

TRANSLATION

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TRANSLATION & TRANSMISSION

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Translation and Transmission Conference

with David Bellos



David Bellos
(Princeton University)

David Bellos is professor of French and Comparative Literature at Princeton, where he also directs the Program in Translation and Intercultural Communication. He has translated works by Georges Perec, Ismail Kadare, Fred Vargas and many others and is also the author of literary biographies of Georges Perec, Jacques Tati and Romain Gary. His irreverent essay on translation, *Is That A Fish In Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything*, was published in 2011.

David Bellos's Presentation

TRANSCRIPT

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Marcus Perman:

So, we've decided to do something a little different from some of the other Tibetan studies conferences you've probably been to, and that is begin the conference on Tibetan translation with a speaker who is a professor of French and comparative literature. Little bit different. I'm really very excited for him to be here, and we're honored that he'll be addressing the conference now. David Bellos directs the program in translation and intercultural communication at Princeton University. He's translated works by Georges Perec, Ismail Kadare, Fred Vargas, and many others, and is also the author of literary biographies of Georges Perec, Jacques Tati, and Romain Gary. His irreverent essay on translation, "Is That a Fish in Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything," was published in 2011. If you haven't read that yet, it really is worth taking the time. So, I'd like to please welcome to the stage, Dr. David Bellos.

David Bellos:

Thank you, Marcus. Thank you, Eric, and thank all of you for making this visit possible to such a spectacular place that I have never been to before. I'm really delighted to be here and very humbled on learning what extraordinary and complicated work that you all do. I mean, I just translate from French, which is really a dialect of English, and that's not really difficult.

I got into translation, maybe a little bit like some of you did, in the middle of a midlife crisis somebody put a book in my hand and said "read this, you'll like it," and I did! I loved it so passionately, was bowled over by it, that I thought, *this I have to share*. I have to do two things. One, I want to make it my own, and there's nothing like translating for actually really feeling you own something, and I want to share it. It's a book, happened to be written in French but it was that sort of a book where you feel, actually, it really belongs to everybody. So that's how I got into translation.

In the course of that initial adventure I was really very fortunate to fall into the hands of a publisher who was a very wise and very courteous gentleman, and has become a good and deep friend, and I'm sure my early drafts were pretty awful, but he was very nice and kind to me, but he gave me one piece of very firm advice, he said, "David, be kind to your reader," and that's what I want to talk about today, because I'm sure all of us share that general ethical, moral, emotional idea that we are doing something for our readers. We don't want to make them feel inadequate. The whole purpose of our activity as translators is not to punish them or make them feel like idiots. On the other hand, how to implement that injunction in the specific field of translation of written texts is not obvious, and so I want to go around that. I think to go around that and try and understand what are the different ways of implementing that injunction to be kind to your readers, it involves the thinking about the whole history of translation, at least in the

West. When I've stopped talking, you will tell me things about translation in the East, which I'm sure has a very different genealogy, a different history, but they must cross paths in many ways despite their distance from each other. We all know that kindness to children is not always doing them a great favor, and that there are different ways of construing what it means to be kind in different circumstances. One of the curious things is, in the western world, one presumes that in all of the world, intercultural communication of some sort has taken place more or less informally since the beginning of time. People have traded with each other, and fought with each other, and encountered each other across language barriers, but translation is something slightly more than, and different from, just managing to get on with somebody who speaks another language.

In the western world, translation does have two, almost simultaneous, historical origins. In the middle of the third century B.C.E., for the first time, two texts were brought from one language into another, not just rewritten, or re-encoded, re-elaborated, they actually purported to be the same book in another language, and that's the starting point of the idea of translation, that what you present is not just doing something with the original. It purports to be the same thing as the original, but in a different language. Those two origin points – they are geographically quite close. They are separated by the Mediterranean Sea. One was on the south shore of the Mediterranean, Alexandria in Egypt, which was, at that time, a Greek-speaking city. It was ruled by Macedonian kings. The other origin point, within a few years, maybe five or six years, was on the toe of Italy, on the other side of the Mediterranean, again a Greek-speaking colony called Taras, but it had been overcome by the Romans, was part of the Roman republic by that time. In Alexandria, the Hebrew Torah, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, were reproduced in Coinean, say common-or-garden everyday Greek. That is point one. A holy book was brought into a language of wide diffusion from a language, biblical Hebrew, that was no longer a spoken language anywhere, and was becoming very much a cult language for a particular identity group. In Taranto, (Taras in Greek) in Italy, on the other hand, a Roman nobleman asked one of his slaves, perhaps he didn't ask because slaves are slaves. He *told* a slave to write Homer for him in Latin. That's the very first translation of Greek poetry into Latin.

So these two events – it's really rather peculiar, nobody knows why. There's really no explanation as to why, pretty much at the same time, the same idea arose. Both of these translations involve Greek, but very different kinds of Greek. In Alexandria, it was being translated into the Greek that was actually spoken, not merely in Alexandria, but in a wide area of what we now call the Middle East. Coinean Greek was a vehicular language through which many different cultures communicated with each other, did trade, did business, and so forth. What was being translated into Latin, on the other hand, was Greek that was already archaic, that was ancient Greek, that was no longer the spoken form of the language. The dissimilarities between these two events could hardly be exaggerated, but we don't know enough about either of them to really understand what was going on and why they occurred at the same time, but it's very interesting that western translation begins then, and it begins with these two divergent, different ideas of what translation is.

Why was the Hebrew Torah translated into Coinean Greek in Alexandria at that time? Well, Alexandria was ruled by a very culturally ambitious man, this pharaoh called Ptolemy the Second. Incidentally, he sent an envoy to India, to the court of King Aśoka. Probably, the first

contact between the West and the East happened within that same time frame, within the reign of Ptolemy, and it was he who built the library of Alexandria. One myth or legend about this story is that Ptolemy was such a megalomaniac guy he wanted a copy of *every* book in the world in his new library, and of course, you know, Greeks were extraordinary linguistic xenophobes. Unless a thing was written in Greek, it didn't really exist. To be in the library, it had to be in Greek, so since he knew that the community of Jews in Alexandria had a book, Torah means book, then it had to be in Greek, and so the legend goes he sent a, probably a squab, off to Judea to bring back a *klatch* of Jewish scholars, set them to work on kind of foundational translation workshop on the island of Pharos, you know, the lighthouse island of Alexandria, and they came up with the translation that we now call the *Septuagint*, which is very odd. "Septuagint" is actually Latin, not Greek, or Hebrew, and it means "seventy," and it's called "seventy" because mythically or legendarily there were seventy, perhaps seventy-two, of these Judean captives, I suppose, who were set to translate. That would make it an L2 translation, a translation from a language that was native or quasi-native to the translators into a learned language, though one can assume that most educated or moderately educated people from that part of the world would have had everyday Greek as their language for dealing with ordinary life.

