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TRANSLATION AS METAPHOR REVISITED

On the promises and pitfalls of semantic and epistemological overflowing

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In the spring of 2015, I was working on a book about the metaphor of translation (Guldin 2016) for the Routledge series *Translation Theories Explored* edited by Theo Hermans, who was also my very first reader. In an initial draft of the introduction, I pointed to the questionable side of metaphors, their tendency to proliferate¹ and to obscure the object they are supposed to describe. In the version I received back from Theo with his comments, I found a short revealing question next to the relevant passage: “Why such a defensive attitude?”. As I will argue, Hermans’s question is central for a discussion of the epistemological relevance of metaphors in translation studies. At the same time, it points to a pervasive attitude towards metaphors in the Western tradition² that focuses more on its pitfalls than its promises. Despite the radical re-evaluation of the cognitive potential of metaphors in the wake of the work of Max Black (1954), Paul Ricœur (2003), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999), there is to this very day a persistent distrust of metaphors across the disciplines, and naturally also in translation studies. An example will illustrate this.

A keynote speaker at the second symposium on Research Models in Translation Studies, held at the University of Manchester in April 2011, pointed out that translation studies had recently become “a source discipline in its own right”, quickly adding “but I do not mean this in a *merely* metaphorical way”. The first part of the observation is very much to the point. It refers to the metaphorical use of the notion of translation in cultural and post-colonial studies and other disciplines, what has recently also been called the ‘translational turn’. The second part of the observation, however, clearly distances itself from the use of metaphors. The word *merely* suggests their inferior, secondary nature, a secondariness, incidentally, that metaphor shares with translation. Interestingly, the first part of the statement – “a source discipline in its own right” – uses the notion of *source*, which together with *target* is one of the two central spatial metaphors in both translation studies and metaphor theory, reminding us that metaphors pervade our writing and shape our thinking even at the very moment we disavow them.

The German philosopher Hans Blumenberg proposed an interpretation technique that focuses on metaphorical subtexts, which he called *Latenzbeobachtung*, the observation of

latent meaning (Heidenreich 2020:15–17), a mode of reading I recently applied to Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens/On the Different Methods of Translating* (Guldin 2020:121–127). Sommer describes this method with the help of a spatial metaphor (1998:137; emphasis added):

below the surface of the text manifest to the reader there is an *imaginary sub-stratum*. And the metaphors are the *places* where this sub-stratum *projects out* into the text and becomes *visible*. Thus, metaphors scattered through the text are not to be understood as occurrences. Instead, one has to conceive of them as *indications* and *parts of a whole pictorial structure*. The metaphors are *interconnected underground* ...

Two points are worth highlighting here: that single metaphors stand out from the rest of the text, and that they are part of a subaqueous, submerged network of metaphors. The implication is that texts know or reveal more than their authors intend them to do.

Antoine Berman's work provides a telling example of the theoretical ambiguities of translation scholars with regard to metaphor in general and the metaphor of translation in particular. In what follows I draw on Blumenberg and Sommer to reinterpret his writings on translation and metaphor, including his understanding of translation itself as metaphor. I begin with two of his essays, written in the second half of the 1980s and included in a collection of his works which appeared posthumously in 2012 under the title *Jacques Amyot traducteur français. Essais sur l'origine de la traduction en France*.³ The two essays are 'De la translation à la traduction' (Berman 2012a), which was first published in 1988 (Berman 1988) in a slightly different version, and 'Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore' (Berman 2012b).⁴ They provide a useful starting point because the metaphoric subtext I wish to examine is much easier to grasp in its entirety in these works, whereas *The Experience of the Foreign* (Berman 1992), which I go on to discuss later in the chapter, does not explicitly address the subject of metaphor *per se* nor that of translation as metaphor. This conspicuous absence adds a further layer of meaning to the interconnected metaphorical subtext that I want to reconstruct here.

'De la translation à la traduction'

In his unpublished inaugural lecture 'Translation's Other', delivered at University College London on 19 March 1996, Hermans outlines a theoretical approach to translation that emphasizes the necessity of adopting a critical stance towards supposedly unproblematic accounts of translation. Any "smooth, unruffled picture of translation", he argues, "has an 'other' to it, a more unsettling but also a much more interesting and intriguing side". Specifically, he points out that the "conventional perception and self-presentation of translation papers over the cracks" and declares: "I want to try and poke my finger into at least some of these cracks" (Hermans 1996:4). One of these cracks is unquestionably the relationship between translation and metaphor, epitomized in the metaphor of translation. The question I wish to pursue here is: How can metaphor, more specifically the metaphor of translation, unsettle a certain understanding of translation?

