Introduction
Poetry as Experience

by
Gerald Parks

The assault on immortality begins.
Put your rimes in order, marshal your thoughts,
give it all a jump.
Translation will cast the whole thing down, like bins.
They've tried it in Polish, Italian, German, lots,
& it all came out a lump.

Henry's thought, in Henry's original words -
although it would not win the Nobel Prize-
was the point.¹

John Berryman expresses laconically and forcefully the disappointment most people feel with translations of poetry. Such disappointment would seem to stem from very high original expectations as to what can be done in the translation of poetry from one language to another. If people did not expect so much, they would not be so tempted to say that translations of poems are always bad, or that poetic translation is impossible.

It may thus behoove us to review the issues from the beginning. Any discussion of the translation of poetry necessarily revolves around the definitions of "poetry" and "translation." I cannot know what the translation of poetry is until I know what poetry is, and what translation is. And here the difficulties start.

First of all, there is no complete and accurate, comprehensive, agreed-upon definition of poetry, valid for all languages.

No satisfactory single-concept theory of poetry has been produced: a poem is not essentially a representation, or essentially expression, or essentially a formal or 'organic' unity. Not because none of these functions is relevant to poetry, but because no one of them does justice to its complexity and many-levelled nature.²

Given a text X, not everyone would agree in every case that text X is a poem. Some people distinguish between poetry and verse; this is essentially a qualitative distinction, and such people would exclude "bad verse" from the realm of poetry. Jingles and rhymes of all sorts, nonsense rhymes, children's verse, light verse in general – these would all be excluded from the world of poetry. They are "not serious enough." Other people might exclude prose poems, or even free verse, on formal grounds; others, instead, might include passages of poetic prose that are not normally considered poetry. And not everyone would agree that "concrete" or "visual" poetry is really poetry; some might consider it a form of art.

The definition of poetry, therefore, is based on a mixture of criteria: formal features (verse, etc.), qualitative judgments, even perhaps the context and use to which the text is put (thus an advertising jingle is distinguished from other light verse by its purpose and use). When the poetic text is taken seriously enough, it tends to be regarded as "sacred", hence untouchable, like a religious text in a holy book.

Babette Deutsch defines poetry as follows: "The art which uses words as both speech and song to reveal the realities that the senses record, the feelings salute, the mind perceives, and the shaping imagination orders." 3 She then quotes a number of other definitions, offered by Sidney, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Arnold, Hopkins, Stevens, Auden and Dylan Thomas; the one that comes closest to being a technical description in the modern sense is that of Hopkins: "speech framed ... to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning." 4 Sidney's definition also merits quoting: "a representation, counterfeiting, or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture: with this end, to teach and delight." 5 The definitions of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Stevens and Thomas all relate poetry to the idea of knowledge or truth, the revelation of ideal perfection; for Arnold it is a "criticism of life." 6 These definitions obviously cannot be discussed at any length here, though it is clear they involve us in unending complexities. Deutsch's description makes it clear that poetry has to do with reality, feelings, the mind, and imagination; Sidney points out that poetry has a moral and esthetic purpose; and all the definitions (except that of Hopkins) claim some moral and intellectual importance for poetry. So, to determine exactly what is and is not a poem, we shall have to examine not only the linguistic form, or the

4 Ibid., p. 112.
5 Ibid., p. 111.
6 Ibid., p. 112.
words as conveyors of meaning, but also the words in themselves (Hopkins), the purpose of the poem, and its relation to ideas of reality, truth and morality.

These issues may seem marginal to the translation of poetry; actually, they are central to it. If any text refers to reality, two texts X and X prime – X prime being a text derived from X and purporting to be a translation of it – should refer to the same reality, if they are to have the same "meaning"; moreover, they should share the same feelings, ideas and purposes. The actual words used in the translated text will of course be different; if the translated text is a poem in its own right (as perhaps it ought to be), the words in it will be used for their own sake, like the words in the original. But if the words are necessarily different, we may hope that the overall "meaning" is the same; and this meaning would seem to include such factors as the text's relation to reality, its expression of feeling and ideas, and its purpose. If not, what would the meaning be?

