



HAL
open science

The Ambivalent Translator. How to Write the History of Psychoanalytic Translations

Andreas Mayer

► **To cite this version:**

Andreas Mayer. The Ambivalent Translator. How to Write the History of Psychoanalytic Translations. *Psychoanalysis and History*, In press. hal-03923306v1

HAL Id: hal-03923306

<https://hal.science/hal-03923306v1>

Submitted on 5 Jan 2023 (v1), last revised 6 Jan 2024 (v2)

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Andreas Mayer
(Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin CNRS)

The Ambivalent Translator. How to Write the History of Psychoanalytic Translations

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud famously compared the act of interpreting a dream to the translation of a text: “The dream-thoughts and the dream-content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression; whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation.” (SE 4:277) Many theoretical attempts to formulate a general theory of translation have taken up cues from this and other usages of the psychoanalytic “translation metaphor”. Even if the cultural prestige of psychoanalysis has considerably waned over the last decades, its traces can still be found in recent works that now tend to view the history and theory of translation as a project in its own right. One can detect them in various ways in some of those ambitious projects which have resulted in bulky dictionaries and encyclopaedias such as the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* (better known by its subtitle *Dictionary of Untranslatables* [Cassin, 2004; Cassin et al. 2014]), whose aims is to transcend the realm of a specialized sub-discipline such as “Translation Studies”, which existed since the 1970s and has already made heavy use of psychoanalytic concepts [Venuti 2002]. Although psychoanalysis is in these recent works occasionally the subject of historical discussion — like in the *Histoire des traductions en langue française*, a four volume collective work on the history of translations in the French language spanning five centuries —, it often still provides the terminological underpinnings to theorize the act of translation *per se*. Accordingly, translation itself, following Freud’s own metaphorical usage, is set in analogy to the psychoanalytic process of interpretation, in which the relationship of the patient to the analyst is characterized by an affective “transference”. Thus we hear of a “drive” to translate and of an “unconscious” of the translator, in which the alienating forces of cultural ideologies are at work leading to a purported “ambivalence” characterizing his or her position with regard to the original work which has to be overcome by a way of translating that can render the “foreignness” of the original work in another language.

In this contribution, I will first formulate a criticism of these theoretical approaches that paint a portrait of the modern condition of the translator as being deeply ambivalent, necessarily torn apart between cultures, languages, and ideologies and constantly under the

threat of distorting the original work. The major problem I want to raise is not only that such theoretizations have generally contributed to a schematic and impoverished view of the historicity of the concrete practices of translations (in a sense that they seem sometimes not more than a sophisticated version of the old saying “Traduttore-traditore”), but also have been partly used to render legitimate recent projects of retranslations of Freud’s works, notably in France, that are conceived in an equally ahistorical spirit. I will argue that we need not only more detailed historical and philological analysis on the textual practices of translation in psychoanalysis, but also to develop an appropriate approach to understand the relational, affective, and institutional bonds connecting authors, translators, and readers in global processes of cultural transmission. The outline of such a history by the way of a case study will lead to a quite different portrait of the figure of the “ambivalent translator”.

I

Equating “transference” and “translation” is a seductive move for anyone who is aware of the fact that, in German, the term *Übertragung* which is commonly used to designate an affective relation within a psychoanalytical process is a possible synonym for *Übersetzung*, in the sense of a linguistic or symbolic act of translation. The passage about dream interpretation quoted in the beginning seems to provide a convenient starting point for this fusion. One has to note that Freud uses the word *übersetzen* throughout his work in a very capacious way. The translation metaphor seems to encompass not only acts of interpretation within the psychoanalytic process, but also the formation of symptoms and mental processes in general and even the entire treatment in order to demonstrate that translation of the unconscious into “something conscious” is possible: “How are we to arrive at a knowledge of the unconscious? It is of course only as something conscious that we know it, after it has undergone transformation or translation into something conscious. Psycho-analytic work shows us every day that translation of this kind is possible. In order that this should come about, the person under analysis must overcome certain resistances – the same resistances as those which, earlier, made the material concerned into something repressed by rejecting it from the conscious.” (SE XIV:166) From this recurrence of the metaphor of translation that Freud uses to describe a variety of unrelated processes occurring at different levels, it has been assumed that translation is a “truly theoretical nodal word”, and even a “unified field concept” which can tie together these processes (Mahony 1980, 461). Such a usage of translation as a kind of master metaphor has been driven even further by a number of studies following up on Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author’s written permission)