In 'De la translation à la traduction', Berman elaborates on the concept of translation that emerged in France during the Renaissance. For the first time in Western culture, translation became a clearly defined activity based on the differentiation between a 'first' and a 'second'

text. This, Berman adds, is evident to us moderns, “pour nous” (Berman 2012a:79), ignoring thus all the disputes surrounding the complex relationship between original and translation which were already being discussed at the time. The new understanding manifests itself in the use of the word *traduction* across all Romance languages and the development of a specific discourse on translation. *Traduction* designates translational activity – “activité traduisante” (ibid.:78). Together with *traducteur*, this new unitary word – “mot unitaire” (ibid.:83) – will quickly supplant, in France at least, the earlier *translation* and *translateur*.

This new view of translation implies a different understanding of language and the relationship that single languages entertain with each other. In the metaphorical subtext, languages – as well as culture and translation – are conceived as individuals with a name, a character, a profile and a face of their own. This notion, which accompanies and upholds the formation of national languages (Guldin 2020:13–26), seems to precede and confirm the new definition of translation as the transfer of a text from one language to another (Berman 2012a:78). Although Berman does not explicitly reflect on the importance of national languages and the essential role they play in the development of the new concept of translation, he clearly proceeds from this assumption when he discusses the French, German and English words for translation. And yet, as we shall see, each national language has its own unique understanding of translation, which is encoded in the very word it uses to describe the process.

In the Middle Ages, several words were being used, the most common being *translation*, which is still used in English today. There was a “multiplicity of denominations” (ibid.:78) at the time that coincided with a wide variety of intertextual processes involving many types of relationship between different texts. Berman describes this situation as a scriptural network – “réseau scripturaire” (ibid.:79). Under these circumstances, it was difficult and meaningless to attempt to isolate and extricate the act of translation from all others. The medieval lack of definition – “indéfinition” (ibid.:79) – was connected to an absence of stable linguistic frontiers. This suggests that the new notion of translation was directly linked to the creation of the linguistic borders of national languages, something that Berman, strangely enough, does not comment upon.

In the medieval context, certain genres were written in certain languages, other genres in two, sometimes even in three different languages. Berman describes this situation as the linguistic network – “réseau langagier” (ibid.:79) – of the *translateur*, the medieval translator that he opposes to the *traducteur*, the new translator figure of the Renaissance and of modernity. The notion of *réseau* resurfaces in the second essay, this time in connection with the proliferating multiplicity of metaphors for translation during the Renaissance. I will come back to this metaphor shortly. Even though Berman traces this paradigmatic shift to the rediscovery of the writers of Roman and Greek Antiquity and the invention of the printing press, his analysis remains predominantly within the linguistic domain, aiming for a purely terminological explanation of the change.

In the Middle Ages, the act of translation did not possess the uniqueness (*unicité*) of the “concept de ‘traduction’” (ibid.:79). Caught in this double, linguistic and scriptural network, it had no face of its own, and no proper name – “pris dans ce double réseau, il n’avait ni visage propre, ni nom unique”. The original lack of definition – “indéfinition originelle” (ibid.:80) – is an absence of delimitation – “absence de définition (de délimitation)” (ibid.:80). However, looked at from another perspective, the medieval situation was not so much an absence as an overabundance of intermingling definitions and textual practices. Instead of the later unicity

of the “nom unique de la traduction” (ibid.:81), the medieval notion of *translatio* was characterized by a “pluralité de sense” (ibid.:81). In addition to linguistic translation, it also meant physical transportation of objects and people, transfer of law, jurisdiction and ideas, as well as metaphoric and symbolic transfer. The medieval view of translation was thus characterized by a double multiplicity: it referred to a series of overlapping textual practices and pointed beyond a purely linguistic understanding of the word *translation*.

Berman’s definitional essentialism is accompanied by linguistic determinism. *Traduction* imposes itself mainly because of its close linguistic ties to related words composed with the suffix *duction*, which all play an essential role in modernity: *production*, *induction*, *reproduction*. It is the destiny of the modern word-family to which it belongs – “le destin de la famille moderne des mots auxquels ils appartient” (ibid.:83). The ontological metaphor of the face with a proper name is reinterpreted here in terms of genealogical family ties (Guldin 2020:89–94). As we shall see, the metaphor of kinship (*parenté*) is also used to describe the relationship between metaphor and translation (Berman 2012b:96, 97).

Berman compares the different words used for translation in French, English and German. Each great western language can reveal how a culture *thinks* about this operation and determines at the same time its nature, he argues – “Chaque grande langue occidentale peut nous révéler comment une culture *pense* cette opération et détermine à la fois sa nature” (Berman 2012a:86; emphasis in original). National languages develop a deterministic force, influencing the very way a culture and its members conceive of translators and translations.

Contrary to the unity and uniqueness of the French *traduction*, the English *translation* has at least four different meanings: the act of translating and its results, the transport of objects, transformation and the transfer of law. The verb *translate* has even more meanings. That the English language retained the word *translation* is no surprise, argues Berman, when one considers the fundamentally communicational character of the language. English is a communication language – “langue *communicationnelle*” (ibid.:86) – a translative (ibid.:87) language committed to the universal circulation of signs – “mise en circulation universelle de signifiés” (ibid.:88).

