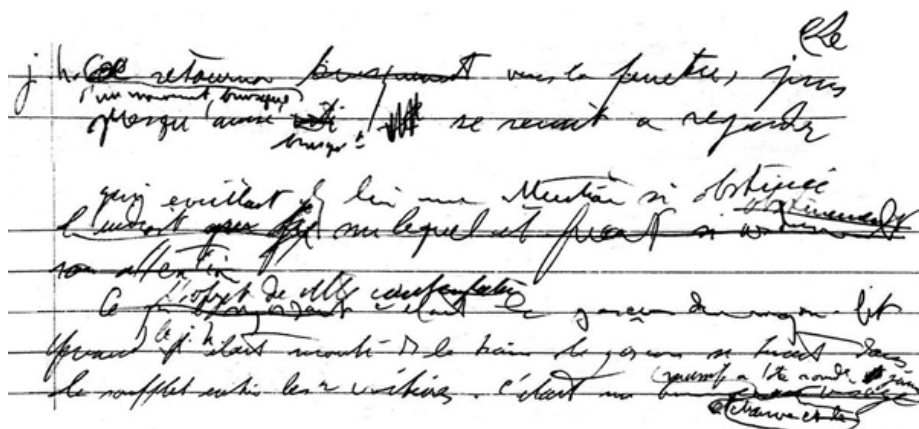


Figure 11.3 IMEC, CND 4, Translations 1959–67, ‘La Sagesse dans le sang’ by Flannery O’Connor, manuscript, fols. 2–3.

Transcription: Il <Le j. h.> <d'un mouvement brusque> se retourna brusquement vers la fenêtre, puis, presque aussi vite <brusqu<, il se remit à regarder l'endroit <qui éveillait en lui> ~~sur lequel il fixait si ardemment son attention~~ <une attention si obstinée.>

~~Ce qu'il regardait~~ <L'objet de cette contemplation> était le garçon du wagon-lit. Quand il <le j. h.> était monté ds le train le garçon se tenait dans le soufflet entre les 2 voitures. C'était un homme <massif> ~~au visage lourd, dont la tête~~ <à tête ronde, chauve et jaune.>

What does this short passage from Coindreau's drafts have to teach us? The transcription reveals an extensively reworked text, following a logic which becomes increasingly apparent when we compare the English original, the first attempt and finally the corrected version in its final state:

Source	He turned toward the window suddenly
1st Draft	Il se retourna brusquement vers la fenêtre
Final	Le jeune homme, d'un mouvement brusque, se retourna vers la fenêtre ¹¹

The correction here seems motivated by a concern for clarification: two male characters are evoked in this paragraph, and 'le jeune homme' in the final version removes an ambiguity. It is possible to reconstruct the translator's reasoning here: compared to a simple *il*, the choice of *le jeune homme* is certainly more explicit, but also substantially longer. 'Le jeune homme se retourna brusquement vers la fenêtre' would form a long phrase, which is also unbroken, creating a flagrant dissonance with the meaning of the sentence and the liveliness of the gesture it describes.

The following example is harder to interpret with certainty. We can observe a definite tactical change along the way:

Source	a thick-figured man with a round yellow bald head
1st Draft	C'était un homme au visage lourd, dont la tête
Final	C'était un homme massif, à tête ronde, jaune et chauve ¹²

The sentence breaks off after 'dont la tête' in the first attempt, as if the translator understood that a sentence begun like this could only end in a rather ungainly way, by placing an excessive stress on the adjectives qualifying the character's head: 'C'était un homme au visage lourd, dont la tête était ronde, jaune, et chauve.' Another hypothesis: Coindreau is correcting an initial confusion, a mistake well known to English learners – 'thick-figured' does not mean 'au visage épais' or 'à la figure épaisse' but 'à la silhouette épaisse'.¹³ For this reason, then, 'un homme au visage lourd' becomes 'un homme massif'.

The same excerpt displays one of the translator's most frequent and most significant solutions for avoiding a calque:

Source	What he was looking at was the porter
1st Draft	Ce qu'il regardait, c'était le garçon du wagon-lit
Final	L'objet de cette contemplation était le portier ¹⁴

The drafts reveal that for Coindreau, the first attempt almost always copies the unfolding of the original English syntax. Only in a second phase does the classic syntax or rhythm of French substitute for the initial Anglicism, either in the first typewritten sheets (where we can see redactions followed by a correction on the same line), or, more often, in a subsequent round of corrections (where the correction is between lines, sometimes in different coloured ink). Every translator has had the experience, after several straight hours of working on a text, of transposing some formulation or other (lexical or syntactic) from the foreign language. Here, the calque from English must have seemed unacceptable after reading it with fresh eyes, what could be called (to borrow a phrase from Antoine Berman) a 'conversion of perspective'.¹⁵ The author of the first attempt is handling linguistic matter so malleable that everything in it is still possible; the re-reader he becomes later, or immediately after, no longer sees a translation in progress but a foreign book in French.

