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Translation as the hermeneutic motion and a personal experience of the translator

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George Steiner, 1975, "After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation" London—Oxford—New York: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 5: The Hermeneutic Motion, p. 296-413

(3)

Hermeneutic motion

motion – an act

The hermeneutic approach—i.e. the investigation of what it means to 'understand' a piece of oral or written speech

(After Babel, p. 237)

(4)

The hermeneutic motion, the act of elicitation and appropriative transfer of meaning, is fourfold.

(After Babel, p. 296)

(5)

There is initiative trust, an investment of belief

(After Babel, p. 296)

All understanding, and the demonstrative statement of understanding which is translation, starts with an act of trust.

(After Babel, p. 296)

the donation of trust remains ... spontaneous and anticipates proof

(After Babel, p. 297)

(6)

The radical generosity of the translator ('I grant beforehand that there must be something there'), his trust in the 'other', as yet untried, unmapped alterity of statement, concentrates ... the human bias towards seeing the world as symbolic, as constituted of relations in which 'this' can stand for 'that', and must in fact be able to do so if there are to be meanings and structures.

(After Babel, p. 296)

(7)

Social incentive, the officious evidence of precedent ... keeps one at the task.

(After Babel, p. 297)

(8)

A social proof may come from a reviewer, other readers, critics, the publisher

(9)

Trust the author and trust yourself

(10)

The translator (mis)trusts thanks to his/her experience

(11)

But the trust can never be final. It is betrayed, trivially, ... by the discovery that there is nothing there' to elicit and translate.

(After Babel, p. 296)

(12)

He may find that 'anything' or 'almost anything' can mean 'everything'.

(After Babel, p. 297)

(13)

Or he may find that there is 'nothing there' which can be divorced from its formal autonomy ... and ... enter into any alternative mould.

(After Babel, p. 297)

(14)

After trust comes aggression. The second move of the translator is incursive and extractive.

(After Babel, p. 297)

(15)

all cognition is aggressive, ... every proposition is an inroad on the world

(After Babel, p. 297)

each act of comprehension must appropriate another entity

(After Babel, p. 298)

(16)

Is it necessary to view understanding as a war?

(17)

The third movement is incorporative, in the strong sense of the word. The import, of meaning and of form, the embodiment, is not made in or into a vacuum. (After Babel, p. 298)

No language, no traditional symbolic set or cultural ensemble imports without risk of being transformed.

(After Babel, p. 299)

(18)

Here two families of metaphor, probably related, offer themselves, that of sacramental intake or incarnation and that of infection.

(After Babel, p. 299)

(19)

Acts of translation add to our means; we come to incarnate alternative energies and resources of feeling. But we may be mastered and made lame by what we have imported.

(After Babel, p. 299)

(20)

Incorporation as cooperation

(21)

The hermeneutic act must compensate. If it is to be authentic, it must mediate into exchange and restored parity.

(After Babel, p. 300)

(22)

To class a source-text as worth translating is to dignify it immediately

(After Babel, p. 300)

The motion of transfer and paraphrase enlarges the stature of the original.

(After Babel, p. 300)

(23)

The original text gains from the orders of diverse relationship and distance established between itself and the translations.

(After Babel, p. 301)

there can be no doubt that echo enriches, that it is more than shadow

(After Babel, p. 301)

(24)

Translation infers that the source-text possesses potentialities, elemental reserves as yet unrealized by itself.

(After Babel, p. 302)