The German *übersetzen* and *übertragen* come from two different semantic domains, both moving beyond the Latin *translatio* and the English *translation*. For German translation, Berman argues, is neither a translational movement of signifiers, nor the energy that presides over this movement – “Pour l’allemand la ‘traduction’ n’est pas un mouvement de translation des signifiés, ni l’énergie présidant à ce mouvement” (ibid.:88; emphasis added) – as is the case of the French *traduction*. *Übersetzung* suggests a twofold movement that Berman interprets as the reciprocity of the domestic and the foreign: the essence of this double movement (is) inscribed in the very word *Übersetzung* – “l’essence de ce double mouvement (est) inscrit dans le mot même de *Übersetzung*” (ibid.:88). No wonder then that the German culture attributed such an overwhelming importance to translation processes. The tyranny of etymology pervades each individual language. The double meaning of *Übersetzung* is expressed by shifting the accent – crossing the river (*übersetzen*) and translate (*übersetzen*). Contrary to Berman’s assertion, the word itself does not automatically imply a crossing of the river in both senses. Most probably, Berman projects Schleiermacher’s (1992) conception of translation – moving the original towards the reader or the reader towards the original – back onto the German *Übersetzung*.

Finally, the French *traduction*, which is more delimited, that is, limited – “plus délimitée (voire limitée)” – than the English *translation* and the German *Übersetzung*, stresses the very

act of translating – “ductivité” (ibid.:88). No surprise then that the French culture developed the concept of *la belle infidèle* – the ‘freest’ form of translation – “la forme de traduction la plus ‘libre’” (ibid.:88).

An Anglo-Saxon, a German and a French cannot have the same in-depth understanding of translation – “ne peuvent pas *penser*, en profondeur la ‘traduction’ de la même manière” (ibid.:89). Despite these cultural differences, however, the fundamental question for Berman remains whether there is a way to define translation on its own, to define it as a specific activity – “Existe-t-il une manière de définir la traduction à *partir d’elle-même*, de la définir comme une activité spécifique?” (ibid.:91; emphasis in original). The new definition of translation goes hand in hand with the new figure of the *traducteur* who emerges in the course of the sixteenth century. Unlike the medieval *translateur*, the *traducteur* has a “profil propre” and a “*psyché propre*” (ibid.:93). The new figure of the translator is thus linked to the personifications of national languages and translation through their names, their character and their circumscribed nature. The *traducteur* is someone whose task is to transfer a text from one delimited language to another delimited language without threatening this delimitation – “transférer un texte d’une langue délimitée dans une autre langue délimitée, sans menacer cette délimitation” (ibid.:93). This translator operates in a world where languages are firmly bounded – “fermement *délimitées*” (ibid.:93). However, her/his activity always *risks blurring* the mutual delimitations of languages – “*risque toujours ... de brouiller les délimitations mutuelles des langues*” (ibid.:93; emphasis added).

In Berman’s vision, translation follows the institution of national languages and puts it at risk. However, as Sakai (2009:76) has argued, interlingual translation actually precedes the existence of national languages:

Strictly speaking, it is not because two different language unities are given that we need to translate ... It is because translation articulates languages so that we may postulate the two unities of the translating and the translated language as if they were autonomous and closed entities through a certain representation of translation. ... it is extremely difficult to comprehend what we perform in translation outside the discourse of the modern nation-state, and this difficulty only teaches us how massively we are confined within the discourse regulated by the idea of the national language and what I call the schema of cofiguration.

The final part of Berman’s essay creates a thematic bridge to the following chapter. Berman laments the theoretical poverty of the discourses of the sixteenth century about translation, which is counterbalanced by a great richness in metaphors – “la pauvreté théorique des discours sur la traduction au XVI^e est contrebalancée par une grande richesse métaphorique” (Berman 2012a:94). It is as if the Renaissance could only identify translation and the translator through a disconcerting multiplicity of images, he argues – “Tout se passe comme si la Renaissance ne pouvait cerner la traduction et le traducteur que par une multiplicité déroutante d’images” (ibid.:94); far from constituting itself in the mode of conceptual knowledge, it can only grasp translation in the rhetorical mode ... of metaphor – “loin de se constituer sur le mode du savoir conceptuel, (elle) ne peut saisir la traduction que sur le mode rhétorique ... de la métaphore” (ibid.:95). The twofold opposition between concept and metaphor on the one hand, and singularity and plurality on the other, is also at the centre of the second essay.

'Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore'

In 'Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore', Berman offers a theoretical vision of metaphor and its relationship to translation that is conspicuously absent from *The Experience of the Foreign* and deeply influences his view of translation as a metaphor. The title alludes to the unsettling force of metaphors that represent a plurality of dangerous nets (*filets*), in which the translator risks being hopelessly entrapped. Metaphorical views of translation are stereotypical, he argues: "La perception métaphorique de la traduction est ... une perception stéréotypée" (Berman 2012b:114).