So, that's story one. It's pretty implausible because – can you imagine seventy translators agreeing on anything? Seventy *Jewish* translators? So, a supplementary myth arose, but actually several centuries later, to account for this extraordinary event, namely that they were directly inspired by God and they all came up with *exactly* the same translation, which is no more implausible than any other explanation. **As you know, if you set not seventy but seven translators to work on the same text in the same room, there is zero chance that they will actually come up with exactly the same formulation of anything, and that's not because of human perversity. It's because of the nature of human language and the nature of translation, but we'll come back to that in a minute.**

So, why were they doing it? Well, story one is that they were doing it for the glory of Ptolemy, for the glory of his library, and under compulsion, or some kind of compulsion, I mean pharaohs are not very democratic people. Story two, which you might find more plausible, is that this is all propaganda put about by Ptolemy's successors. Actually, the Torah was translated into Greek by the Jewish community of Alexandria for itself. Like the Jewish community of Denver or New York, they were losing contact, they were not at home in biblical Hebrew, and to maintain their identity, their cultural and religious identity, they needed to have that text in a language they could explain to their children and practice more fully. I think it's a form of rescue translation, and of survival transmission translation done by the community itself. That's the other story. But then, scholars, and I'm not one of them, it's all borrowed learning from my wonderful colleagues at Princeton. I pick their brains all the time. The Greek of the Septuagint of this very first foundational translation in the western tradition is, apparently, not very good. It's rather clunky. In some places, I am told, it's Greek that barely masks Hebrew syntax and word order, and it's also clear that, in some cases, they didn't even bother to translate. They just took the Hebrew words and wrote them in Greek letters. Now, you might do that with Tibetan every now and again. They were extraordinarily successful in doing that because we still have in English, transmitted to us by translation, non-translation into Greek and non-translation from Greek into Latin and non-translation from Latin into English: *cherubim* and *seraphim*. These are Hebrew words that have just been rewritten in the different alphabets over 2,500 years now, with the

result that nobody knows what they mean. Why do that? Well, you know yourselves, translators, there are two reasons for doing that, two possible reasons, rival reasons for doing that. One is that you don't know what it means either! So, rather than invent, rather than guess, rather than alter the text, you take over a technical term from the original, as it is, put it in inverted commas, maybe, or italics, and treat it as a term of the trade that is just its own thing, but of course that gives no semantic information, and no context for how to understand it, and maybe the Jewish translators of Alexandria of 246 B.C. no longer knew what *kērūbīm* really meant, what it referred to.

The other reason that you might want to do that is, assuming that you understand, you know what it's about, you don't want to tell people. Or rather, you want them to make an effort. You don't want to be too kind to them, to make it seem as though, you know, oh well, it's just something ordinary. It's something special, and you want to keep it as that special thing. So these are two obvious motivations for including what you call a *foreignism* or a *xenism*, or simply a *transliteration* in the transmission from one culture to another. Of course, between Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, it's very different, well, it's a little bit different from the world you're working in because these are alphabets that can reproduce each other. You can write Hebrew in a Greek alphabet, and Greek in a Latin. They're not the same alphabets, but they're very closely related, and they have multiple direct correspondences so that literalisms are always an option.

That second reason of not wanting to say explains an approach taken in quite recent years by a scholar in England, Tessa Rajak, Professor Rajak at Redding, who has written lengthily about the Septuagint, almost as a piece of post-colonial writing, something that transmits and at the same time resists. That's to say, it's in Greek so that everybody can read it, but it's in a sort of Greek that reminds you all the time that it's not really Greek, that it's both an act of transmission and appropriation, assimilation to new culture and, at the same time, it encodes resistance to that transmission. It asserts the authenticity of the identity of the transmitting culture and seeks to preserve it in the awful things it does to the receiving language. I don't know whether that strikes any chords with you, but there's that awful word *translationese*, which is indeed dreadful when it's involuntary or the result of incompetence, but sometimes translationese is actually what you want to write. You want people reading it to know that this comes from somewhere else, and that it retains something of its original identifying function in the language.

Ok, so, that's one source of a long tradition. I'm sure you can hear all the echoes down the ages, from this situation, and maybe it's just as well for us that the truth about the Septuagint will forever remain a mystery, because these different interpretations have enriched and provoked debates and experiments in translation over two thousand years that go in these different directions right down to post-colonial writing, and trying to write English as if it was a foreign language, which some people do with great talent now. Maybe they are the direct inheritants of The Seventy.

What went on the other side of the Mediterranean in those very same years was completely different. We know that Homer was not translated into Latin because Roman citizens could not read Greek. That is not true. They could all read Greek. Learning Greek was the cornerstone and the main purpose of the education of the Roman elite. What you learned when you went to school in Rome and in Roman provinces was how to write like a Greek. For some reason, the

Romans had this incredible inferiority complex. They'd overcome the Greeks militarily, economically, and in every way, but culturally, the Greeks had it, and the top language was Greek for thinking, for philosophy, for reciting, for performance, for rhetoric, and so forth. The idea of writing Greek in Latin was something new, but it was being done not so that you could read Homer, because they all read Homer anyway. They knew the stories. The idea is very obvious, very clear, was to inject into Latin the cultural prestige of Greece, to show that Latin, too, could be the vehicle of this higher culture. It was an appropriation. It sounds like a dirty word, appropriation, but it's not a dirty word. Only a few lines of that first translation of Homer have survived through secondary quotation in other manuscripts, but we can see from those lines what it is that Livius Andronicus, ultimately freed Greek slave, was being asked to do and what he did very well. He was writing something else. He was showing that Homer could be perfectly acceptable Latin poetry, or that you could write acceptable Latin poetry out of Homer. So it's very different. Nowadays we'd call it an "adaptation," and that's what, over the following five centuries, that's what Latin literature is. It's an appropriation of Greek culture. It's a rewriting, translation/re-elaboration of material, poetic, epic, philosophical, dramatic, into this new language which sought to be the vehicle of culture in its own right, but always with a kind of nod to the Greeks who got it there first.

That process is something that has gone on in the West ever since, in many, many languages and cultures, to assert the vitality, flexibility, richness of a language, by taking cultural treasures from more prestigious languages and translating them. You could say that's how every modern European language has emerged from being a mere dialect in the Middle Ages into a language of culture, whether in the fourteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, or twentieth and twenty-first century.