The Coindreau method: A breakdown

The richness of the archives permits (and even demands) a more in-depth analysis – a patient assessment of the erasures which reveal, if not a system, then at least a method of translation and revision. An exhaustive assessment of the translator's process will eventually add to the survey we have just undertaken of these few salient examples which Berman calls 'signifying zones'.¹⁶ This categorization, once established, reveals three specific concerns: lexical precision, the restructuring of syntagms in the sentence and regard for the register of language.

Lexical precision

The drive for semantic accuracy is reflected by a great number of revised words and expressions; here are several examples taken from translations of different authors, showing first the original English (A), followed by our transcription of Coindreau's draft (B) and finally the version published in French (C). The first excerpt (Figure 11.4) is from a translation of John Steinbeck:

Ils avaient descendu le sentier à la file indienne, et, même en terrain dé-
 couvert, ils rest^{aient} l'un derrière l'autre. Ils ~~portaient~~ ^{étaient vêtus} tous les deux
~~des~~ ^{(serge de coton bleu} pantalons et des vestes ~~de~~ ^{à boutons de cuivre.}

Figure 11.4 IMEC, CND 2, Translations 1927–48, 'Des Souris et des hommes' by John Steinbeck, typescript, fol. 2.

- A. Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. (Steinbeck 1937: 9)
- B. Partial transcription: Ils **portaient** <étaient vêtus> tous les deux de s pantalons et de s vestes ~~de toile~~ en <serge de coton bleue> à boutons de cuivre.
- C. Ils étaient vêtus tous les deux de pantalons et de vestes en serge de coton bleue à boutons de cuivre. (Steinbeck 1939: 7)¹⁷

In a time when the terms ‘denim’ and ‘jeans’ were not as universally known as they are now, Coindreau begins by undertranslating ‘denim’ with ‘toile’ before opting for the explication ‘en serge de coton bleue’.

Here (Figure 11.5) is another lexical fine-tuning in a different passage from Steinbeck:

aussi, dont, ^{et} les branches ~~et~~ le feuillage, ~~tachetés et blancs~~ ^{marbrées} et blancs ~~forment~~ ^{s'allongent} ~~retombent~~,
 et forment voûte au dessus de l'eau dormante.

des sycomores

Figure 11.5 IMEC, CND 2, Translations 1927–48, ‘Des Souris et des hommes’ by John Steinbeck, typescript, fol. 1.

- A. and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool. (Steinbeck 1937: 7)
- B. Transcription: des sycomores aussi <,> dont * <et> les branches <marbrées> et *le s feuillage tachetés et blancs forment retombent <s'allongent> et forment voûte au dessus de l'eau dormante.
- C. des sycomores aussi, dont le feuillage et les branches marbrées s'allongent et forment voûte au-dessus de l'eau dormante. (Steinbeck 1939: 5)¹⁸

By revising ‘les branches et le feuillage tachetés et blancs retombent’ to ‘le feuillage et les branches marbrées s'allongent’, Coindreau manages several improvements in one stroke: the initial inversion of two substantives gets rid of an ungainly liaison, the logical pacing is quicker, the rhythm less heavy; he removes the unwelcome repetition of ‘et’, since the first unit of the sentence is two nominal syntagms and the second is two adjectives; finally, ‘marbré’ translates, with one word, the white undertone and the striped shadows covering the branches.

The following excerpt (Figure 11.6) is from a novel by Truman Capote:

sions le champ ^{des hautes} herbes. Juste à l'entrée des bois il y avait un ~~tronc~~ ^{azédarac à}
~~tronc double,~~ ^{tronc double,} deux arbres en réalité, mais dont les branches étaient si

Figure 11.6 IMEC, CND 3, Translation 1952–57, ‘La Harpe d’herbes’ by Truman Capote, typescript, fol. 12.