As Berman points out at the beginning of the article, all definitions are conceptual: "toute définition est conceptuelle". Concepts *encircle* their object firmly – "*cerne fermement*" – and tightly stick to it. Metaphors, on the other hand, are always loose (*flottants*), like a baggy dress, and because of this can always be replaced by other metaphors, "*ad infinitum*" (ibid.:96). This garment metaphor re-emerges in connection with translation, in an approving comment on Walter Benjamin's "royal robe with ample folds" (2000:19). The coat of translation has wide folds – "de 'larges plis'"; it does not hug the body tightly like the skin of a fruit – "il ne *serre* pas le corps comme la peau le fruit" (Berman 2012b:99). The oppositions of definition and metaphor on the one hand, and definitional tightness and metaphorical looseness on the other, are reinterpreted here in positive terms. This goes to prove that metaphorical subtexts also allow for internal tensions and contradictions.

By contrast with Berman, Blumenberg (1998) convincingly argued that concept and metaphor are not simply opposites but intricately interwoven. They can be transformed into each other, or to use one of Berman's own metaphors, they can overflow into each other. In this sense, metaphors are not simply pre-conceptual or pre-scientific,⁵ and cannot be completely retranslated into conceptual terms (see also Haverkamp and Mende 2009), as Berman suggests. Metaphors represent an inexhaustible catalytic sphere in which concepts can constantly revitalize and enrich themselves (Blumenberg 1998:11). Each metaphor, moreover, possesses a structure of its own, and a specific, if not unique way of mapping inferences from a source onto a target (Black 1954; Lakoff and Johnson 1999), which makes a simple substitution by another metaphor practically impossible.

According to Berman, it is nearly impossible to perceive translation other than in metaphorical terms. Translation can never quite extricate itself from the net of metaphors, which is also true for the Renaissance. This is due, above all, to the profound kinship and structural identity of metaphor and translation, that is, the metaphorical structure of translating and the translational structure of metaphor (Berman 2012b:116). Because of this, metaphor itself is generally defined in metaphorical terms and tends to become a metaphor in its own right (ibid.:97). Berman's vision of the close terminological proximity of metaphor and translation is very much to the point. However, I would argue here that it is not so much the structural similarity of metaphor and translation that reveals the need for their metaphorical explanation, but the fact that both notions evade unambiguous conceptual definitions. Furthermore, Berman's insightful comment on the close terminological connection of metaphor and translation could also be interpreted as a possibility to conceive of a different history of the two interlinked terms (Guldin 2016:18–23).

Metaphors are translatable into each other – "*traduisibilité réciproque*". The metaphors of translation used during the Renaissance are no exception; they are perfectly permutable – "*parfaitement permutable*s" (Berman 2012b:114). Interestingly, Berman refers in a footnote

to the existence of a different form of metaphor that he calls poetic, to distinguish it from the purely rhetorical form of metaphor that is endlessly permutable. The poetic beauty of these metaphors is intimately linked to their veracity, and because of this they are able to convey the very nature and essence of translation – “l’être de la traduction”. Poetic metaphors escape the serial logic of resemblance – “échappent à la logique sérielle de la ressemblance” (ibid.:265n13). Tucked away in another footnote about Walter Benjamin’s metaphors of translation, Berman points out that some very rare metaphors are not translatable into concepts (ibid.:258n53). However, despite the introduction of the restricted form of poetic metaphors, metaphor as such does not escape its status as a fundamentally disqualified terminological form, incapable of ever being a viable way of interpreting reality, a view which denies its epistemological and systematic nature.

Berman’s argument is also based on the implicit assumption that metaphor is a pre-scientific tool and therefore belongs to the early stages of translation theory (Guldin 2016:26–27). This would explain the importance of metaphor in the Renaissance, which represents in Berman’s view the first stage of a new scientific understanding of translation still to come. In these early stages of theory building, the curse of resemblances – “la malédiction des ressemblances” (Berman 2012b:99) holds sway. Metaphor multiplies meaning endlessly and rhetoric does not leave any space for true theory. This impinges directly on the self-understanding of the translator: the translator never gets his bearings – “le traducteur n’arrive jamais à se cerner”; he or she becomes the prey of metaphors – “la proie des métaphores” (ibid.:100). The reflexive forms *se cerner*, to define oneself by drawing a circle around oneself, and the earlier *cerner*, to encircle, to surround – referring to the functioning of conceptual thinking – link the two domains to each other.

In the list of metaphors that Berman discusses in the essay, negativity, as he calls it, prevails. The new translator perceives him or herself above all in negative terms. The medieval translateur, on the other hand, was far removed from the translator’s self-deprecation – “auto-dépréciation du traducteur” (ibid.:106). Berman uses the notion of net (*réseau*) in the singular to describe interconnected clusters of metaphors. However, this metaphor is reinterpreted in negative terms and connected to the title of the essay, where the net features in the plural form: “Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore” (emphasis added). The connecting net of metaphors (*réseau*) turns out to be an ensemble of stifling nets (*filets*) entrapping translation and the translator in a descriptive straightjacket. The network is actually a net that falls heavily, with all the weight of its rhetoric, onto translation and the translators – “Le réseau est vraiment un filet qui s’abat lourdement, de tout le poids de sa rhétorique, sur la traduction et les traducteurs” (ibid.:114).