I was recently contacted by a lovely young man from Tartu in Estonia, who was translating the same French authors that I've translated so passionately, and in his first letter to me he said, "I'm doing this to prove that Estonian is rich and flexible enough to do Perec as well as English or French," and you can see the same motivation runs from Livius Andronicus to Tartu in 2011, and it's one of the things that translation does, or has done, has been used to do, is actually the primary vector for the constitution of a dialect as a language of culture. So these two very different things that start at the same time in the mid third century B.C.E., you can see them, as it were, continuing as, not just traditions, but as conceptions, as ideologies of translation. They're not completely incompatible with each other, but they are very different ideas of what translation is, and they run into the same problems, but they give you quite different take on some of the central, fundamental issues of translation relations.

One thing that I have learned from my colleagues about Roman translation and that I'd like to share with you because it may conceivably be relevant to other traditions too, is that the practice of highly adaptive, extremely free, naturalizing translation, has something to do with the actual technology of reading and writing. In Rome third century B.C.E., but also in Rome fourth century A.D., how do you read? Well, desks and chairs hadn't been invented. You sat cross-legged on the floor, or on a very low stool, and you took your scroll and you opened it. You need two hands to read. That's fine, but if you're translating, where's your third hand to write? You can't actually, in a culture that has no desks and no chairs, and has scrolls and not codices, you can't actually do what we now think of as translating, namely, writing whilst reading, seeing and transcribing. There aren't very many records, but there are some, both in sculpture and *bas relief*

and in some accounts. What you do is you sit cross-legged on the floor, you open your scroll, and you sight translate aloud whilst a slave with a wax tablet annotates what you're saying, then you take a break, and what's on the wax tablet is then re-transcribed with a reed pen onto a piece of papyrus. Alternatively, and actually much more commonly, apparently, is you open your reed scroll, you read a page, or a chunk or a column. You memorize it, roll it up, take your own wax tablet, and write a translation from memory. As you can see, either way, the physical conditions make it much more difficult to check back, to identify correspondence, and the adaptive and highly free nature of Roman translation of Greek has something to do with those actual material conditions. I always like little details of this sort, but I think one should always think, when looking at texts from other worlds, from ancient times, from different cultures, just have a look: what are the material, practical conditions in which this is being done, and what do those conditions allow, or favor, or rule out in terms of the way the intellectual work can be done. Have any of you ever done sight translation, I mean just read something aloud and have somebody else right it down? It comes out different. It's a great skill, but it's not the same as going over and back and forth all the time.

Now, the Roman tradition of free and adaptive translation has a long post-history in Western Europe. Its most famous sort of peak was in seventeenth century France, where French courtiers thought they would do to the Romans what the Romans had done to the Greeks, produce French versions of Latin literature suitable for reading by well-brought-up young men and woman folk at the court of Versailles, and of course the trouble with the Romans is that they didn't have the benefit of French education. They had no manners. They mentioned body parts and vulgar things, and so all this had to be cleared out and you had to save, for the future, in this form of a very Roman-style idea of transmission, that which was appropriate for the polite, polished world of the seventeenth century court. These highly adaptive translations, which are often laughed at now, are called *Les Belles Infidèles*, the beautiful unfaithful ones or the unfaithful beautiful ones, and they're laughed at because, obviously, they aren't anything like the originals. Everything is transferred into seventeenth century French parlance. A Roman *senato* becomes a *comte*, a French nobleman. All the money, the *libra* is turned into French money. Clothing is transferred, body parts aren't mentioned at all, and soldiers and so forth addresses each other on the borders of the Roman Empire, in Caesar, with all the flowery politeness of a French courtier. So they're Frenchmen masquerading as Romans. From many points of view, yes, we all giggle, it seems ridiculous, but Nicolas Perrot D'Ablancourt, who is the chief instigator of this movement, the main translator, thought that's exactly what he should be doing. They should sound like French people, because what he wanted to do is say "yes, they are just like us, and that's why we can still read them, and we should cut away all this now-irrelevant difference and barbarism and lack of manners so that we can see the Romans as us." Don't smile, because the motivation, the dynamic of many translation projects, is to do just that, is to save from the past something that you want to say is relevant to us now, and so must be put in a shape in which we can accept it without it causing offense or irritation. Of course, not everybody agrees, even in the seventeenth century. There were counter-translations that did the opposite, and that made the Romans sounds very different from seventeenth century French people, but it was a big project, and it has its virtues, but it's really interesting that it really is doing to the Romans what the Romans did to the Greeks, and that this step-by-step transmission through misrepresentation has an intellectual, moral purpose to it as well.

And of course, it happens now. You can see a tiny reflection of the debate between adaptive and non-adaptive translation. If you happen to be doing Swedish crime fiction into English, or into American, sorry, when Lisbeth Salander pops into the corner store in Stockholm, does she buy sixteen ounces of aquavit, or does she buy a liter bottle? It's the same squabble. If you put in the liter bottle, well, it's correct. That's what she buys, but nobody in America knows how much a liter is, so why should you be so unkind to your readers as to make them do that work and look it up on Wikipedia? Why not just say the size of bottle as it is sold in United States? It's the same argument, and it never goes away even in the most trivial and low-grade kind of thing you can think of.

At about the same time, or just a little before Nicolas Perrot D'Ablancourt started the great retranslation of the Latin classics into French, something different and fascinating happened a little bit north of that. King James the Sixth of Scotland became, by dynastic succession, King James the First of England, and the United Kingdom came into existence, and he traveled south from Edinburgh to London through a country riven by religious dissention. His extraordinary idea was to commission a group of scholars to produce one version of the Holy Book such that all the different warring sects in England would at least have the same thing to argue about.

In direct reminiscence of the legends of the Septuagint, he selected professors from Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh, and prelates from the church, and set them to work to produce an authorized version of the Bible, and it's amazing, they worked really rather quickly, because the early cantos were in 1603, and the first printed edition of this authorized version we call the KJV is 1611. It's only eight years later, but it's rather a large project for a committee to organize in eight years, but they did it.

Now, the KJV is an enormously important milestone in the history of translation, and in the history of cultural and religious transmission. It was done with a purpose, and it was done with a certain ideology behind it. As you all know, it's become a monument of the English language. It's done many things outside the field of religious transmission, but it's rather strange because the English of the KJV is, in part, strange to us, and in part it's very familiar to us now. The fact is, the committee tried to write an English that was already archaic. It is not actually everyday, current Jacobean English, far from it. We assume that the translators of the Septuagint were writing everyday, common, ordinary Greek, but that's partly because we don't really know. We know a lot more about Jacobean English than we do about everyday life in third century B.C.E. Alexandria. So, from the point of view of the translators of the KJV, the archaisms were there to connote solemnity, antiquity, grandeur, and the grandest of the linguistic correlates of their English was Hebrew. Hebraisms, Hebrew word structures and so forth, abound, even when they are actually translating from Greek for the New Testament. The model, as it were, of the sound of the divine is in shapes of sentences that sound a bit like Hebrew rather than like Greek. The problem with voluntary archaisms is this: time will turn even the trendiest modern phrase into an archaism before too long, so everything becomes archaism. So, if your translation survives, your voluntary archaisms will disappear, because they will become indistinguishable from just the language of your text, which becomes archaic with the passage of time. So, it takes a huge amount of scholarship and guesswork and so forth to extract from the KJV those phrases in it that are voluntary archaisms and those that are just English of that period. At the same time, some of the turns of phrase of the KJV that are just ordinary Jacobean English have entered into