Jacques' Derrida's remark that "a text can stand in a relationship of transference (primarily in a psychoanalytic sense) to another text" (Derrida, 'Border Lines', 1979, 147). Their authors make a move that stands in marked contrast to the original Freudian metaphor of translation: whereas for Freud the act of interpretation is understood as the recovery of meaning from a distorted utterance of a human subject undergoing analysis (utterances that can take the form of hysterical symptoms, of fragmentary and incomprehensible dream reports, of slips of the tongue etc.), these attempts at theorization claim that *any* act of interpretation or of human reasoning (and not just those acts happening in the specific context of the psychoanalytic treatment) is affected by transference and thus inevitably distorted (Bass 1985; Venuti 1992). According to such a view, the work of translators cannot escape from "the inevitable misconstruing that is unconsciously repeated in human relations" (Bass 1985, 138-9) and must result in distortions and mistranslation.

Could there be a cure for such distortions to ensure that translators can still perform their tasks and do justice to the original text? This has been in some way suggested by the French translator Antoine Berman in his study *L'épreuve de l'étranger* (1984), a widely read and influential work which offered a kind of manifesto of a new science of translation ambitiously referred to as *traductologie* and deliberately modeled on Foucault's *archéologie* and Derrida's *grammatologie*:

"Cultural resistance produces a systematics of deformations that operates on the linguistic and literary levels, and that conditions the translator, whether he wants it or not, whether he knows it or not. The reversible dialectic of fidelity and treason is present in the translator, even in his position as a writer: The pure translator is the one who needs to write starting from a foreign work, a foreign language and a foreign author – a notable detour. On the psychic level, the translator is ambivalent, wanting to force two things: to force his own language to adorn itself with strangeness, and to force the other language to trans-*port* itself into his mother tongue. He presents himself as a writer, but is only a re-writer. He is an author, but never The Author. The translated work is a work, but it is not The Work. This network of ambivalences tends to deform the pure aim of translation and to graft itself onto the ideological deformation discussed above. And to strengthen it." (Berman 1984, 18-19; engl. tr. 5-6)

According to such a view, the translator, who is positioned between two languages and two cultures, has one single task, namely to ensure that the radical otherness or foreignness of the work remains visible in the translation and is not erased. It is obvious that the English

translation of Berman's title as *The Experience of the Foreign* is not just wrong, but also misleading. The emphasis is not on the "experience" of the foreign, but on the "challenge" (*épreuve*) to render the foreign work in terms of the language and culture of the translator without distorting it in an ethnocentric way. Berman's assumption of a universal ambivalence of the translator is, however, fraught with numerous problems. This starts with his postulate of linguistic, cultural and ideological systems which are both dominant and coherent, taking on the form of a sort of structural "unconscious", that would exert pressure on the translator's psyche. According to such a bleak picture, there is only one possible solution: namely that the translator become aware, at least partially, of the multiple distortions that counteract his or her task of translating the original work by preserving its strangeness into another language through a kind of "self-analysis": "The translator has to 'subject himself to analysis,' to localize the systems of deformation that threaten his practice and operate unconsciously on the level of his linguistic and literary choices — systems that depend simultaneously on the registers of language, of ideology, of literature, and of the translator's mental make-up. One could almost call this a *psychoanalysis of translation*, similar to Bachelard's *psychoanalysis of the scientific spirit*: it involves the same ascetic, the same self-scrutinizing operation." (Berman, 1984, engl. tr. 6)

Despite such gestures towards a distinctively French epistemological tradition, Berman's ideal of a pure translation, that would be as faithful as possible to the foreignness of the original and be stripped from any possible ethnocentric bias, finds its resources ultimately in the reconstruction of a tradition that is quintessentially German in spirit (embodied by Goethe, Schlegel-Tieck, or Hölderlin) and echoed in Walter Benjamin's famous essay on the "task of the translator". This German tradition is pitted against the "French" elegant style of translation. It thus may not come as a surprise that the theses expounded in *L'épreuve de l'étranger* — a "historical" work, at least according to its author's view — were used as a justification by the team of translators working under the stewardship of psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche during the 1980s to produce, with the delay of several decades, the first complete edition of Freud's works in French (the *Œuvres Complètes* at the Presses Universitaires France). Their own quite schematic account of the history of their predecessors dismisses their achievements as an act of betrayal due to the "Latin spirit" (*le génie latin*) and the search for "elegant" solutions, inevitably leading to the ethnocentric distortions deplored by Berman. The essential task of a good translation is here defined in a way that it has to "stick" as closely to the original text as possible: "the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text" which has to be rendered in its literalness at the cost of more "elegant" stylistic solutions (Laplanche, Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author's written permission)