Berman quotes altogether ten examples of metaphors of translation from Hermans’s ‘Images of Translation: Metaphor and Imagery in the Renaissance Discourse on Translation’ (1985), mainly to bolster his own view of the negative incidence of metaphor. The quotations are repositioned in a new context where they generally serve a different interpretative agenda. The digestive metaphor is reinterpreted in negative terms: Translation digests badly and always risks being indigestible – “la traduction digère mal et ... risque toujours d’être indigeste” (ibid.:104). In the section ‘Figures de la servitude’ (Figures of bondage), Berman explores the translator’s unambiguously submissive, if not slave-like status. Hermans interprets the metaphor in much more ambivalent terms, pointing to the restricted freedom of the translator it implies (Hermans 1985:109). The metaphor of the rough jewel in a casket, which “can serve several purposes” (ibid.:119), is in Berman’s view above all an example of

“dévalorisation” (Berman 2012b:110). The same holds true for the garment metaphor that Hermans does not perceive as “necessarily disparaging in itself” (1985:115). The metaphor of translation as a pouring of a liquid from one vessel into another does not imply total loss (Hermans 1985:121). Berman, however, focuses on the possible evaporation of the poured liquid, a radicalization of the negativity of the image – “radicalisation de la négativité de l’image” (Berman 2012b:111).

In the essay on metaphors of translation in the Renaissance, which was written at about the same time as Berman’s texts, Hermans highlights several aspects of the theoretical relevance of metaphors for an understanding of translation that is clearly at odds with Berman’s own understanding. Hermans’s focus is on different ways of describing translation and the way this impinges on our perception of it. Metaphors have an epistemological aspect to them, they “are not just incidental ornaments; on the contrary, they carry the burden of the argument” (Hermans 1985:105) and are part of the metalanguage of translation at a given time (ibid.:106). Contrary to Berman’s mainly dualistic view – positive versus negative metaphors, and rhetorical versus poetic metaphors –, metaphors can both highlight the problematic side of translation and “upgrade the translator’s achievement and projected self-image” (ibid.:106). Hermans mentions laudatory metaphors that celebrate the translator’s freedom. Other metaphors “invert the hierarchy between original and translation” (ibid.:110). Finally, shifts in the perception of translation are generally “signalled by a change in the metaphorical apparatus” (ibid.:105).

The Experience of the Foreign

Berman first published *L'épreuve de l'étranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique* in 1984, at a significant juncture in the history of translation studies, and in a way anticipated the cultural turn of the 1990s. In this respect, the juxtaposition of culture and translation in the subtitle is highly significant, if not programmatic. According to Venuti, who quotes from *L'épreuve de l'étranger*, Berman questioned “‘ethnocentric’ translating that ‘deforms’ the foreign text by assimilating it to the target language and culture”. “Bad translation is not merely domesticating, but mystifying”, he continues, as it “performs a systematic negation of the foreignness of the foreign work”. “Good translation”, on the other hand, “shows respect for the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text” by “developing a ‘correspondence’ that ‘enlarges, amplifies and enriches the translating language’” (Venuti 2000:219). In this sense, also thanks to Venuti’s intervention, Berman might be considered in retrospect as one of the founding fathers of a new vision of translation that tried to extricate itself from the simple opposition of original and translation. However, as the previous reflections have shown, this truly innovative and provocative way of looking at translation is accompanied by profound theoretical ambivalences. One of the main problems being – together with an essentialist stance – his defence of a primarily linguistic understanding of translation processes.

Berman’s discussion of the notion of translation in German Romanticism is animated by a wish to open up the traditional linguistic understanding of translation to a broader definition that would also include cultural and historical aspects. At the same time, however, he holds on to the primacy of a purely linguistic understanding of translation and shies away from any form of linguistic overlapping and mixing. In his view, the borders between different languages are not porous and open to osmotic exchanges. Each (national) language is a self-confined unit existing separately, next to other linguistic units.

Throughout the book, Berman painstakingly avoids using the term *metaphor* even when it would be the most obvious terminological choice. Instead, he uses *model* (*modèle*) and *archetype* (*archétype*) (Berman 1992:183, 1984/1995:291–292) without elaborating on the implications of these concepts. Metaphor represents a terminological threat to a purely conceptual definition of translation, and the terminological integrity of translation proper (the ‘restricted’ form) is constantly menaced by any metaphorical use of it (the ‘generalized’ form). In the same way that national languages are clearly separated from each other, the notions of metaphor and translation, and the restricted and generalized understanding of translation, have to be kept apart. To differentiate restricted from generalized forms of translation, Berman resorts to distinguishing between *traduction* and *translation*. This terminological choice is meticulously applied throughout the French text.