the circulation of our language, have become turns of phrase, expressions that we use and reuse, and we think of as just English, and sound strikingly modern when you read the KJV in its original. Over that, we as translators have no control. Time will do things to our translations, and that you can't seek or wish. There's no intellectual project that you can engage with on that front. I would say that for translators, as you are and as I am, the lesson of the KJV is the only language in which you can translate is your own, and the only people you can translate for are those who are reading you, or who you hope will read you now, because about the future of your language and of your readership, you can have some intuitions but you can't ever know what is going to be the case, and therefore you can't calculate the effects that you might have.

So, translation across time, when we look backwards, is as problematical as translation between cultures that are distant, but as you can see from the example of the KJV, the time lag doesn't have to be that great. It's only four hundred years for things to turn on their head and turn around and to create problems that you can't solve in advance.

I'll give you a few really trivial examples of how these kinds of issues work out in translating a work of no importance whatsoever over a time lag that's not that long, even less than a century. I was asked, a year and a half ago, whether I'd like to participate in the Penguin Publisher's crazy idea of re-launching the French author Georges Simenon, the inventor of Inspector Maigret, in English. They'd acquired the rights to the whole of Simenon's oeuvre, so I said, "alright," so I'd translated the first of his Maigret adventures. It came out a few months ago. It's not very good. It's not very long, it's only about 40,000 words. It was published in 1930, so that's not *that* long ago. It's culturally very close to us. There are trains, there are even aeroplanes and telephones, all sorts of paraphernalia. French crooks and detectives seem to behave more or less as crooks and detectives behave now, though I must say French detectives behave more like crooks than they're supposed to now.

But at one point, he goes into a bar, and people are drinking something called "absinthe substitute." I thought, "what exactly is that?" So, just as if I was translating an ancient text or something else, I had to do some research, and it's really interesting. Absinthe itself is an alcoholic drink that caused such ravages amongst the poor of Paris that it was actually made illegal in 1915, and I believe it's still illegal in the United States. There are one or two countries, like Switzerland and Portugal, where it's never been actually illegal. But, drinks guys were pretty quick to produce things that weren't actually absinthe but tasted rather like it, and these were marketed as absinthe substitutes. One of these guys was a medic in the south of France called a doctor Paul Ricard, who perfected a way of making a drink that had some of the alcoholic and flavorsome virtues of absinthe whilst not being made of absinthe, and he took out a patent on that in 1932, and sold the patent to an established drinks wholesaler in the south of France called Pernod. From 1932, Pernod-Ricard was marketed as Pernod, and that's what they were drinking when they were drinking absinthe substitute in 1930, it's just that it hadn't been trademarked yet and didn't bear that name, but it's the same stuff.

So, in 2014, to be kind to my reader, do I call it Pernod because people might recognize and they know what it is they're drinking, and then be totally anachronistic because *they* didn't know it was Pernod, or do I stick to what the text literally says, which is "absinthe substitute," which will have caused your eyebrows to, you know, "oh, what's that?" So that's only eighty years and you

get these kinds of questions of transposition and transmission over time, even when the substance itself is not problematic. We do actually know what it was.

Another absolutely trivial example: our detective wanders along a rain and wind-swept quayside at night where herring fishermen are unloading their catch, lit by the light of a *lampe à carbure*. Now, no French person today knows what a *lampe à carbure* is, and again you have to go back into old dictionaries and picture dictionaries to find out what it was, and then to find out what it was called in English. Unfortunately, its actual name in English then was an “acetylene lamp,” and the problem with that (that’s why you’re giggling), because the word that you now know is “oxyacetylene lamp,” which is a blowtorch for cutting metal, and that’s not what it was at all. So again, the same problem arises. Do I just actually use the proper term from the 1930s of an object that is no longer manufactured, no longer known, it’s as historic as a Roman oil lamp, and allow that potential misunderstanding to arise? I mean, so there’s someone with a blowtorch lighting up the herring, which is quick reading. Or, do I simply drop it? That’s the other option with awkward things in translation, and that you may be tempted to do at times. You just leave it out because leaving it in is more problem than it’s worth. The third step, which again I’m sure you’re familiar with, is to escape the dilemma by generalizing. You go one up, you say “by floodlight,” or “by a bright light,” and leave the specifics out. The generalizing, what’s called the hyperonym, can solve that problem.

These are what you call translation praxis, these decision points. I’m sure hundreds of them arise for you on every page of what you’re doing. I just wanted to reassure you that sometimes they arise in translating very trivial literature from a very closely related culture as well, and that they are something that, bizarrely and paradoxically, I’m sure, we have in common.

The third issue that I want to pick up from this little novelette is perhaps a little more profound and will lead me on to slightly more general points. My detective wanders into a bar where he’s got a rendezvous with his sidekick, but his sidekick is late, and so he’s leaning on the bar, and he mutters under his breath – and it’s laid out as dialogue in the original – he mutters under his breath, *Sacré Dufour!* (59:55). Then something else happens and we’re just left with that hanging. It’s a written simulation of a sub-vocalized, pseudo-oral expression. It isn’t actually said aloud, but it’s sub-vocalized. It’s as if he had said that to himself. The problem with *Sacré Dufour*, with that expression, is that, like many expletives or energetic expressions in many languages, it can have different polarity values. It can express real irritation, but it can express admiration, too, in another context. If you see somebody score a goal at soccer you say, “god, what a score,” you know, *Sacré Zidane*, great guy. The words themselves do not tell you what the emotional value of that little occurrence actually is. Given the context and given the context I’ve given you, okay, it’s most likely that we are meant to understand that our detective is expressing frustration and irritation with a colleague who hasn’t turned up on time. That’s a choice, it’s a decision, but let’s take that decision. Then you have to think, well, how would a French detective, if he spoke English, express irritation? All translated literature, from the tiniest novelette to the grandest philosophical treatise, is a secondary fiction. Maigret does not actually speak English, but I have to pretend that he does. Do I pretend that he expresses irritation like an Edwardian lady, from whom he is chronologically less separated than he is from me, and said, “oh dear!” Or, do I do what I’m sure you do to some of your texts and bring him right up to date and make him sound like an NYPD cop and say “fuck you, *Dufour*,” or something in between.