Cotet, and Bourguignon 1992, 143). This kind of reasoning has led to the enterprise of inventing a “Freudian French”, in which other terms or neologisms replace terms that have become familiar in French and in everyday use (such as “fantasme” for the German *Phantasie* replaced by “fantaisie”, or “désir” for *Wunsch*, replaced by “souhait”). The translators went to certain extremes in their attempt to transpose minor stylistic idiosyncrasies in Freud’s use of the German language by resorting to odd syntactical French constructions, decisions that have sparked controversy and led in France to various projects of retranslations.¹

It may be useful to glance back for moment at the critical discussions that developed around the most important, influential and controversial translation project of Freud’s work, namely James Strachey’s *Standard Edition* published between 1953 and 1974. In the 1980s, when the French project of the *Oeuvres Complètes* took on its definitive form, Strachey’s pioneering editorial work was heavily attacked for erasing both Freud’s distinctive style of writing in the German language and the rich cultural and literary contexts that had shaped and sustained it. In his book *Freud and Man’s Soul*, the Austrian émigré psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim criticized the introduction of Greek and Latin neologisms to replace Freud’s German wordings that are close to everyday language: not just on the level of terminology, where “ego” is used to render “Ich” and “Id” for “das Es” or “cathexis” for “Besetzung”, but also throughout in the discussion of examples when “Mutterleib” (mother’s womb) is for instance mistranslated as “uterus”. The “wish to substitute a medical term for a word in ordinary use leads to the replacement of a “word that has deep emotional associations with one that evokes hardly any” Who would want to return to a uterus?” (Bettelheim 1982, 52) What was at stake here were not only matters of philology, the question of fidelity to the original text, but also the question whether Freudian psychoanalysis is at its core a humanist endeavour enabling the common reader to engage in self-analysis, according to Bettelheim a highly emotional and uncomfortable process – “to explore whatever personal hell we may suffer from” (ibid., 4) – or a medical-scientific approach leading to abstract theoretical insights about the human mind which are compatible with a behaviourist psychology. With the use of “ego” for “Ich”, Bettelheim stated, “an introspective psychology is made into a behavioral one, which observes from the outside. This, of course, exactly how most Americans view and use psychoanalysis” (ibid., 54).

As John Forrester has persuasively argued, the criticisms by Bettelheim and others were largely mistaken, since they missed the essential point of Strachey’s model of translating Freud in the *Standard Edition* which was deliberately a *historical* one. The key to this conception lies in the translator’s choice of an “imaginary model”, namely of “some English

Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author’s written permission)

man of science of wide education born in the middle of the nineteenth century" (Strachey, General Preface, SE I, xix). Choosing an "archaic voice" for the founder of psychoanalysis, then, did not produce "a Freud for our time (...) nor a Freud for Strachey's time, but an English Freud in *Freud's* time — the turn of the century, the time of Freud's generation of Cambridge men of science" (Forrester and Cameron, 2016, 601-602). It is interesting to note that although Strachey's model of an imaginary English Freud is clearly situated at the opposite of the later French *Oeuvres Complètes* with their seemingly "literal" approach to the German original, in the eyes of most critics both tend to achieve a similar result: namely an esoteric strategy to render colloquial German words used by Freud by neologisms that often tend to obscure the meaning of the original or suggest conceptual connections whose existence is doubtful. From a purely technical point of view, the essential difference between the respective models of translation is not the one between a *literal* and an *ethnocentric* approach, since on the level of actual practice both do not follow a coherent method. A more salient criterion to distinguish translation practices is to what extent they are predominantly *terminological* or *contextual* in orientation. And here one can observe that debates about translation in psychoanalysis have always tended to foreground terminology, for the sake of establishing or defending a certain conception of science, at the cost of context. Hence the increasing neglect of history, philology, and linguistics, bodies of knowledge that shaped Freud's own conception of psychoanalysis as a new science and therapy and his own style of writing.