Berman uses *translation* for pre-modern times and for metaphorical uses in the present, implicitly suggesting a terminological connection between the two. *Traduction* is set apart from both the earlier medieval understanding of translation and the new metaphorical uses of translation. In the book, *traduction* is used in the singular and *translation* in the plural, in line with the opposition between conceptual singularity and metaphorical multiplicity advocated in the two essays discussed previously. The *acte de la traduction* is opposed to the *multiplicité de translations*.

Silvia Heyvaert, who translated the book into English, opted for *translation* in the case of *traduction* and *trans-lation* for the metaphorical cases. Since Berman does not explicitly focus on his terminological choices and their implications for the book as a whole, the absence of a comment by the translator in her initial note is understandable. This also explains the fact that there is only one mention of this terminological choice in the index of the English translation. Under the heading ‘translation’ are listed ‘restricted’ and ‘generalized’ translation, followed by “see also trans-lation”, without, however, specifying any page numbers (Berman 1992:250). Comparison of the use of *translation/traduction* and *translation/trans-lation* in the French and English text respectively reveals some differences. In the English translation, the singular *traduction* is rendered as *translations* on one occasion; on several other occasions the French *translation* is not translated as *trans-lation* but as *translation*. These asymmetries are not simply mistakes. In my view, they are an ironic comment on Berman’s attempt to keep the purely linguistic and the metaphoric meaning of translation distinct from each other. It is the very act of translation that inadvertently reveals the inherent instability of meaning and the shifting character of the notion of translation.

To illustrate these inner tensions, I will first discuss some of the main metaphorical uses of translation in German Romanticism and then move on to the conclusion of the book, which sketches a traductology that explores the ways in which the notion of translation can be used across the disciplines and what this means for translation studies.

Translation is primarily an agent of *Bildung*. The notion of *Bildung* covers a large semantic field; it means education, formation, but also self-education, and both cultural and personal maturation. Neither *Bildung* nor translation is a form of appropriation or conquest, but presuppose the experience of the foreign. Translation is at the same time an aspect and a metaphor of *Bildung*. Conversely, *Bildung* is a metaphor for translation. Berman (1992:46) argues that *Bildung* “is closely connected with the movement of translation – for translation, indeed, starts from what is one’s own, the same ... in order to go towards the foreign, the other ..., and starting from this experience, to return to its point of departure”. The “circular, cyclical and alternating nature of *Bildung* implies in itself something like *trans-lation*, *Über-Setzung*,

a positing of oneself beyond oneself” (ibid.:47; emphasis in original). The notion of Grand Tour, which belongs to the experience of *Bildung*, is the second important metaphor for translation. *Bildung* and the Grand Tour, which as forms of self-education both presuppose the experience of the foreign and the idea of a homeward journey, also imply the notion of *Begrenzung*, limitation. “Limitation”, Berman argues, “is what distinguishes the experience of *Bildung* from the purely erratic and chaotic adventure where one loses oneself. The *grand tour* does not consist of going just anywhere, but there where one can form and educate oneself, and progress towards oneself” (ibid.:48; emphasis in original). Translation (*traduction*) is

the action *sui generis* that incarnates, illustrates, and also makes possible these exchanges without, to be sure, having a monopoly on them. There is a multiplicity of acts of translation⁶ that assure plenitude of vital and natural interactions among individuals, peoples and nations, interactions in which they construct their own identity and their relations to the foreign.

(Berman 1992:54)

Before embarking on his analysis of a generalized use of the metaphor of translation in German Romanticism, Berman points out that Goethe insisted on keeping a “*théorie de la traduction généralisée*” – interlinguistic translation – clearly separated from a “*théorie de la translation généralisée*”, of which interlingual translation would only be a particular case (Berman 1984/1995:110; emphasis added). Within the general narrative of the book, Goethe plays the role of an alter ego of the author insofar as he stands for a clear separation between restricted and generalized forms of translation, which breaks down in German Romanticism.

Despite the fact that the ethnological discourse on the foreign “constitutes a kind of translation (*traduction*)” (Berman 1992:178), implying a possible interpenetration and overlapping of the two meanings (restricted and generalized translation), Berman insists on a spatial distinction. Commenting on Roman Jakobson’s tripartite subdivision of translation, he argues that this understanding of “generalized translation” covers reformulation, translation properly speaking, and transmutation as distinct domains, in an “effort to *dominate the unmasterable* (*immaîtrisable*) concept of translation” (ibid.:179; emphasis added). Metaphor and translation not only share a similar structure and the same terminological origin, they are also both slippery notions that are difficult to pin down. In this sense, metaphor in general and the metaphor of translation in particular tends to unsettle translation by reactivating its own inner terminological instability.