The purpose of the text called a poem is also important. All the writers Deutsch quotes refer in some way to the moral quality of poetry. Poetry is not just language used for expressive purposes, and not just "to delight", but also "to instruct." Poetry has a (sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit) didactic purpose, in addition to its aesthetic purpose; it aims at revealing the truth, or at least a truth, some truth, however limited and individual. It is a criticism of life, as Arnold says; in any case, it involves an examination of values. It is generally subversive of accepted mores, and never more serious than when it abandons all explicit categories of good and evil.

That the purpose is an important element in defining a text as a poem is clear even from a purely linguistic analysis. It is commonly said that poetic texts and advertising texts use the same linguistic means to achieve their expressiveness (metaphors, similes, hyperbole, repetition, alliteration, rhythm, rhyme, etc.). The difference is said to be that a poetic text has an expressive function (purpose), whereas a piece of advertising has a vocative function (purpose). This means that the context in which a given text is placed may determine whether or not it is considered to be poetry. An advertising jingle included in an anthology of light verse acquires a dignity that it did not have before; and yet lines by a famous poet, say Shakespeare, may be used to sell goods, if incorporated into an advertising text. Do they then cease to be poetry?

One implication of this discussion is that the translator must respect the original purpose (function) of the text he/she sets out to translate.

It should be emphasized that the idea of the moral and didactic nature of poetry is not limited to our Romantic heritage, or a prerogative of English letters, but is universal in scope, as the following passage from Lu Chi's Essay on Literature should make clear: 7

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The use of literature
Lies in its conveyance of every truth.
It expands the horizon to make space infinite,
And serves as a bridge that spans a myriad years.
It maps all roads and paths for posterity,
And mirrors the images of worthy ancients,
That the tottering Edifices of the sage kings of antiquity may be reared
again,
And their admonishing voices, wind-borne since of yore, may resume
full expression.
No regions are too remote but it pervades,
No truth too subtle to be woven into its vast web.
Like mist and rain, it permeates and nourishes,
And manifests all the powers of transformation in which gods and
spirits share.
Virtue it makes endure and radiate on brass and stone,
And resound in an eternal stream of melodies ever renewed on pipes
and strings.

Rarely has poetry been so exalted as the purveyor of truth.
The purpose of poetry is thus an essential part of it, alongside the form and
the content, and governing the use of both form and content. It cannot be reduced
merely to the expressive function, to use the term modern linguists usually
employ whenever they refer to the function of poetry. Poetry does, indeed,
express the poet's ideas and feelings, but this does not answer the question of
why it does so. The expression of emotions might be a mere noise; the moral
and didactic purpose of poetry is infinitely more: it implies communication of
the highest order, and to some extent it overlaps with the vocative function,
since it aims to change the reader's perceptions regarding the world. Lucretius
was not merely expressing his personal feelings; he was unveiling the secrets of
the universe. Poetry of this order has the status of a revelation; it is like the
unveiling of a sacred mystery.

Precisely because the sacred function of the chants used in the religious rites
of "primitive" peoples is not respected when such texts are "translated" and
published in learned tomes by anthropologists, we may say that such texts have
not been "translated" at all in the complete sense of the word. Only some
indication of the content is given, with maybe a hint at what their function once
was. Not only have they been robbed of their form, but they have been put in a
context that completely falsifies their purpose and function. Such texts are like
animals in a zoo, or exhibits on display. Their context makes a travesty of
them, as we should do were we to use Milton's Paradise Lost to sell razor
blades.
These issues directly regard the translation of poetry. In fact, the basic theoretical question, around which all discussions of the translation of poetry revolve, is this: can two texts, in two different natural languages, express the same relation to (grasp of) reality, the same feelings, the same perceptions and ideas? To the degree that they can, poetry translation is possible; if they could not at all, no translation would be possible.