II

As these problems surrounding Freud's translation indicate, studies of psychoanalytic translations in their historical and cultural contexts are needed. For such a work, it is necessary to abandon the framework, often taken for granted and only sometimes made fully explicit, that understands the history of the translations of Freud's own works into other languages according to a model of reception history emphasizing the resistances, obstacles, and distortions in processes of cultural transmission.ⁱⁱ The precondition for any historical study of translations is obviously first and foremost philological work starting from the comparison of different editions or the translation of technical terms. However, in the case of psychoanalysis, the specific epistemological features of its own object — the unconscious as an outcome of a practice of translation — have also to be integrated into such a perspective.

One may add that on this level psychoanalysis stands already in a complex relationship with Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author's written permission)

the discipline of philology itself, as both the philologist Sebastiano Timpanaro and the historian of psychoanalysis John Forrester have forcefully demonstrated (Timpanaro 1976; Forrester 1980). In his acute criticism of Freud's interpretation of the lapsus linguae, Timpanaro posed the problem of the so-called "polyglot unconscious", the fact that the activity of free associating during the analysis of a slip or a dream shows the subject in command of many different languages in which he or she is not a native speaker.

More generally, one could argue that there are at least three levels of translation to be taken into account: first the level of the unconscious material itself, second the level of the act of interpretation which is a translation from the unconscious to the conscious, and third the problem of rendering these first two operations of translation as they are detailed in a psychoanalytic account in another language. The first level is a purely technical one and poses certain difficulties that one could describe, as Freud himself has repeatedly done, in the terms of the "untranslatable" (meaning local expressions of the dreamer or analysand, allusions to certain works of art or literature specific to his or her culture, but also the chains of associations including words from various languages which do not work once these words are translated). One should note that at this point the problem is not ambivalence, but rather linguistic and cultural context. However, the activity of translation on the second level, within in a psychoanalytic setting of interpretation, is marked by affective processes. This relational aspect, rendered by Freud and subsequent psychoanalysts in the terms of "transference" and "countertransference", cannot be ignored on the level of historical analysis. The historicity of psychoanalytic translations, then, should be treated in a way that can do justice to the specific practices of psychoanalysis as they emerge in relationship to Freud's text. In that sense, it seems to me necessary to study what I call "historical models of translation", historical because they existed at a certain period and because they do not necessarily conform to our current philological standards.ⁱⁱⁱ

The historical model of translation that I am going to discuss in the following is closely tied to Freud's famous self-analysis, on which the core of *The Interpretation of Dreams* rests. It is this model to which Bettelheim refers, a model almost self-understood for an analyst of his generation coming from Vienna, and later superseded by other institutional forms of training. For Freud, however (in marked contrast to Bettelheim), the self-analytical model is not a humanistic undertaking opposed to a scientific one. Based on previous forms of psychological self-observation, note-taking and collecting of dreams, it is characteristic of his attempt to establish psychoanalysis as a new science of the intimate (Mayer [2002] 2013, 198-221). The effectiveness of this model depends both on the possibility of repetition and

translation. Since Freud's methodical exposition of his self-analysis is necessarily incomplete, it demands from all readers to be ready and able to step into the author's shoes, to embark on a journey of self-discovery by analysing their own dreams, slips and misperformances. But the ability to repeat the act of self-analysis rests to a large extent on the ability to translate Freud's very specific dream examples and their interpretations by setting them in their respective intellectual, cultural, political and linguistic contexts — a rather demanding task, according to Freud himself, so demanding that he thought it at first impossible beyond linguistic and cultural barriers.