In chapters 5 and 9, the focus is on the Romantic notion of total translation, the will to translate everything, what Berman calls “*versabilité infinie*” (Berman 1984/1995:125): infinite versability. The Romantic will to translate everything, “*la volonté de tout traduire*” (ibid.:205), is grounded in the idea that all poetry is translatable; “*But if all poetry is translatable, one can now translate everything, get started on a program of total translation*” (Berman 1992:135; emphasis in original). In the overall narrative of the book, the Romantic will to total translation and the notion of generalized translation, which Berman discusses in more detail in the conclusion, are connected to each other.

Versability articulates a need for plurality – “*exigence de pluralité*”; ibid.:127). The term *Versabilität* was first introduced by Novalis (Berman 1992:78), who compared it to

the voluptuous movement of liquids – “mouvement ‘voluptueux’ du liquide” (Berman 1984/1995:125). Versability comes from the Latin *versabilitas* and the verb *versare*, ‘to turn, capable of being acted upon’, hence *versabilis*, ‘capable of being turned, changeable’. The associated French *verser* means ‘to pour’, so that *versabilité* also implies the possibility of pouring a liquid, which links it to one of the metaphors of translation discussed earlier. The phonetically and semantically associated *versatility* comes from the Latin *vertere*, ‘to turn’. *Versatile* from French, or from Latin *versatilis*, from *versat-* ‘turned about, revolved’ and the verb *versare*, an iterative form of *vertere*, ‘to turn’, is also used in the sense of ‘inconstant and fluctuating’. Both terms thus emphasize plurality and fluidity.

The conclusion of the book deals with the potential of elaborating a ‘traductology’. One of traductology’s main aims is to explore the ways in which the notion of translation can be used across various disciplines and its theoretical consequences for translation studies. Berman’s argument is based on his earlier analysis of *trans-lation* in German Romanticism. In ‘Translation as a New Object of Knowledge’, the second subsection of the conclusion (Berman 1992:181–191), he defines translation as a “carrier of a knowledge *sui generis* on languages, literatures, cultures, movements of exchange and contact” that must be confronted “with other modes of knowledge and experience concerning these domains. In this sense, translation must be considered rather as *subject* of knowledge, as origin and source of knowledge” (ibid.:181–182).

To describe the relationship between the domain of traductology and other domains Berman employs spatial metaphors. The space of traductology is “a space of reflection” that “will cover [*couvrira simultanément*] the field of translation within other fields of interlinguistic, interliterary and intercultural communication, as well as the history of translation and the theory of literary translation ... encompassing [*englobant*] literature ... philosophy, the humanities and religious texts. ... this field, by its very nature, intersects [*croise*] a multiplicity of domains”, and because of this, “there will necessarily be some interaction between these and traductology” (ibid.:182). In the same way that the field of translation is contained within other fields, the generalized version of translation is contained within the restricted theory. Berman defines their relationship as a “mutual envelopment” (ibid.:183). Instead of envelopment, which implies folding and wrapping up, the French original uses “*emboîtement réciproque*” (reciprocal nesting; Berman 1984/1995:292), that is, boxes containing each other. This metaphor, which at first sight seems to imply a balanced symmetry between a restricted and a generalized theory of translation, is however disavowed by the very denomination chosen for the endeavour: ‘traductology’ is a linguistically centred theory of translation, not a ‘translatology’. Furthermore, Berman’s spatial metaphors all do without osmosis or porosity. The existing borders between the interacting self-contained units remain in place, recalling the spatial metaphors of containment and circumscription discussed so far.

“Any type of ‘change’ (of ‘trans-lation’)”, Berman argues, can be “interpreted as a translation, not only in the aesthetic domain, but also in that of the sciences and, finally, in human experience in general”. However, this “peculiar extension of the concept of translation” can “result in *depriving* it of all content”. Much “would be gained in the development of a restricted theory of translation. Still, it remains a fact that the concept of translation *continues to overflow* [*ne cesse de déborder*] *any limited definition it can be given*”. “This semantic – and epistemological – *overflowing* [*débordement*]”, he continues, “seems inevitable”. This calls for the articulation of a restricted and a generalized theory of translation, “without *dissolving*

[*dissoudre*] (as is the case for German Romantics) *the former in the latter*. ... the restricted theory should function as the *archetype* of any theory of ‘changes’, or of ‘trans-lations’” (Berman 1992:183; emphasis added). Linguistic translation is the “*model* for any process of this kind” (ibid.). The specificity of a restricted theory of translation is its uniqueness, “*son unicité*” (Berman 1984/1995:292):

The relation that links a translation to its original is unique in its kind. No other relation – from one text to another, from one language to another, from one culture to another – is comparable to it. And it is precisely this uniqueness that makes for the *significant density* of translation; to interpret the other exchanges in terms of translation is to want (rightly or wrongly) to give them the same significant density.⁷

(Berman 1992:183)

In the metaphorical subtext, overflowing limits and dissolving distinctions are opposed to density and self-containment.