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In any case, a piece of poetry is a text, and shares all the characteristics of other texts, besides having a few of its own. So perhaps the next thing to do is to look at the definition of text. Jorge J.E. Gracia defines it as follows:

A text is a group of entities, used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey some specific meaning to an audience.\(^8\)

This definition has some important consequences, one of which is the inclusion of the context in the definition of text. As Gracia points out, "What needs to be stressed is that the meanings of all texts depend on context to some extent. This entails that there is no such thing as the 'literal' meaning of a text if by 'literal meaning' is understood meaning apart from context."\(^9\)

All texts presuppose an author or authors, although the actual author may be unknown. Presumably also the author selected and arranged the signs (words) with the intention to convey some specific meaning, but this intended meaning may no longer be identifiable in certain instances. It is sufficient for our purposes to know that it must have existed.

The audience is important because all texts are part of a communication process. In fact, the above definition contains the classic elements of the communication process: the encoder (author), code (signs), message (specific meaning), and decoder (audience).

Gracia proceeds to distinguish texts from from languages, artifacts, art objects and works. To sum up, texts are not languages; texts are all artifacts, though not all artifacts are texts; some texts are art objects; and some art objects may be both texts and works, though texts are not identical to works. To say that texts are artifacts is tantamount to saying that they are not natural objects; some texts, but not all, are art objects; an art object is defined as "an artifact"

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9 Ibid., p. 29.
that is "capable of producing an artistic experience."\textsuperscript{10} This definition is further refined as follows:

\[ X \text{ is capable of producing an artistic experience if and only if it is} \]
\[ \text{regarded by someone both (1) as an artifact and (2) as capable of} \]
\[ \text{producing an aesthetic experience.} \textsuperscript{11} \]

\textbf{Gracia comments:}

The category of artistic, then, is included within the category of aesthetic, but it is limited both by the recognition of the artifactual nature of the object that gives rise to the experience and by the historical character of the experience.\textsuperscript{12}

The art object, then, is defined by the type of experience it gives rise to; this is important for us, because a poem is certainly an art object, and it is thus an artifact that gives rise to an artistic, or aesthetic, experience. That a poem is a text in a given language should not make us forget that the linguistic expression is the means used in order to give rise to a certain experience, which is the purpose of the poem.

Gracia points out that it is also important to distinguish texts from works, because if a text is a work then translation is impossible. If, that is, the Spanish text of \textit{Don Quixote} is the work, then the English translation of that text is a different work. (This would seem to be the position held by Derrida.) Gracia writes:

\begin{quote}
The text is, as mentioned earlier, an artifact constructed for the purpose of conveying meaning. This artifact is in fact an instance of a type of artifact that can be reproduced to convey the meaning Cervantes had in mind. Thus, different instances of the same type of artifact yield or can yield the same results. This text can be translated into other languages, that is, different artifacts can be used to produce the same understanding. But in the case of a translation we do not any longer have the same text, although we still have the same work. The work, I propose, is the meaning of the group of signs and, therefore, independent of it insofar as other groups of signs can be used to convey it.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

This last sentence in a way begs the whole issue. To what extent can other groups of signs (in another language) be used to convey the same meaning?

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 65.
There seems to be no obvious and definitive answer. But it is clear that, following Gracia's lead, the translator translates the meaning of a group of signs and leaves the work intact.

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A poem is not only an artifact, but a cultural artifact; therefore, there is nothing natural about its precise form and structure, which are the product of a given language and culture. Every culture develops different forms of poetic expression; thus, poetic translation is a very special and complex case of cross-cultural mediation.

But if the precise form of poetic expression is culturally determined, the impulse to express oneself in poetry would seem to be "natural", i.e. common to all cultures. There is, so far as I know, no culture without some form of poetic expression. Indeed, the types of expression found almost universally in poetry seem to be related to innate, or universal, feelings, such as love and hate, loneliness and fear, anger, desire, longing, anxiety, a sense of wonder or of abandonment, fear of death and love of life. Every culture has found a way of turning these feelings into poetry. So the translator's task is made easier, and yet also harder: easier, because the forms exist; harder, because he has to recreate them. But a sensitive translator can always find a suitable form in his own culture for expressing the poet's feelings.