The historical model of self-analysis dominated the first two decades of psychoanalysis (roughly from 1896 to the end of the First World War) and appears to us today as a rather exotic configuration. Within this early model, the role of reading books and texts and of writing down interpretations and associations during analysis holds a prominent place before giving way, at least ideally, to an increasingly oral practice of psychoanalysis cultivating what has often been called an “art” of listening and memory. For this reason, the multiple changes and rewritings of Freud's foundational book *The Interpretation of Dreams* proved to be essential for the dynamics of the initial historical constitution of psychoanalysis, its techniques, theories and objects. A detailed study of the history of the book shows to what extent the numerous modifications of the text, especially in the period from 1900 to 1914, take place within a collective process in which the book initially appeared as the central vehicle for conveying Freud's new theory and technique. The book itself becoming the scene of debates and disputes within and outside the psychoanalytic movement, Freud attempted to integrate or refute the critical voices of his readers (Marinelli and Mayer 2003[2002]). This relationship between the theorist/analyst and the reader/patient is theorized by Freud in the register of affectivity — with the terms “transference” and “resistance” — in order to integrate it into the setting of psychoanalysis, even if these are forms of reading and rewriting that take place outside clinical practice. In this respect, we need to ask how Freud's first translators responded to this model and what can be concluded from it.

The example of the first translations into English offers the best starting point, not least because English was one of Freud's working languages alongside French, from which he himself had translated and in which he occasionally published. It is therefore not surprising that he followed the first translations of his own texts into these two languages very closely and entered into an exchange with the respective translators. Equally important is the fact that we are dealing here with two languages which, in addition to Spanish, were to gain great strategic importance for the further global transmission of psychoanalysis. For English and

Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author's written permission)

French, Freud granted exclusive status to one specific translator in each of these languages: For the Anglo-Saxon world, this was the American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Abraham Arden Brill (1874-1948), who came from Galicia and translated all of Freud's major books published up to that time between 1908 and 1918; for the French-speaking world, the doctor Samuel Jankélévitch (1869-1951), who had emigrated to France from Russia, held a similar monopoly during the 1920s, although a number of other competing translation projects were undertaken alongside.

These early decisions were to have far-reaching effects, especially in view of the increased efforts, at least since the 1920s, to standardize the vocabulary of psychoanalysis in other languages. One would think that the role of an exclusive translator gave Freud the advantage and guarantee that his own terminological decisions would be respected throughout, and accordingly, most previous attempts to study the history of translation have focused on this dimension. However, as the correspondences with his translators reveal, finding a solution to render “untranslatable” concepts seems not to have been the most essential aspect for Freud who sometimes hesitated when it came to choose to render a new concept (such as the “Es” in French) or made suggestions that were ultimately not adopted. Freud attached more importance to the order in which his works were to appear in another language and had no qualms about recombining his texts in editions that did not even exist in German. Thus Brill’s first translation was a collection of articles entitled *Selected Papers on Hysteria and other Psychoneuroses* (Freud 1909) bringing together a selection of four chapters from the *Studies on Hysteria* (the preliminary note, co-written with Breuer, the final chapter on psychotherapeutic treatment and the cases of Miss Lucy R. and Elisabeth von R.) and articles from the two volumes of the *Sammlung kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre* (published 1906 and 1909 in Vienna by Deuticke). Such collections of texts were conceived as introductions that were to be tested by specialist readers in a different linguistic and cultural context based on their personal observations. Freud summed this up in a letter to the American neurologist James Jackson Putnam who was to become the founder and first president of the American Psychoanalytical Association: “my work demands from the reader only this: that he seek to undergo the experiences on which it is based^{iv}.”

In this sense, Brill stated in the preface of his first translation that “no one is really qualified to use or judge Freud’s psychanalytic method who has not thoroughly mastered the *Traumdeutung*, the *Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, and the *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, and has not had considerable experience in analyzing his own and other’s dreams and psychopathological actions. It is especially in the *Traumdeutung* that Freud has

Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author's written permission)

fully developed his psychoanalytic technique and a perfect knowledge of which is the sine qua non in the treatment.” (Brill, preface to Freud 1912, vii-viii.) Successfully self-acquired analytic experience counted for Freud more than language skills or qualities of literary style. Therefore the fact that Brill, who was born in Kanczuga in Galicia, a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Poland), only came to learn English at the age of 15 after emigrating to the United States, was of less importance to Freud than the fact that he was trained at the Burghölzli Clinic in Zurich and then during a few sessions with himself on walks through the streets of Vienna (the analytical *Spaziergang* was a common practice of initiating many of his first disciples). When Putnam voiced his criticisms of the early translations of Brill (“I wish it was expressed in better, more fluent and more impressive English” letter from Putnam to Freud, 17.11.1909., Hale, ed, 1971, 87), Freud conceded that he found them “more conscientious than beautiful” (Letter from Freud to Putnam, 5.12.1909, Hale, ed, 1971, 352). But his persistence in authorizing Brill to translate all his major books published till 1914 provoked especially tensions with his zealous British disciple Ernest Jones who worked hard to become the principal spokesman for psychoanalysis in the entire Anglo-Saxon world. In his biography, Jones gave the following retrospective account of what he considered to be one of Freud’s greatest mistakes:

“Freud himself was a highly gifted and swift translator, but he translated very freely, and I do not think he ever understood what an immense and difficult task it was going to be to render accurately and edit (!) his own writings. Brill’s evidently imperfect knowledge of both English and German soon aroused my misgiving, so I offered to read through his manuscript and submit for his consideration any suggestions that occurred to me ; my name was not to be mentioned. After all, English was my mother-tongue, whereas Brill had picked it up in the unfavorable surroundings of his early days in New York. (...) There is no need for me to stigmatize Brill’s translations; others have done so freely enough. When I remarked to Freud a couple of years later that it was a pity his work was not being presented to the English-speaking public in a more worthy form, he replied: ‘I’d rather have a good friend than a good translator,’ and went on to accuse me of being jealous of Brill.” (Jones 1955, 50-51)

Jones’s retrospective evaluation assumes that any translation not only requires linguistic skills, but also must meet philological standards such as fidelity to the text. One could argue, however, that the latter criterion meets difficulties in the case of texts which, at the time, were considered to be provisional formulations or which, in 1908, in Freud’s eyes were already

Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author’s written permission)

'historical' or belonged to the 'prehistory' of psychoanalysis, such as the *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), co-written with Breuer. The other striking element in Jones' presentation is the emphasis on the affective dimension between the author and his translator, which serves here to disqualify Freud's initial choice. It would be wrong, however, to ignore this dimension entirely. Certainly, it would not be appropriate to attribute an explanatory value to it, naively couched in psychological terms. Rather, the affective dimension should be addressed in the terms of a historical model of translation specific to Freudian self-analysis in the sense that it involves a relationship which requires from the translator not only knowledge at the intellectual level, but also an emotional investment.

From the very beginning, Freud set the bar high by stressing the “untranslatable” character of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In 1911, when the third edition appeared, he added a footnote stressing that the “dream, indeed, is so intimately connected with linguistic expression that (...) every language has its own dream language. A dream is, as a rule, not translatable into a foreign language, and this is equally true of a book such as the present one.” (Freud, 1911, 71) As I have already outlined, this dimension is a purely technical one: it is linked to linguistic expression and cultural context. However, it also follows from this (and this point seems essential) that this problem of untranslatability concerns only a part of Freud's work. It is mainly the triad of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the *Psychopathology* and *Jokes*, in which analysis is particularly dependent on linguistic expression and puns and where almost every single element of the ‘web’ of associations has to be footnoted or explained in brackets by the translator.

The fact that the book on dreams was initially conceived as an initiation into the psychoanalytic method meant that the question of translation was inseparably linked to that of its cultural and institutional transmission. This explains why for Freud in this case the main purpose of a translation was not to transpose the text unchanged with all examples into another language, but rather to demonstrate that the method also worked for readers from another language area. Already in 1908 Freud had declared to C.G. Jung that *The Interpretation of Dreams* is “unfortunately untranslatable and would have to be rewritten in each language, which would be a deserving task for an *Englishman*” (Freud to Jung, 17.2.1908, Freud/Jung, 1974, 120). That this was a view that Freud continued to hold is shown by the correspondences with his first French translator Samuel Jankélévitch, and the editor Gaston Gallimard from the 1920s. To Jankélévitch, Freud wrote with regard to the book on dreams and *Psychopathology*: “In these two books, so much depends on the wording that the translator himself would have to be an analyst and replace the material that I have

provided with his own, new material from his experience, as it has been the case in various translations.” (Freud to Jankélévitch, 28.6.1920, LoC)

The requirement that the translator be ideally a psychoanalyst, who was entitled to replace the author's examples with his own ones, authorizes the translator to at least partially rewrite the book in his language. Brill was the first translator to work according to this genuinely Freudian model of a rewriter when, beginning in 1911, he translated into English all the three major works that Freud had declared untranslatable.