In his analysis of the use of the metaphor of translation in other disciplinary domains, Berman does not take into consideration the fact that the different disciplines generally use the metaphors they borrow from other disciplines to suit their own ends, even if the choice of a specific metaphor clearly also introduces a new point of view. In the case of the metaphor of translation, this generally led to a use that ignored the specific understanding of translation in translation studies itself. The examples of molecular genetics and translational medicine on the one hand, and postcolonial studies and Freudian psychoanalysis on the other, show that understanding what a translation actually is can vary greatly from discipline to discipline and that these different readings of the notion can be at odds with each other. The spectrum extends from translation as a form of transcriptive replication (genetics) to translation as a transformative power (postcolonial studies) (Guldin 2016). These processes of borrowing and appropriation do not simply drain translation of its meaning; they also recast it in new terms. Translation scholars should not attempt to safeguard the one true meaning of translation – if there ever was one – but open up to the different ways in which the term is used in other disciplinary domains in order to reach a better understanding of the notion within translation studies itself. Instead of an essentialist stance aimed at protecting the supposed integrity of the concept, one could engage in a cross-disciplinary dialogue that can help unsettle questionable terminological certainties and further the development of a more encompassing and differentiated understanding of processes of interlingual translation. This would also imply a systematic reflection on the predominant metalanguage of translation studies, especially on the metaphoricity of its key terms.

Concluding remarks

I wish to conclude with a brief overview of the metaphorical subtext that structures Berman’s vision on metaphor, translation, and translation as metaphor, and a few considerations on possible alternative metaphors.

The subtext operates with a series of interlinked dualistic assumptions: concept/metaphor, poetic and rhetorical metaphors, negative and positive metaphors, restricted and generalized translation, singularity/multiplicity, solidity/density versus liquidity/fluidity, fixity/mutability, tightness/looseness, clear-cut borders/porosity. These oppositions do not allow

for intermediate solutions but rather call for a series of closely interrelated delimitations that echo each other throughout the texts. Berman uses spatial metaphors that emphasize circumscription, distinction and separation. The metaphor of reciprocal nesting, for instance, emphasizes spatial separateness at the expense of porosity, overlapping and mixing, and the metaphor of overflowing presupposes a rigid conceptual container that recalls the box in *emboîtement*. Another layer of related metaphors connects unicity and uniqueness to the metaphors of the face, the profile, the proper name, the character and psyche of the translator and the personification of national languages. The metaphors of the close and loosely fitting terminological garments connect the metaphors of overflowing and dissolving to the metaphors of unicity and closeness. Finally, the metaphor of the net that turns out to be a trap suffocating the true meaning of translation and hindering its conceptual emancipation could be linked both to the notion of unchecked multiplicity and to the garment metaphor insofar as it does not really fit its subject but covers it up with a smothering blanket.

To counteract Berman's dualistic approach and to escape the Scylla of fixity and the Charybdis of fluidity, I would like to introduce a metaphor that has been used by scholars of both metaphor and translation, and which moves beyond the oppositions described here. In Max Black's interaction view of metaphor, the extension of meaning implied by metaphor is brought about by a "system of associated or related commonplaces" that project a "corresponding system of implications" (Black 1954:288) about the source domain onto the target domain. Lakoff and Johnson described this exchange as 'mapping' and 'cross-domain mapping'. The source domain of a metaphor is mapped onto a target domain, and "[t]he main function of conceptual metaphor is to project 'inference patterns' from one conceptual domain onto another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:82). Mappings represent systematic sets of correspondences between constituent elements of the source and the target domain. The target domain influences the sets of correspondences that are activated in the source domain. Systems of implications, inference patterns and sets of correspondences highlight the dialogical relationship that links the source and target domains and the many strands connecting the two like the weaving shuttle in a loom. These threads are like a dense mesh of filaments that can be followed in both directions. In a similar vein, the translation scholar Sarah Maitland argues that the source and the target text are not reified binary opposites but intertwined "threads of textual possibility" (Maitland 2016:17) linked to each other by the subjective work of the translator.

Notes

- 1 For alternative discussions of the use of the metaphor of translation in other disciplinary fields, see Trivedi (2007) and Bennett (2012).
- 2 By which I mean European and North American tradition.
- 3 Antoine Berman died in Paris on 22 November 1991. He chose the content and decided on the order of the chapters between 1990 and 1991, as he states in his preface to the volume.
- 4 This text was most probably written after 1985, as Berman quotes abundantly from Hermans's 'Images of Translation: Metaphor and Imagery in the Renaissance Discourse on Translation' (Hermans 1985).
- 5 In a similar vein, Koller (1972) describes metaphors as a useful pre-scientific tool that can only pave the way for more systematic terminological reflections. They can reproduce vividly – but only in a simplified and condensed way – concepts that have already been clearly formulated or help to illustrate that which is not yet clear, difficult to explain or just intuitively perceived. As pre-scientific images, metaphors can only initiate thinking. This is also their main function in translation theory.

- 6 In the French version, Berman uses *translation* (Berman 1984/1995:89), which in this case should be rendered as *trans-lation*.
- 7 In the original, Berman uses *épaisseur* (thickness) rather than density (1984/1995:292–293).

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