Some linguists have claimed that there are linguistic universals, common to all languages. This rather Platonic conception poses a number of problems; linguistic universals are highly abstract concepts, of the sort that children normally form only after they go to school. It is therefore difficult to maintain that people are born with them, though all humans are born with the innate ability to learn a language (any language). John Locke has discussed the matter of innate ideas in very clear terms: "For to imprint anything on the mind, without the mind's perceiving it, seems to me hardly intelligible. If therefore children and idiots have souls, have minds, with those impressions upon them, they must unavoidably perceive them, and necessarily know and assent to these truths; which since they do not, it is evident that there are no such impressions. For if they are not notions naturally imprinted, how can they be innate? And if they are notions imprinted, how can they be unknown? To say a notion is imprinted on the mind, and yet at the same time to say that the mind is ignorant of it, and never yet took notice of it, is to make this impression nothing. No proposition can be said to be in the mind, which it never yet knew, which it was never yet conscious of."14 In any case, it seems more logical to affirm that

people in different places express similar thoughts and feelings because they experience similar things, than to say that they express similar thoughts and feelings because their languages permit or force them to do so.

Therefore, whether or not there are linguistic universals (and their existence does seem rather problematic), there are certainly experiential universals, which the translator can rely on to convey the meaning of the text. As we know, there is no communication without shared experience; but since poetry usually talks about universally experienced emotions (love, death, aging, etc.), some form of transposition from one culture to another would always seem to be possible. If, that is, we shift our attention from the linguistic surface structure (which is obviously different in different languages) to the underlying experience, we have a surer footing from which to proceed.

A poem, then, at least in the intentions of the poet, is not just a text, but is above all an experience. It is, like making love, not reducible to the mechanical operations that compose it. Housman, when asked to define poetry, said it could be recognized by the fact that it "makes your hair stand on end." Poetry does something to the reader; it does not leave him indifferent. Therefore, any translation of a poem must recreate this experience, must move the reader in the same way as the original poem. If it does not, it can hardly qualify as a translation.

Thus, in addition to the poem's form and content, we have identified three other aspects of a poem that must be kept in mind when translating: the reality subsumed by the poem, the purpose and function of the poem (the intention of the text\textsuperscript{15}), and the experience produced by the poem (its effect on the reader). These are all part of the complex communication process that occurs whenever a poetic text moves from writer to reader.

Therefore, a complete description of the translation process would go something like this. (1) The idea or experience of the author is translated into a text. (2) This text is read by a translator/reader, who forms a mental image of it—his interpretation. (3) This mental image, or virtual translation, corresponding to the author's original idea or experience, but mediated through the experience and personality of the translator, is then turned into a text in another language. (4) This text is then read by a reader, who forms a mental image of it, and whose experience on reading it should correspond to that of the original author, mediated by the experience and personality of the translator and interpreted in the light of his/her own experience and personality.

The experience of reading a poem is unitary and indivisible. The poem is more than the sum of its parts. The translator must keep this in mind, and render the original in a way that also recreates the unitary experience that the poet felt,

\textsuperscript{15} See Umberto Eco, \textit{I limiti dell'interpretazione} (Milano, Bompiani, 1990), pp. 22-23.
and was trying to convey. Or, at least, since it is theoretically impossible to determine what other people (including the poet) have experienced on reading the poem, in actual operating practice the translator tries to recreate on paper the unitary experience that he/she felt on reading the poem. The translated poem is the translator/reader's recreation of the experience of reading the original poem.

One of the pleasures of reading a translation is experiencing its foreignness. The reader of a translation of poetry has, most likely, some idea or image of what the original must be like, and takes pleasure in imagining this Urtext on the basis of the text in front of him. He knows this is not the original text, but uses it to imagine for himself an original. This is why he can read the translation with pleasure even when he knows the original. The translation always retains a certain autonomy, precisely because of its difference from the original. Though it can never replace the original, it can take its place alongside it as a sort of "offshoot" which has, to some extent, a life of its own.

Generally speaking, we want a translation to sound foreign. We do not want Homer in English to sound like Robert Frost or Wordsworth or even Shakespeare or Milton. We wish to find in the poem something un-English that lets us imagine the far-off reality of another time, place and landscape.