The problem with speech, or sub-vocalized speech, or the fiction of speech, in a written text that's all you have to construct the character. Maigret is what Maigret says inside a written story, so that it's a real crucial decision, the way in which I translate that little bit of internal monologue will tell you what sort of a person Maigret is and will construct or considerably frame the way you understand all his other actions and what sort of a person we're dealing with. So there you are. It's really quite perplexing to think that something as simple as the mere paraphernalia of an ordinary genre novel of detective kind actually encounters the same big problems or the distinction between the oral and the written, of the relation of the oral to the speaker, and of the construction of character, of the impenetrability of objects, realia, concepts that have disappeared from current usage, as any more ancient and more noble text might do.

One solution to the oral dilemma and the construction of Maigret's character is, of course, to allow him to speak French when it doesn't mean anything very much. Obviously, when it means something much I have to make him speak English, otherwise you wouldn't be able to understand the story, which of course you want to understand. But this, in English, was quite a tradition in the eighteenth and nineteenth century when translating foreign fiction, mostly French but not always, is to leave the characters addressing each other as *Monsieur Le Vicomte*, and *Madame La Marquise*, and to allow them to say *sacrebleu!* and *parbleu!* and so forth, and some modern English novelists, contemporary English novelists, still do that when foreign characters appear in their English fictions. They give them little tags that signify their foreignness, provided that they're not saying anything that matters, like "good morning," "good afternoon." The movies do it all the time, you know, the German officers in World War Two movies speak perfect English, except every now and again they break out into a *heil Hitler* or a *jawohl* or *mein herr* or something. You might call these decorative xenisms. They serve a purpose. They give a color, they give, some people would say, the authentic sound of French, and that's one option when it doesn't mean [anything], but as soon as it starts to be actually, to contain semantic values that relate to the construction of the story, the meanings, you can't do it, because then otherwise you'd just tell people to read the book in French...or Tibetan.

Now, among translators into English today, there are profound disagreements about the use of foreign expressions in English translation. There is quite a divide. Some of us feel that it's condescending towards a foreign culture to treat its terminology as untranslatable, that actually, far from representing the authenticity of the foreign, this pushes it off and away into the area of the quaint. You can see why that might be so, say in translating Japanese fiction that frequent use of Japanese terms of address, sound and so forth, in a work that includes other dialogue translated into English, can make the characters sound not at all like us, and so to speak keeps them at arm's length through these funny ways of speaking that they have, turns them into curiosities on parade rather than into serious figures that you should engage with.

Sometimes, however, it can work. You can use foreign and special terms in the English translation to create the impression of something authentic and authentically different that is not merely quaint and curious, but worth engaging and struggling with. I have a few examples to give you, but I do have one, and it's called "Memoirs of a White Sea Wolf" by a Polish writer, Mariusz Wilk. It's set on the Solovetsky Islands, which are extraordinary places. There are islands where there are monasteries and gulags side by side, rather today the remains of monasteries and gulags, and a very special terminology for both, especially when they get

involved with each other. For me that worked very well. But it's a very delicate business using foreign terms within English, and without footnotes, without running the risk of being either incomprehensible or condescending.

But of course it is much easier to leave terms untranslated when the translated language is relatively close. As you know, Italian, French, and German aren't so very foreign, and they're also not so very different from English structurally. Using Italianisms, Frenchisms, or Germanisms in English has, I think, a very different impact from the one that would most likely be created by the reuse of terms from languages about which we know absolutely nothing, like Chuvash or Yoruba. We wouldn't even know they were Chuvash or Yoruba, because we have no imagination of what those languages are like. This brings me on to this vexed question of the way in which languages relate to each other in what look like more or less hierarchical ways, of languages above and below, in languages up and down, and that's what I would like to move on to, and to consider how that does affect, has affected, might affect the translation of sacred texts.

Now, translations do not flow equally in all directions between all the languages of the world. That's obvious. Dominant languages, in any particular time period or place, a dominant language is one that is used as the source for translation into languages of lesser diffusion. Dominant languages receive translations, but they receive translations partly because they can serve as pivot or relay languages for translations into third tongues. I think that's the best way to think about what you mean by dominant language, and forget about military, economic, et cetera domination, because the language situation, although it's not unrelated to those things, is often out of phase with it, out of phase by a thousand year sometimes, maybe five thousand years. When you say dominant language, it's the language that it would be useful to translate something into because it is spoken or understood or used by far more people than your own, and a dominant language accepts texts from other cultures, partly in order to conserve them, and to make them available to a wider grouping of languages. That's the best way of understanding what a dominant language is, what I mean by a dominant language.

So such, as you know, was the role of Latin in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, let's say long after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Latin really acquired its role as the dominant language of Europe for science, philosophy, and religion. Such was the role of French from seventeenth to the early twentieth century. French was *the* language through which most of Europe could communicate for diplomacy, commerce, culture, and philosophy, too, and the French haven't got over the fact that that's no longer really the case, but, you know, it'll take a century or two. Today, as we all know, English is the dominant world language, in the sense that I use the word dominant, and translation into a dominant language, while I invented these very simple terms, I call that translation *up*, and translation from a dominant language in the reverse direction I call translation *down*. It's very simple schema, and it's open to many objections, which I will try and deal with, but I think it really comes from my own long experience as a translator of fiction into English and contact with my own translators of my work into French and other languages and the realization that actually we are doing rather different things, and that different constraints and different considerations apply.

Translation from language A to language B is not quite the same thing as translation from B to A when A and B are at different places on the hierarchy of dominant and sub-dominant languages. Now, translations *up*, ever since that first Roman translation of Homer, have always tended to be very adaptive and normalizing. That's because the dominant language, being a self-confident cultural entity, wants to take things from elsewhere in so far as they fit, in so far as they perpetuate, confirm, and enrich the dominant language. Translation *down* is more characteristically foreignizing, less adaptive, and again, for obvious reasons, that you are bringing into your smaller, more local language, something that has the prestige of having been written in, or coming to you via the dominant language, so that if it retains the traces of its origin, well that's fine. That makes it seem all the more important.

That's been the structure, I think, since our two founding events, which are reflections, well we don't know which is dominant and which is not between Greek and Hebrew, Latin and Greek. At that time in pre-third century, that's what they were inventing, was the hierarchy that we now have. However, this simple schema, you know, which is important to you because you need to think, in some senses, English is the dominant language, and you are using English for the purpose of rescuing, saving, preserving, and transmitting things of value from a language of smaller diffusion, and in other senses, English is a secondary language because it's not the real language in which those thoughts were thought.