- A. Just entering the woods there was a double-trunked China tree, really two trees. (Capote 1951: 14)
- B. Partial transcription: Juste à l'entrée des bois il y avait un tulipier à deux troncs <azédarac à tronc double>, deux arbres en réalité ...
- C. Juste à l'entrée des bois il y avait un azédarac à tronc double, deux arbres en réalité ... (Capote 1952: 23)¹⁹

Thanks to a revision of the typescript, the 'tulipier à deux troncs' becomes an 'azédarac à tronc double'. This kind of lexical refinement is common for Coindreau: here, we have provided three examples lifted from hundreds of possibilities. As in the case of 'thyrse' cited above, one can deduce (or at least hypothesize) that Coindreau did not consult a dictionary as he worked, probably to preserve the flow of the first attempt, but later he was careful to find the most rigorous translation of ornithological, botanical or other specialized vocabulary.

The restructuring of syntagms

On almost every page, and sometimes several times per page, Coindreau reorganizes the syntagms that first mimicked the English. This type of adjustment seems to confirm that his initial translation follows the English sentences as much as possible, without altering the arrangement, but he later revisits this first draft to invert words or groups of words. We see this method, for example, in an excerpt from Erskine Caldwell (Figure 11.7):

Alors, il ferma ses yeux

lourds de sommeil, baignant dans la chaleur des corps qui l'entouraient.

Figure 11.7 IMEC, CND 2, Translations 1927–48, 'Terre tragique' by Erskine Caldwell, typescript, fol. 202.

- A. Then his eyes closed drowsily while he soaked up the warmth of the bodies beside him. (Caldwell 1944: 227–8)
- B. Transcription: Alors, * il ferma ses yeux lourds de sommeil, *baignant dans la chaleur des corps qui l'entouraient.
- C. Alors, baignant dans la chaleur des corps qui l'entouraient, il ferma ses yeux alourdis de sommeil. (Caldwell 1948: 204)²⁰

A segment of the phrase, in opposition to the present participle, moves from the end to the beginning of the sentence; the final result is both more natural and lighter in French. Here (Figure 11.8) is another example of this process, which Coindreau repeats, also from a novel by Erskine Caldwell:

Blondy ~~par~~ Adossé au réverbère, ~~et~~ regardait les gens traverser le boulevard. Il était trop tard pour aller à un spectacle et trop tôt pour

Figure 11.8 IMEC, CND 2, Translations 1927–48, ‘Un Pauvre type’ by Erskine Caldwell, typescript, fol. 55.

- A. Blondy leaned against the lamp post and watched some people crossing the Boulevard. (Caldwell 1930: 67)
- B. Transcription: *Blondy était A/adossé au réverbère, * et il regardait les gens traverser le boulevard.
- C. Adossé au réverbère, Blondy regardait les gens traverser le boulevard. (Caldwell 1945: 56)²¹

Notice a slightly more complex restructuring in another excerpt (Figure 11.9), taken, in this case, from a novel by Truman Capote:

soudain galamment belliqueux. ~~comme~~ une grenouille inspirée il fit un bond et saisit ^{une} ~~un~~ des bottes pendantes du shérif. Le shérif en échange ^{à l'usage} ~~ne~~ saisit les chevilles, et Catherine dut ~~me~~ retenir par la taille

Figure 11.9 IMEC, CND 3, Translations 1952–57, ‘La Harpe d’herbes’ by Truman Capote, typescript, fol. 41.

- A. Like an inspired frog he hopped and caught hold to one of the Sheriff’s dangling boots. (Capote 1951: 38)
- B. Transcription: ~~comme~~ *de une grenouille inspirée I/il fit un bond * et saisit ~~un~~ <une> des bottes pendantes du shérif.
- C. Il fit un bond de grenouille inspirée et saisit une des bottes pendantes du shérif. (Capote 1952: 64)²²

Coindreau seems to have been motivated by rhythmic considerations here; ‘Comme une grenouille inspirée, il fit un bond’ is corrected to ‘Il fit un bond de grenouille inspirée’: thanks to this rearrangement, the sentence can do without the comma, reproducing the cadence of the original, which compresses three movement verbs into one line without interruption.

The register of language

A third possible category groups numerous variations and hesitations concerning the register of language. One example (Figure 11.10) is this sentence from William Styron:

manger dans le Surry, monsieur. Il paraît que les geais ^{qui survolent la région} ~~qui volent au-dessus~~ sont obligés de porter leur ~~nourriture~~ nourriture avec eux.

Figure 11.10 IMEC, CND 5, Translations 1969–78, ‘Les Confessions de Nat Turner’ by William Styron, typescript, fol. 177.