The translation of the third edition of the *Traumdeutung* gives us an idea of the practical difficulties that this model had to meet. Due to multiple complications with the publisher George Allan, who had even demanded to cut parts of the text, a request that Freud considered “shameful”, but to which he finally agreed to save the project, the English translation was not published until March 1913. Brill, who in the preface insisted on the “almost insurmountable difficulties” that he had encountered in this translation, resorted to the solution envisaged by Freud by repeatedly replacing the author's examples with dreams of his own patients. The greatest difficulties arose in the part in which Freud discusses one of the fundamental techniques operating in dream work, condensation. Words are frequently treated “in dreams as things and therefore undergo the same combinations as the representations of things (*Dingvorstellungen*)”, which leads to “comical and bizarre neologisms (*Wortschöpfungen*)” (Freud, my transl.). Brill omitted two examples given by Freud and noted that he had replaced them with an example from one of his own patients suffering from anxiety attacks. The combination of the words "*uclamparia - wet*" that appears in her dream narrative produces associations referring to a trip to Italy to treat these nervous attacks that she believed to be due to a Malaria infection and during which she drank a eucalyptus liqueur in a monastery. According to Brill's analysis, the fusion of the words "malaria" and "eucalyptus" produced the composite *uclamparia*, while "wet" evoked "dry", in this case the name of a Mr. Dry "whom she would have married except for his over-indulgence in alcohol".

Even if the mechanisms of dream work also work in different languages, as Brill tried to show with this example, difficulties remained when it came to translating the symbols of a dream. Let me briefly recall that the extensive discussion of symbolic interpretation was only added in the later editions, mostly visibly in the fourth edition of 1914 when Freud decided to devote a special subchapter to it. Whereas the symbolic interpretation allowed the first psychoanalysts convenient shortcuts (“a tie is a penis”), that were often the target of criticisms, the transfer to another cultural and linguistic context necessitated detours and even

Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author's written permission)

substitutes. Thus Brill had noted that the symbol “king” or “emperor” which according to Freud represents the father had to be replaced for American dreamers by “the President, the Governor, and the Mayor” (Freud 1913, tr. Brill, 246).

The exclusive status of Brill as Freud’s chief translator in the Anglo-Saxon world was undoubtedly due in large part to institutional politics. Brill had trained the first psychoanalysts in the United States at several renowned institutions, where he himself held increasingly important positions. Together with Putnam of Harvard University and Smith Ely Jelliffe, who had founded the Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series with William A. White in 1907, Brill therefore played a key role in the “conquest of the American market” (LoC, 2.12.1909) as Freud would acknowledge himself in a letter. But in addition to this institutional dimension, Freud, like in the case of his relationships with other disciples, repeatedly stressed the strong emotional ties that he attributed in Brill’s case to their common secular Judaism. In 1920, he assured his translator that “from our first acquaintance I put a complete confidence in you, not shaken to this day, such as a Jew can only put in another Jew, and I thought highly of your abilities as a scientific man and a physician” (19.1.1920, LoC). He saw “something unalterable” in this bond, “an intimacy of the kind present in blood relationships” (25.4.1923, LoC) and also made connections to Brill's family by taking over the sponsorship of his daughter Gioia, born in 1911, whose name alone — via the detour of Italian — was a tribute to the master.

However, the publication of the English translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams* marked the beginning of a crisis. In 1914, the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and most of the book on jokes (*The Wit*, in Brill’s arguable translation of the title) seemed to be translated, but the latter book took so much time that Brill fell behind with two other projects: *Totem and Taboo* and *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*. Brill justified this delay with the intrinsic untranslatability that characterizes the book on jokes: „I have to spend hours and days in search of fitting examples. Translation as such offers no difficulties for me. (...) I have plenty of material when it comes to dreams and psychopathology but I have to hunt for witticisms that would fit in with your thoughts and do justice to your own. That accounts for the tardiness.“ (27.4.1914, LoC).

That the translation of the book on jokes was delayed had other reasons as well. In contrast to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and *the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, this was a book that Freud re-published almost unchanged for the second edition of 1912. Only a few passages were modified to include examples from an article published by Brill the previous year, which was ultimately intended

Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author's written permission)

to prove the untranslatability of the jokes and puns treated in this book.^v Freud's gesture thus already testified to the translator's inscription in the text itself. Following the practice already adopted for the book on dreams, Brill did not hesitate to insert his own material and to reformulate the jokes and anecdotes that he himself had provided or that were quoted by Freud, while he deleted others from the original without substitution. But this time he went even further by replacing the numbers, with which Freud had structured the book on jokes in the style of a philosophical treatise, with his own intertitles in his translation.