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One of the main theoretical and practical obstacles standing in the way of any translation of poetry is the importance attributed to form in a poetic text. Many studies of poetic translation, indeed, concentrate on this aspect. Some practical translators, however, ignore the problem altogether, and translate all poems into a sort of free verse, often without paying any attention to the rhythm.

From a theoretical standpoint, there would seem to be no reason to explain why it is considered legitimate to translate a sonnet into free verse, but not correct to recast a poem originally written in free verse as a sonnet. It is not actually true that in the one case we are subtracting a form and in the other case adding one; for free verse is also a form. In both cases one is replacing the original form with another form: and this is always the case in poetic translation. Even free verse forms are different in different languages. Perhaps the closest one can come to maintaining the original poetic form is in the case of prose poems, though even here the rhythm and sound of the passage have to be created ex novo.

Though, inevitably, the same form cannot be recreated in another language, some careful attention to form would seem to be necessary. For Ezra Pound (and not only for him) the rhythm of a poem is very important. He writes:

As for the verse itself: I believe in an ultimate and absolute rhythm as I believe in an absolute symbol or metaphor. The perception of the
intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence. It is only then, in perfect rhythm joined to the perfect word that the two-fold vision can be recorded. (...) Rhythm is perhaps the most prinal of all things known to us. It is basic in poetry and music mutually ..."16

The rhythm is part of the poet's voice, which is an essential element of the poem; therefore, in recreating a voice for the poet in another language, a definite rhythm must be given to it.

Translation, any translation, even the worst, gives the poet a voice in another language, like dubbing in film translation. It is necessarily a different voice, and one can always complain about the non-identity of the "dubbed" voice with the original voice, but the alternative is: no voice at all.

Not only does every poem present a voice, but it also presupposes a persona (the 'I' of the poem), a point of view, and a tone of voice. While it may be relatively easy to keep the persona and the point of view intact in the translated text, it is more difficult to recreate the appropriate tone of voice. Yet this is precisely the element that can make or break the effectiveness of a poem.17

Perhaps the traditional theories of poetic translation have been approaching the matter from the wrong end – from the linguistic microstructure, which of course can never be reproduced in another language. What if we were to approach the subject from the macrostructure? Perhaps the most important features of a poem to be reproduced in a translation are not the individual lexical items or isolated rhetorical devices, but the poet's voice, his/her persona, his/her point of view, his/her tone of voice, and the overriding intention – this, combined with a fairly precise rendering of the content and images, may be as much as can be reasonably expected. It is still a tall order, yet it seems to be more in line with the approach of actual translators of poetry, at least those who turn out volume after volume, very often translating from languages they know only slightly or not at all – translators like Joyce Lussu or Jack Hirschman. To be sure, only a foolhardy explorer can be expected to tackle such a daunting task. But the work of actual translators of poetry seems to point in this direction.

Sympathy with the poet is a prerequisite for any translation. And such sympathy means that the translator is likely to translate more than one poem. This is the next important point. The quality of a poet in translation is likely to become more apparent if a fairly large corpus of works is translated; in this way, the poet's world comes through more clearly, and the importance of individual


17 Remo Cesari and Lidia De Federicis, Strumenti, termini, concetti, problemi di metodo (Torino, Loescher, 1980), p. 79.
details is diminished. The recreation of the poet's world in another linguistic and cultural tradition is the translator's ultimate ambition.

In the final analysis, it may be that the main value of a poem translation is that of calling attention to the original text. It "points to" a text and invites the reader to go and see it, if at all possible. Like a piece of criticism, the poem translation does not replace the original text, but exists alongside it, illuminating it and commenting on it, and calls attention to its existence. Without the poem translation, the foreign reader might never even have known that the original poem (or poet) existed. The greatest purpose of the translated text is then to lead the reader back to the original, even arousing his (or her) curiosity to such an extent that he (or she) learns the language of the poet in order to be able to read the newly discovered poetry.