- A. They says a bluejay flyin’ over has to tote his own food. (Styron 1967: 198)
- B. Partial transcription: Il paraît que les geais qui ~~volent au-dessus~~ <survolent la région> sont obligés de porter leur <manger> nourriture avec eux.
- C. Il paraît que les geais qui survolent la région sont obligés de porter leur nourriture avec eux. (Styron 1969: 202)²³

Coindreau has sometimes been criticized for not translating the black American sociolect, and making a Black nanny sound rather like a servant from Vendée. Here, we can see his hesitations over the register of language: the first attempt tries to translate the sociolect of the original with a slightly looser French or one with more populist connotations (‘volent au-dessus’, ‘porter leur manger’). Between the lines, the two modifications reveal an impulse to correct that is quite far from the original. Coindreau the editor is therefore less audacious than Coindreau the primal translator: with ‘survolent la région’ and ‘nourriture’, he returns to elevated language and puts it in the most populist mouths.

Our next example, taken from an unpublished translation of Dos Passos (and so lacking the final version ‘C’), illustrates the many strategies he uses to transpose and compensate for a more vulgar tone:

- A. But what the hell, they can’t arrest a guy for a deserter on British soil. (Dos Passos 1932: 20)
- B. <J’mèn fous après tout> On n’peut ~~foutre~~ pas arrêter un déserteur en territoire anglais.²⁴

The American expression ‘what the hell’ becomes the adverb ‘foutre pas’, then the conjugated verb ‘j’mèn fous’ created by an elision of *je* to *j’*, which is undeniably more natural. The creation and suppression of elisions in rendering common speech is one of the most prevalent revisions in many of these drafts. For example, another from Dos Passos:

J’ai laissé le<’> mec faire c’qu’i<l> voulait pour dix billets de cinq!
 Vous <n’> sauriez pas les résultats du baseball par hasard.
 Merde, pas moyen de<’> se baigner... et nous ne<’> verrons plus de singes non plus.
 Je <’> voudrais bien savoir c’qu’ils sont ve <’>nus foutre ici, dit Joe.²⁵

Note that his concern for the register of language, which is apparent in these drafts, does not always amount to a convincing translation of spoken language. Besides, it

is possible to critique Coindreau for re-transcribing common speech by erasing the sociolinguistic origins of the characters concerned. Jean-Marc Gouanvic raises this point about Coindreau's translation (with Georges Duhamel) of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*: '[I]t appears that, throughout the work, the solution he used was to respect the rules of grammar, giving way to the "familiar" system. The consequence of choosing this option is that the resulting text is characterized by a flattening of sociolectal speech' (Gouanvic 1999: 276–7). This, of course, can be established by a simple comparison between the source and the target – between the published original and its published translation. But we hope this chapter demonstrates that a detailed genetic analysis, made possible by numerous and much-revised drafts, not only corroborates this assertion but also permits us to distinguish between a first attempt that is occasionally loose, concerned with orality, and the changes that transform certain speech into impeccable French.

Examining these drafts eventually confirms the importance Coindreau 'accorded to the notion of correctness – what in English is called "propriety" – the fact that he was never tempted to coin a new word, even by assimilation, or to "strangle" the syntax' (Gresset 1992: viii–ix). Coindreau's literary style has been the subject of several commentaries and critical studies, regarding both his taste for classical high language and his dated, if not questionable, manner of translating orality.²⁶ Because they did not have access to these manuscripts, the authors of these studies have contented themselves with observing and analysing the translation in its published form, or its revised form on the occasion of a new edition, without seeking to understand Coindreau's translation strategies, which are apparent from a single look at his drafts. Furthermore, the genetic approach brings to light the daily reality of Coindreau's work, the evolution of his techniques over the years, from one novel to the next, and his place in the translation landscape of his contemporaries in the first half of the twentieth century. Last, and perhaps most importantly, his drafts give us a precious glimpse of that grey zone where Durand-Bogaert sees a 'possible world [chosen] at the expense of other worlds which, at a given moment, were equally possible' (2014: 30). As the drafts of translators make up that interface which is ordinarily invisible, they offer the moving image of that '*no man's langue*' (Ladmiral 2005: 474) where the text develops and the language is transformed – through bursts of discovery, temporary approximations and perpetual adjustments.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Hartmann (2007: 230–62); Dueck (2014); Weissmann (2016: 129–44); Hersant (2018).
- 2 Michel Gresset (1991: 42–52) is the author of a biographical and critical article on Coindreau, accompanied by a complete bibliography of his published translations.
- 3 Many of Coindreau's translations were revised for new editions, mainly by Michel Gresset. On this topic, see Pitavy (2004: 153–67).