The problems that I will just point out briefly now come inside the western tradition because modern Bible translation, and after all Bible translation is a huge part of the whole translation business, doesn't work like the way I've said it should. Bible translation, well how can I call it an exception? Modern Bible translation, that is to say Bible translation since the seventeenth century, and increasingly and expandingly and massively in the second half of the twentieth century, of the translation of Bible into languages that are unrelated to the West, the languages of, you know, small groups in Papua New Guinea and Africa and South America, too, where extraordinary work is done by evangelist from the S.I.L., where they go off and learn a tribal language, learn how to write it out, invent a script for it, and then try and reproduce in cultural terms in that small language the message that they feel to be the message of the Bible, and they will do the most outrageous adaptations to get the thing through. They will turn, you know, a fig tree into a banana tree if it's in a part of the world where there are no figs, so it gets a banana. They will turn snow into cotton. It's white; that's the important thing, who cares? It really is an enormous effort. I still can't quite get the grip of it that all parts of the Old and New Testament now exists in 2,400 and something languages. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Bible existed in about fifty languages. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bible existed in something about, like two hundred languages. Over the last hundred years all the rest of that, 2,200 languages have been added, and most of those languages were only written down the first time for the purpose of translating the Bible, so you have a huge intellectual human effort that can't really be just put to one side and said "that's exceptional," but it is different from the way most other translation works. It's a real objection to my model.

Also, the *up/down* model doesn't work, or isn't stable between any two languages irrespective of the domain or field of the work being translated. Classic, obvious examples: most translation from German into English over the last hundred years is very obviously translation *up*, into a language of wider diffusion, but not German philosophy. Hegel, Kant, etc. are translated into

English as if it was translation *down* and the German were the more prestigious language, so that you retain in English many of the signs of its German origin and, just like our Septuagint translators who didn't bother to translate *cherub*, we don't bother to translate *dasein* or *aufhebung*, maybe for the same reasons. So the *up/down* model is not stable and, you know, translating kitchen recipes you carry on using French words in English because within the field of kitchen recipes, French is the language of prestige, is the *up* language, and English is the *down* language, so you could complicate my model to such a point, if you really went into different domains, such that it would fall to pieces and you would say that, actually, it's not true at all that people within specific fields choose a mode of language that becomes, as it were, the fiction of language within English, or within French, or within German. And if you're doing opera, then your English can contain Italianisms, but not if you're writing a political analysis, then you don't put Italian words in. And, the *up/down* model is too simple by half. Well, maybe it is too simple by half, but I still think it's a jolly useful framework for beginning to think about these things.

Now, whichever way you are translating, *up* or *down*, whether you are translating things closely related in time or distant, the act of translation presupposes that you comprehend the source text completely. This is a high demand, even when it's a novelette by Simenon you have to do some research. I always do insist to my students that many of the so called "problems of translation" really do evaporate the more you cast the full light of the sun of comprehension on the source text, when you really, really do get it, it's not so hard. The hard bit is really getting it. The problem for really getting it, and I'm sure you'll know this, actually, but I'd like to make it more explicit, is that not all that you need to know in order to translate a text is in the text. It's in the nature of the written thing itself. Writing is a fabulous technology and it allows us to do all sorts of things, but it only represents some parts of an utterance, and it can only represent, very schematically, all sorts of things that form the context of utterance that tells us how to interpret the words on the page. And the more remote the source, the more difficulty we have in retrieving, or knowing, finding out about those extra-textual things that bear on an understanding of the words through which that text reaches us. This is a fundamental issue, and I think translation theorists and translation gurus of various kinds do not always pay enough attention to it, and urge us to attend to the meaning of the words on the page, and I say "no!" You cannot access the meaning of the utterance that those words convey exclusively through the words on the page. Of course, you can tell a lot, I mean, you know, we acquire lots of knowledge that allows us to interpret texts, but actually a large part of that knowledge is extraneous to, is not actually present in, the words on the page.

A corollary to this, the fact that writing only represents *some* aspects of an act of communication, is that writing also contains supplementary meanings that are quite independent of speech, and independent of the context of utterance. For example, the illuminated capitals of medieval manuscripts tell us things that have got absolutely no correspondence in speech or communication. They are that thing itself. The alternation between uppercase and lowercase initial letters in printed books has absolutely no correspondence with speech. It belongs to writing itself. Punctuation marks, font size, oblique, bold, and regular face, the ampersand, the arabesque, curly brackets, square brackets... there's a whole load of stuff in a written text that is *only* in written texts, that is a medium, a channel, that is irreducible to anything outside of it, and indeed anything outside of writing. Reading and writing, it's communication system that is related to language and speech but is not strictly parallel to it, and is not a hundred percent

derivative from it. It is its own thing as well. Now, I don't have much problem with this because western print culture is largely unified. There are little variations, but it is largely the same culture of print, and most of the non-spoken or irreducible symbols and conventions used, you don't even translate. They are the same, largely the same, between the languages I work with. I'm sure it's a much bigger issue for you because it really is not obvious, or I can't imagine how you can, represent meanings encoded in the visual features of scripts that come from quite different traditions from the ones you're working in, the target. Now, it's not impossible to simulate them, especially now with digital technology you can do that, but it's much less clear to me how, without enormous genius and deviousness, you can transmit to new readers the meanings, codes, that are associated with visual practices of writing in western styles. They take a long time to learn, I'm sure, just as ours do take a long time. It takes all of our schooling and more, so it might be thought kinder to readers to normalize non-western, that's to say to just forget about them and lay it out like a western text, but once again, it may not be an ultimate kindness to allow your readers to remain unaware of just how different the communicative effect of the original actually was, and you have to weigh those things against each other.

Well, the questions I've raised, and I'm sorry I've gone on so long, but I will shut up very shortly, could all be formulated simply as ways of complicating the argument about how close a translation can or should be. Now, what exactly do we mean by 'close,' as opposed to 'free'? Well, we don't mean anything very exact, actually. The problem is in the formulation of that question, actually, but I have to bring it up because translators talk about it all the time. When you say "a close translation," most people seem to mean a version, the subunits of which, can be linked in close, almost one to one correspondence, with the subunits of the source. Now, I don't supposed you'll be at all surprised to learn that I think that's a very naïve idea of what a translation is. You know, the French have this ridiculous way of saying "what." They say *qu'est-ce que c'est que cela*. Now, if I were to take the subunits of that and do it in English, I would say "what is it that it is that that." *qu'est-ce que c'est que cela*. What is it that it is that that. Obviously, that would not be a translation, I mean, a joke! You would answer back, you would literally smile it back to me, but that's silly. I've chosen the wrong subunits. *Qu'est-ce que c'est que cela* is the subunit, is at that level of phrasal meaning that the correspondence should arise. I say, "well, yeah, but sure, how do you..." You can only tell me that because doing it any other way makes nonsense, and that actually your argument is opportunistic and you haven't got a criterion for saying what those subunits should be, anymore than I have, because I don't translate the subunits and nor do you if what you're doing is translating.