The translation of poetry is, in every case, an act of faith in the possibilities of human communication, and in the universality of human experience, however great the cultural differences may be. What remains is a voice that, in the best of cases, testifies to the splendor of the utterance, and the revelation of a soul. Poetry is a founding, or grounding, of experience; it is not only about experience, but is itself a profound emotional and intellectual experience. It aims to explain man to himself, to create a world, precariously perched over the abyss of non-being. Poetry is being, a way of being alive and authentic in the world. To quote Hölderlin: Was bleibt aber, stiften die Dichter. 18

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The contributors to the present volume do not have any common, predefined approach to the question of poetry translation, and in some cases theoretical issues are avoided as the authors illustrate actual translation procedures. There is thus likely to be little critical consensus on how poetry should be translated, but the papers, taken together, show various methods by which it is, in fact, translated.

The volume opens with an essay by Gisèle Vanhese on the theoretical aspects of poetic translation, exemplified in the translation of the Romanian poet Lucien Blaga into French and Italian. The approach she describes is basically philological in nature, but also combines elements of hermeneutics and literary criticism. The aim of this approach is to offer a careful, close reading of the text, paying attention to the connotations, style and register of the original text. The final result should be as faithful a rendering as possible, while considering, as Heidegger says, that all translation is interpretation (p. 14).

The article by Michel Gilles combines theoretical and practical considerations. He begins by examining the translations of Petrarch made by the Belgian poet Robert Vivier, whose theory and practice of translation are modelled on that of Valéry. He confesses that the translations are very beautiful, and nearly perfect as renderings of Petrarch. But then he plays the devil's advocate and asks if this is really what we want a translation of a poem to be. He concludes that, in most cases, we normally expect a translation of a poem to lead us back to the original. That is, we read a translation of Petrarch because we are interested in Petrarch, not the translator. However, it may happen, as in the case of Vivier, that one buys his book of translations because of his fame as a translator and poet in his own right. Yet, however fine a translation may be, it can never replace the original.

Henri Awaiss presents the interesting case of a poem by Rimbaud translated in five different ways into Arabic. Even for one who (like this editor) does not know Arabic, it is evident that the poems have been "adapted" – they certainly look very different on the page. Some of the changes in content and images are commented on in the essay. Awaiss concludes by calling translation an "eternal re-beginning" (p. 66), always provisional and never satisfactory.

The essay by D.E. Suardiaz deals, instead, with linguistic creativity in ordinary language use and how this relates to poetry. His is a valuable contribution since, in emphasizing the peculiar nature of poetry, it should not be forgotten that poetry would not even be intelligible unless it used resources that are part of ordinary language. Suardiaz discusses various types of creativity encountered in everyday life, such as the use of nicknames. Such phenomena are more common in cases of strong affective connotations. In the concluding part of her essay, she discusses the importance of parallelism as the main organizing principle in poetry.

Two of the articles in this volume do not deal directly with the issue of the translation of poetry. One of them, the essay by Adriana Tortoriello, on the translation of Dario Fo's plays into English, seemed too interesting to omit, and what it has to say about the reworking of Fo's texts in English contains much that is relevant also for the reformulation of poetic texts in another language.

Likewise, Tim Parks' essay does not discuss the translation of poetry, since Parks does not translate poetry. He does, however, explain why he does not translate poetry, and his comments are worth meditating on. He first gives an ample discussion of how he approaches the translation of poetic prose. He writes: "Notoriously, it is in those places where poetic prose deviates from standard usage, establishing a personal style and creating meaning through its distance from something else, that translation becomes tormented if not impossible. (...) Translating poetic prose, and even more so poetry, means creating the miracle of the 'same difference' from different and sometimes
potentially antithetical conventions ..." (p. 111) The conventions are those of the two linguistic and cultural systems involved. He goes on: "To imagine one can transport transgressions or deviations from other conventions and reproduce them in the same way and in the same place in the translation, thus generating the same meaning is to be dangerously naive." (p. 113) As he points out, some bilinguals find it difficult to accept that "the same text can be so radically different in two different languages ..." (p. 121) And that explains why he never translates poetry. "The more poetic, or transgressive, a text is, the more it departs from familiar usage, so the more it comes to be about the language it is written in, not in a narrow linguistic sense, but in the sense of all that language stands for and supports. While I feel I can manage this conundrum with prose, where content still plays its very large part, I find poetry, not being a poet, quite beyond me." (p. 121)

As can be seen, Parks raises many of the theoretical issues regarding the translation of poetry, which are seen to apply largely also to the translation of poetic prose. What is most interesting in this essay, though, is the detailed description of how Parks himself tackles the translation of a text by Calasso. It is fascinating to observe the practicing translator at work.