- 4 This assertion only applies to the frame of our source–draft–target device: naturally, Goyen’s manuscripts (preserved at the University of Texas’s Harry Ransom Centre) and those of Coindreau’s other authors contain variations, and the text of the novel is not considered ‘definitive’ except in its published version, our source. As for Coindreau’s French version, it is important to specify that this text is only ‘definitive’ in a relative way, since Coindreau often revised his own translations (with rare and minor corrections) many years after the original publication. See Gresset (2002: 389–92).
- 5 Literal translation: ‘I walked and walked.’
- 6 Literal translation: ‘soaked’ or ‘drenched’ vs. ‘morfondu’ which means ‘chilled’ but also ‘dejected’, ‘moping’.
- 7 This example and all others in French are the author’s own transcriptions.
- 8 < > are used to indicate additions (*Editors’ note*).
- 9 Literal translations of these versions: V1. ‘dancer’, ‘holding a wand of leaves from the vine’; V2. ‘dancing’, ‘decorated with vine in his hand’; V3. ‘decorated with leaves of the vine’; V4. ‘of the vine’; V5. ‘thyrus’.
- 10 Literal translation: ‘characteristic of a ballet dancer’.
- 11 Literal translation: 1st draft, ‘He turned himself sharply toward the window’; final, ‘The young man, in a sharp movement, turned toward the window’.
- 12 Literal translation: 1st draft, ‘He was a man with a heavy face, whose head’; final, ‘He was a heavy-set man, with a round head, yellow and bald’.
- 13 Translator’s note: ‘figure’ in French does not mean ‘figure’ – it means ‘face’. ‘Silhouette’ is French for ‘figure’.
- 14 Literal translation: 1st draft, ‘What he was looking at, it was the boy from the sleeper-car’; final, ‘The object of this contemplation was the porter’.
- 15 ‘The first reading still remains, inevitably, that of a foreign work in French. The second reading reads the translation as a translation, which implies a *conversion* of perspective. For, as I have already stated, one is not born a reader of translations, but made one’ (Berman 2009: 49).
- 16 ‘This pre-analysis and the readings that accompany it will lead to a patient labor consisting of selecting pertinent and significant stylistic examples (broadly speaking) in the original. ... What is selected ... are those passages of the original that are, so to speak, the places where the work condenses, represents, signifies, or symbolizes itself. These passages are signifying zones where a literary work reaches its own purpose (not necessarily that of the author) and its own center of gravity’ (Berman 2009: 54).
- 17 Literal translation of transcriptions: B. ‘they ~~wore~~ <were clothed> both of them in pants and vests ~~of cloth~~ in <blue serge cotton> with brass buttons’; C. ‘They were clothed both of them in pants and vests of blue cotton serge with brass buttons.’
- 18 Literal translation of transcription: B. ‘the sycamores too <,> whose * <and> the branches <marbled> and *the foliage ~~mottled and white formed falling back~~ <stretch out> and form an arch over the dormant water’; C. ‘the sycamores too, whose foliage and marbled branches stretch out and form an arch over the dormant water.’
- 19 Literal translation of partial transcription: B. ‘Just at the entrance of the woods there was a ~~tulip tree with two trunks~~<Chinaberry with a double trunk>, two trees in reality’; C. ‘Just at the entrance of the woods there was a chinaberry tree with a double trunk, two trees in reality.’
- 20 Literal translation of transcription: B. ‘So * he closed his eyes heavy with sleep, *bathing in the warmth of the bodies that surrounded him’; C. ‘So, bathing in the warmth of the bodies that surrounded him, he closed his eyes weighted with sleep.’

- 21 Literal translation of transcription: B. ‘*Blondy was L/leaning against the lamp post, *and he watched people crossing the boulevard’; C. ‘Leaning against the lamp post, Blondy watched people crossing the boulevard.’
- 22 Literal translation of transcription: B. ‘Like *of an inspired frog H/he makes a leap * and grabs <one> of the sheriff’s dangling boots’; C. ‘He leaps like an inspired frog and grabs one of the sheriff’s dangling boots.’
- 23 Literal translation of partial transcription: B. ‘It seems the jays that fly above <fly over the region> are obliged to bring their <eats> food with them’; C. ‘It seems the jays that fly over the region must carry their own food with them.’
- 24 IMEC, CND 2, Translations 1927–1948, subcollection ‘L’homme qui disait s’appeler Jones’, excerpt from 1919 by John Dos Passos, 1931, fol. 4 (unpublished translation). Literal translation: ‘<I don’t give a damn after all> They can’t damn well arrest a deserter in English territory.’
- 25 Ibid., fols. 13, 4 and 7.
- 26 See Vidal (1991: 151–88).

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