

1. LICENSE AND REGISTRATION TRANSLATION IN THE WORK OF BRANDON BROWN

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2. Brandon is a friend of mine, so the first difficulty in writing about his work is having to write sentences like, “In the writing of Brandon Brown,” etc., as though I don’t know the guy.
3. So, as a test, to see whether it helps, I’m going to refer to him as “the writer,” in this piece, with the hopes that you, the reader, will humor me & understand I’m not trying to be cute but just trying to figure out, tactically, how to write what is difficult to write.
4. In a way I’m illustrating, via this method & opening, a fundamental issue (*the fundamental issue*) in the work of the writer, and that’s *translation*.
5. I’m not really clever enough to talk about translation properly – maybe just clever enough to suspect it is one of the most important philosophical issues there is – and that it opens up on to the very basic question of adequation.
6. Implicit in a ‘common-sense’ idea of translation is:
7. Is the text in the origin-language (A) *properly, adequately, sufficiently* brought over into the target-language text (B)?
8. So, yeah, we’re always also talking about judgment here, as in, who makes the call?
9. *Quis judicabit?*
10. (Usually, *experts*.)
11. You all know all this already. The writer does too obviously. He’s just *interested in other practices*.
12. Why? Is he a pervert? Is he just perfidious? (Wearing the mantle of the traitor with pride?)
13. Or is there something particular we can learn about translation, about poetry, about writing, from these other sorts of practices?
14. *Adequation* is governed by the *copula*, in propositions (meaning the third-person singular of “to be,” namely, “is”). The “is,” is evacuated of any content other than bare

apology. It's an equal sign. It's invisible.

15. In customary notions of translation this "is" is the translator. The labor of the translator, and the body of the translator.

16. In several theoretical texts the writer has reiterated that the primary aim of his work is to reintroduce the body and its complex physical, intellectual & social overdeterminations into the practice of translation.

17. For example, there's this extract from *Remarks on Rogue Translation*:

18. "Whether the translator is understood...to be *invisible*, or whether on the other hand the translator is a *traitor*, as in the Italian adage *traddutore tradditore*, what is always overlooked as integral is the body of the translator itself."

19. I mean, do you guys know the writer's work, by the way?

20. There's a lot, but I can stick with what I know best.

21. There's *The Persians by Aeschylus*, a translation of *The Persians*, by Aeschylus, about which the writer has written that he "tried to include many collaborators to intervene in the translation, especially including Edward Said, Jane Austen, Walter Benjamin, my Arabic class, the Clash, e-mail correspondence with a translator recruiter from the U.S. Army, and Rumi; also all the things I ate and drank and wore and said and did are in the translation; and most especially I tried to pay attention to the terrific war and the terrific language that the war made that completely infiltrated all of my food and beverages and clothes and words and actions, and I let that get in the way of the translation too."

22. What does this look like in practice?

23. Beat your breasts, lament
 And tear out your beards
 Scream like an ox / duck
 Tear up your clothes
 Pull at your hair, pity your army
 Shed a lot of tears
 Shout out a response
 Wail out as we go to funerals
 Cry this cry throughout the city
 Wail out you soft ones Greeks killed
 E e e e e triple-banked...
 Take me into the economy
 Do it now

24. And at the bottom of the page, separated off from the main body of the text with a line like that Spicer book or Rodefer's *Villon*, in bold, "**He thinks it's not kosher.**"

25. (Best, perhaps, to remark now that this piece of writing was written in the deep dark heart of the Bush years, when a play written by an Athenian tragedian in which the abject misery of the just-defeated other side couldn't help but rhyme with various dramas of spectacular pomp, including (just because it happens to leap to mind) the capture and execution of Saddam Hussein.)

26. The account of translation, in other words, as repeatedly reformulated & refined in the writer's works, most recently in the text of his work *The Poems of Gaius Valerius Catullus 1-60*, goes something like this :

27. "Translation as I understand it involves a preceding writing, a proceeding writing—in between is the body that translates. The preceding writing is absorbed by the body of the translator in the act of reading. And when the translator writes something down which proceeds from the act of reading and the preceding writing, that is called 'translation.' However, far from idealizing a notion of repetition, this translation model wishes to privilege the *delay* between preceding and proceeding marks. To acknowledge the *fact of detour*. To suggest that things can go *haywire*." (TPOGVC XXIX & XXX)

28. Within, therefore, an **A** ---> **X** ---> **B** account of translation, the writer introduces X as the problem; the locus of overdetermination, the effects pedal, the Duchampian delay.

29. The skeptical are gonna say, as the skeptical tend to, "Well, *why*, for chrissake?"

30. First of all, I reckon, to foreground the fact that translation itself, which in its ad-equationist drag pretends to a mimesis whose whole backstory is a bunch of Platonist hooey, that translation, I repeat, *is always writing*.

31. But also, and more importantly, that the writing thus produced may know things that other writings (including other translations) *don't*.

32. Number fifty-one of the writer's translations of Catullus explores how a translation can know or learn by compiling "a short list of possible ways to translate the fifty first poem in the corpus of Catullus, itself a translation of a poem by Sappho."

33. Some instances:

34. "2. Translate the Sappho poem from the Greek and, like Catullus, add an extra stanza about my laziness."

35. "5. Given the scene described in the poem, put my body in a situation where I am likely to feel intense jealousy. Go home and write poem."

36. "6. Just sit in my cubicle and imagine that scene—speed process of translation."

37. "7. Create a scene in which someone else feels that intense jealousy, and then try to convince them to translate the poem of Sappho."

38. "8. And then add a stanza about the process, including apology."

39. "10. Write about specific imagery that caused me discomfort at the inauguration of Barack Obama in 16 lines, then alter the form so this poem looks like a prose poem."

40. "11. Skip the fifty first poem in the corpus of Catullus entirely. Get refreshment."

41. "12. Substitute discursive short list of possibilities as the translation, and include the four extra Catullan lines as a sort of consolation prize for the reader."

42. (This prize being) : Otium molests Catullus. Otium he exulted in and what does he

get? Otium beats up his Prius in the suburbs.

43. And ain't it the fucking truth?

44. The writer and I are still, in conversation, attempting to figure out what the name for otium is if you don't have otium.

45. But in his work, he is showing a way to incorporate that shrapnel of non-otium.

46. It's this inclusion of the material of the body (the physical body, & also the social body, or bodies) that helps illuminate the texts which are being translated—& *meaningfully translates evasive elements of them*, elements that vanish when the semantic or phonic elements alone are privileged (= drawn into relief at the expense of other elements).

47. May even translate gaps or absences in the text.

48. I'm aware this might sound like a lot of talk surrounding what ought, supposedly, to be at the center of this kind of piece of writing, namely, poetry-as-such, or talk about poetry.

49. My sense of the work of the writer is that his (tremendous) talents of structure and prosody, rather than being used to create autonomous art-objects to be appreciated for their own sake, are being put to use in a project of philosophical poetry—that is, a philosophical project *that can only be worked out in poetry*.

50. *which is why I'm telling you about it*