There's no conceivable logic by which you can determine the level of the subunits that should be made to match in a translation. There's no logic. The only test is the clarity of the result. If the resulting text is clearly meaningful, then you're onto pretty much the right level of unit by which to make the correspondence work, because the ultimate and actually, utterly self-evident truth is that translators do not translate the words on the page for reasons that – I hope you see why I say that now. What they seek to do, sometimes succeed in doing, is to represent the meaning of the utterance to which the words on the page have given us access. From this perspective, in my view, there are no close translations. There are simply different ways of reaching out towards the meaning that the translator has done his or her best to access.

Each of those different ways of doing it incorporates many different levels of decision-making, and those decisions, well, to be kind to your readers, those decisions need to be coherent between themselves and consistent over the length of a text, for it's no kindness to anybody to sort of change what you're doing without telling them halfway through. Consistency and coherence are much better criteria than the idea of, you know, literal, or free, or whatever. And of course the decisions you make need to take into account any existing formal agreements, or conventions, or informal conventions, amongst you and your colleagues, within that field of work, because diverging from convention is always meaningful in itself, and doing so by accident isn't very helpful.

Beyond that, it seems to me that if you're translating a detective story or an ancient poem, or whether you're translating a political essay or a philosophical meditation, a translation says, in the end, what its translator wants it to say, is the result of a series of stacked decisions about it, and of the course the reasons you wanted to say that are not purely subjective, but you are making those decisions on the basis of all the knowledge that you can acquire. So, it seems to me there is just no escape from the translator's responsibility. The translator has to accept the heavy responsibility of actually being the creator of meaning in the target text, so yes, of course, we should be kind to our readers, but the nature of that kindness has to be negotiated afresh for each project. It's not necessarily at exactly the same level for each different project, and the only consolation that I can possibly give you as you work with long, difficult, ancient, and remote works, is that your problems, however specific and detailed they may seem to you, are much the same as mine, only a lot worse. You all have my admiration.

Marcus: There's now some time for questions. We have two mics here if anyone wants to ask a question, please just step up, or you can raise you hand.

D.B.: Ask a question. Raise an objection.

Q: Thank you, that was absolutely wonderful. I wonder if you could say just a bit, because I noticed you didn't say anything about this, and I don't know if it was a calculated evasion, about whether you take footnotes to be a form of kindness to readers. It seems as though footnotes can be construed as a kind of hedge against making the decisions that you think we have to make, and so I wonder if you'd just say a bit about that.

D.B.: I didn't mention footnotes. Why didn't I mention footnotes? Conventions vary. [In] the kind of work I do footnotes are banned. Modern European fiction isn't supposed to have footnotes in English translation. Publishers won't allow it, and so you have to find ways of bringing in this extra information or eliding it inside the text itself. I find it, in a way, a more interesting challenge to do it without the footnotes, but it's not because of that that I do without the footnotes, it's because it's just not part of what's held to be fluent translation of contemporary fiction.

Into French, incidentally, that's not true. French novels translated from English often have footnotes of various kinds, *notes du traducteur*. In France that's not felt to be an interruption to the flow of reading, so you have to respect the cultural conventions of your expected audience.

When it comes to works that are more serious, footnotes that comment on your own translation decisions, I would be very sparing about.

On the other hand, I do remember, oh, thirty years ago, I spent a semester at a German university, sitting at the feet of a teacher whom I admired greatly, and I thought, well, “this semester I’m *really* going to understand Hegel,” and so I sat in the library – because my German is all right. It’s not as good as my French and Hegel is very difficult – with the original. I was going to read Hegel there, and I looked at the guy sitting next to me. It was a German student. He was actually reading the English translation... because of the footnotes. In philosophical works, translators’ footnotes are often almost like essays, or elucidatory paragraphs, that really help even people who allegedly understand the original. I think it depends very much on your project, and how you place your work within, first of all, the field in which you are working, and how much help you think that your footnotes are going to be, not just to defend yourself, which is trivial, but to actually open up the text to readers, not only of the translation, but the work in any other form. It’s tricky. I do prefer footnotes at the foot of the page. Endnotes, I think, are a horror.

Q: Thank you very much. That was absolutely stunning. I wanted to ask you two questions. One is, many years ago I read George Steiner’s book, “After Babel,” and one thing that really struck me was his argument that the way to understand the problem of translation is not so much as a different kind of problem, but it’s the same problem of understanding communication, even between two members of the same language. What is your take on this?

So, that is one question. The second is, even between, say, French and English – my wife is Québécoise, so her mother tongue is French, and she reminds me that the word “care” in English has multiple meanings. “To take care” is an act and “care” as a sentiment is another kind, and also we tend to use the word “I care about it” as being something that is meaningful for me, but, apparently, that kind of multiplicity of meaning doesn’t exist in the French equivalent, so does this raise a kind of a larger philosophical question of how we kind of parse the reality in our experience of it, and if that is the case, how do you solve the problem of trying to cross from one to the other when you are translating?

D.B.: Thank you for those two questions. I’m delighted to answer the first question by saying “yes.” I do not agree with everything George Steiner says, but obviously he’s right about that. The difficulty of translation is just a specific case of the general difficulty of understanding what anybody else means, whatever language they’re speaking, including your own, and the naïve idea that we understand each other because we speak the same language, I think all translation, it’s not like that really. Yes, of course, and that is why translation is so important and why it’s worth both doing, and understanding, and theorizing about a bit, because we are also talking about the nature of the human predicament, of all that frames social and communicative life. Translation is an excellent lever, and tool, and prong, a way into those rather difficult issues.

On the anisomorphism of lexical sets, which is what you just...sound like a professor! I think that it has been blown out of all proportion to its true importance. In French, I cannot say, “you are sitting on a chair.” I have to say either “you are sitting on a chair without arms” or “you are sitting on a chair with arms.” Chaise, fauteuil. There isn’t *a* word in French that just says “chair.”

I hope you agree that this doesn't matter much. We can live with that. We have ways around. It's not an impediment. If you actually speak French and English, it's not an impediment. If you are confronted with a language that you don't speak and you're told there's no way of distinguishing between night and day in this language, you'd say, "my god, how can we do that?" It seems like a bigger problem, but if there were such a language there's probably a way around it. In French, of course, we can talk about all the values that the English vocabulary set associated with "care" contains, but we need a different and more varied vocabulary set and different kinds of expressions.

The claim is made by colleagues in departments of experimental psychology, and neuroscience, and all that jazz, that the vocabulary set that you have in your dominant language frames the way you see the world, and to reduce it to nonsense that French people really do see two different kinds of things when they say "chair," and we just see a "chair," and that this is a different perception of reality. I'm skeptical. What we see is the world. The words, of course, do make us, maybe habitually, a little bit more sensitive to some aspects of the world than the others just because we have words for it, but that's not a big problem. If somebody points out the real reality to you, whatever language you have, you find a way of adapting that language to say it. That's my optimistic message.