Giorgio Faggin, in his brief article, also gives us insight into his working method as he goes about translating the poems of Leonard Nolens from Dutch into Italian. In his case, discussions with the author proved invaluable in determining the exact meaning of the original text, though Nolens – like Kundera, quoted in Parks' essay – seems to have a very naive idea of what happens in translation.

Further insight into the actual process of poetic translation is offered by the essays of David Katan and Silvia Campanini. Katan describes the problems involved, and the procedures used, in translating the Friulian poet Leo Zanier into English. The situation is complicated by the fact that the original text is in dialect, an idiom spoken only by a few thousand people in Carnia. The language is thus essential, simple, but very heavy with connotations. Katan shows how the job of translating involves uncovering the hidden implications or connotations of the words used and trying to find some way of rendering them in English, which has a totally different set of cultural connotations to work with. Katan sees the job of the translator as basically that of a mediator between different cultures, a person who makes it possible for readers from different cultures to meet and communicate. He, too, was helped in his work by being able to meet with and talk to the original author. It is also significant that these poems, in free verse, posed only minimal problems of poetic form.

The problem of form is much more important in the essay by Silvia Campanini, who illustrates the process she used in translating a poem by the Scottish poet lain Crichton Smith from English into Italian. The poem's
traditional form and metre pose a challenge for the translator who wishes to reproduce them in the target language. Campanini clearly shows how this can be done. The process is, in part, hermeneutical, a deeper and deeper penetration of the meaning of the original text, and in part a question of stylistics, of finding the most convincing and esthetically satisfying form and language in the translated text. There is no formula for this; there are only the tact, intuition, knowledge, and linguistic competence of the translator to rely on. The whole process is creative in essence; the poem is remade, in a way that is definitely analogous to that of original creation.

Parks remarks, in passing, that one reason why he does not translate poetry is that he is not a poet. But it is by no means clear that one has to be a poet in order to translate poetry. Neither Faggin nor Katan nor Campanini is a poet, yet all have produced good translations of poetry.

Two of the studies in this volume derive from dissertations discussed at the Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne, by Laura Pedrotti and Emanuela Lorenzi. Both of them are detailed criticisms of existing translations; Pedrotti, in fact, analyzes Nabokov's notorious English version of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin, while Lorenzi criticizes and corrects Verdicchio's translation of Giorgio Caproni's Il muro della terra. Pedrotti shows once and for all the limitations, the absurdities and internal inconsistencies of Nabokov's "literal" approach to translation—which, indeed, is anything but "literal", and even in the judgment of Tim Parks, is "unreadable" (p. 121). But if Pedrotti confutes literalism in translation, Lorenzi faults Verdicchio with settling for too easy a compromise—with a bit more ingenuity, he could have found (and she does find) translation solutions that are closer both to the meaning and to the form of the original.

This book closes with an original rendering in Italian rhymed verse of Rimbaud's famous poem Le bateau ivre, by Ernesto Zenari, now 89, who is not only a very fine artist (the cover design is taken from a painting of his) but also a scholar. He was for many years a teacher of French at the Interpreters' School, though he has long been in retirement. I wish to thank him for allowing us to reproduce his original design and for his brilliant translation of Rimbaud, the fruit of years of work.

In conclusion, we may say that all the authors in this volume are actively concerned with improving the art of translation, by their critical reflection but most of all by their conscientious practice. If poetry is an experience, so too is the translation of poetry, and the poem translated resonates in the world of the reader long after the book has been put down.

Gerald Parks