Q: Thank you so much, a wonderful, wonderful talk. I wanted to ask you to comment on an issue where – and perhaps a European analogue would be rare – something was translated from Greek into Latin, and then someone wanted to translate it into French or English or something, and had both texts available. Tibetan, as you probably know, was very much created full of xenisms in order to carry a much richer vocabulary from Sanskrit, and then a lot of the originals in Sanskrit were lost, but some are still existent. So, even native written Tibetan texts, although they are not translated from Sanskrit, a lot of the xenisms are still flowing along in there, in the terminology that is used. So, what comments would you have about the desirability of having both to compare, and whether in European history that was done.

D.B.: Absolutely. You are in the position of King James' committee. Yes, because the Catholic Church had already declared, many hundreds of years before, that the Latin version of the Bible done in the fourth century by Jerome was the word of God, but Luther and the Reformists said, "no, no, the word of God was what he said in Hebrew." The Septuagint is a very precious intermediate stage. The committee had Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and they knew that Jerome had had access to manuscripts in Aramaic as well, which they didn't have, so that there were some lost originals, too, and we also don't know exactly what the Septuagint were translating, because there's no state of the Hebrew Bible earlier than the Greek one. The earliest surviving Hebrew manuscripts of the Pentateuch are somewhat posterior to the date of composition of the Septuagint.

Your situation is, obviously, much more complicated and remote, but it's not structurally dissimilar to the questions that that committee must have been asking itself: "which is our authoritative text?" One ancient idea in the western tradition, it was St. Augustine who thought of it – he was not a great scholar of languages – he said, "I'll take the six different versions. I'll have them written out in columns, and the word of God is whatever inspires all six of them." That extraordinary object, the Hexapla, again, it's disappeared. We only know it by myth and

legend, but it is a mental idea. You find it used in the European Union, that the real meaning of the law of the European Union is that which is common to all twenty four language versions of that regulation, and that the seven judges of the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, these are our high priests, it is for them to judge what is it that is truly common, what is the meaning of the Legislature with a capital L, that lies behind all the versions when differences crop up between them. It's the Augustinian approach. Quite a lot of records were kept of the discussions of the King James committee, and of course with the quatro-centenary three years ago there are a couple of learned and serious books about how that work was done. You might like to have that as bedtime reading, because they were confronting problems of a similar kind to the transmission of Buddhism from lost Sanskrit, through Tibetan containing Sanskritisms, with parallel texts in Pāli and Chinese that don't say quite the same thing. I think it'd probably be reassuring that other people have got lost in the same kinds of labyrinths before and found a way out.

Q: Thank you, David, very much, for your wonderful presentation. I would like to go back to the issue of the "Seventy" translation of the Bible, and you raised a very interesting idea, that there may be some resistance to translation, something that very few of us are experiencing, but you proposed two stem points. Either people didn't know, or maybe they were not willing to give up the secrets of their own tradition, but I think we can adhere a third possibility, which is very similar to what we are standing in front of, which is: the text that they had was poetry written in a very, very different language from the language that they spoke, and they wanted to render the flavor of this poetry, and therefore they chose, you use "voluntary archaism"...

D.B.: "Voluntary xenism," in this case, yes. The actual sound of Hebrew, yes, that is a possibility. It think it's implausible for the Seventy, but I think it's a very plausible motivation for many modern translators into a language like English where you want to enrich the English reading experience with some of the sounds of the original, and the use of some of the key terms can help you do that, though you have to trust your readers to pronounce your words. Most often, of course, what happens is they then get adopted into the target language and become words of that target language. There are quite a lot of words in English that have come into English through not translating. You know, "robot" is a Czech word from a Czech novel that used the Czech word in the English translation. It just sort of took off, became an English word, and we no longer say "ruh-but", we say "row-baht" You can't always tell what the actual effect or outturn will be.

The reason why I think that is probably not true of the translators of the Septuagint, or that bit of the Septuagint, is because, if you assume consistency over what they are doing, you know, in Hebrew there is a taboo against writing the name of the divinity, and there are therefore many paraphrases, euphemisms, alternative ways of writing and saying the names of the divinity. Well, in the Septuagint there isn't. All those paraphrases are just *Kyrios* in Greek, the Greek word for king or lord. That is, they really weren't interested in the flavor of the original. That's a pretty radical simplification of the Hebrew Bible, is just to say "Kyrios" every time it says *Elohim* or *Adonai*, etc. because the distinctions between the different Hebrew circumlocutions for the divinity, well, they may be fairly impenetrable, but they're certainly not nothing. It's not random as to why it's *Melech HaMelachim*, and to rub all that out and just have "Kyrios" suggests a very normalizing, not an exoticizing approach at all. So, the kind of post-colonial argument about why the Septuagint is the way it is seems to me less persuasive than the idea that they just didn't write

Greek terribly well, which would be consistent with it being the Jewish community of Alexandria, for whom Greek was the everyday language, but there was no tradition of translation for them. They were doing the first thing. They were inventing it as they went along, and, you know, we all depend enormously on tradition, on community, on practices that are resonant that we share, but when you are inventing it first time off, no wonder it's a bit clunky.

Q: Thank you for a wonderful talk. I wanted to raise the issue of gender. We are often translating from texts that were written a long time ago, a society much different from our own. The question, I think, comes up, do we switch to gender-neutral words, and also, what do we do when we come across material which, for no particular purpose, is quite derogatory towards women, denigrates them, and so on. I'm not talking about the material which is particularly about meditating on the hideousness of the female body. That has its own purpose and I don't want to go there, but there's material in perfectly ordinary teachings that denigrates women. Do we translate that kind of meaning-for-meaning? Do we gloss over it? What do we do about that kind of material?

D.B.: You do what you want to do. I say that not as an injunction but as an observation, because inevitably you will do what you want to do. I don't know what I would want to do with that, because I haven't faced that problem. You really are facing the issue of Nicolas Perrot D'Ablancourt. How can we save these barbarians? How can we turn them into respectable people that we would actually want to read nowadays? We have to leave out all these vulgar, horrible, sexist, feudal, blah, blah, yeah?

I don't know how you cope with that because, yes, you will offend many of your readers if you reproduce a mindset, an ideology that we no longer share, that is not ours, and you don't want to offend them, but are you being kind to them by pretending that Tibet of many centuries ago was respectful of the rights of women? Because it probably wasn't. You have to decide. You have to bear responsibility for what you are doing, and, well, footnotes aside, you can write an introduction to tell people what it is you have done, so you can balance the violence you do to the text with the opposite in the introduction, or vice-versa. But, yeah, it's a big issue.