Brill's slowness was also due to the fact that he had to negotiate with the publishers and also submitted his translations to other colleagues for proofreading to make them less vulnerable. And, then there was the relational and affective aspect of the translation work, an aspect that turns up many times in the correspondence and that would take on increasingly the form of an “ambivalence” re-enforced by dissenting positions on the level of institutional and editorial politics. Since the publication of his translation of *Traumdeutung*, Brill suspected that Freud was dissatisfied with his work. After the outbreak of World War I, which made correspondence between Vienna and New York increasingly difficult and soon brought it to a complete standstill, Freud tried to dispel this suspicion and confirmed Brill's status as his exclusive translator, at least for monographs or collections of articles. However, his monopoly ended shortly after the end of the war. In connection with Ernest Jones' founding of a psychoanalytical publishing house in London, a team consisting exclusively of British psychoanalysts was formed in 1919. From then on, this team was to provide the English translations of Freud's writings, culminating in the later *Standard Edition* published by James Strachey (Forrester and Cameron 2016, 591-612). The English office of the International Psycho-Analytical Press now took up the fight against any translation activity that had not been reviewed by its committee, especially in the United States. The first model, according to which the act of translation was tantamount to reinventing psychoanalysis in another language and culture, thus increasingly gave way to another model aimed at controlling and standardizing a genuinely Freudian terminology. In 1922, the International Psycho-Analytic Press published the first translations of Freud's last theoretical works (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920; *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 1921), while Jones' group worked on a glossary to standardize technical vocabulary. Apart from this first attempt to standardize psychoanalytic terms in English, the new team of translators, with Jones as their spokesman, insisted on the quality of good English and did not hesitate to utter scathing criticism of Brill's translations. As Jones wrote 1921 in a letter to Freud, “a knowledge of good English is almost unbelievably rare here, and of course rarer still in America, and is

Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author's written permission)

valued correspondingly highly. (...) Last week, for instance, I had the occasion to read for the first time Brill's translation of your Leonardo, and I was deeply shocked time and again to see punctuation as illiterate as that of a servant's girl, with expressions of a similar order. Men of sensitive feeling, taste and education like Rickman and Strachey rightly shudder at such things." (Letter from Jones to Freud, 15.12.1921, Freud/Jones, 1993, 448).

With Jones and an intellectual elite who — like James and Alix Strachey or John Rickman — had studied mainly in Cambridge, taking control over future editions and translations, the correspondence between Freud and Brill, which had already been interrupted by the war, came to an almost complete standstill. Since publishing and press were expensive enterprises, it was necessary to finance them with donations from professionals (Marinelli [1999] 2009). After Brill had been robbed of his exclusive status as Freud's English translator by the new monopoly of the publishing house, Jones and Freud asked him to contribute to its financing. When communication between Freud and Brill resumed after his first post-war visit to Vienna in 1921, Freud did not forget to note the "ambivalence" prevailing on both sides. In the following years, Brill would stay away from psychoanalytic congresses and take even a stand against Freud and other psychoanalysts on the continent in the sharp controversy over the lay analysis. The latter repeatedly chided him as a "naughty boy" who had been perverted by American society, while assuring him of his affection. Peace seemed to have been made only in 1928 after a visit by Brill to Berchtesgaden, where Freud and his family spent their vacations. Freud summed up the relationship with his translator by referring to his own "transference": "You know I have always been fond of you and at the same time nagging at you, a peculiar form of emotional transference." (8.10.1928, LoC)

For the last time, then, Freud called on Brill to translate into English the eighth and final edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, to be published in 1930. In his foreword to this revised edition, which appeared in Brill's translation in 1932, he not only praised his translator, but came to the rather surprising conclusion that the book had remained "essentially unaltered". However, the contrast between the attempt to integrate this book into a canon, which is now declared the work of a single author, and the practice of the translating analyst, who in this version continues to add his own examples and to rewrite the text, could hardly have been sharper. Thus, in this new version no one would be able to distinguish whether it is Freud who cites examples taken from Brill or whether the latter just quotes himself. This practice of translation, which systematically blurs the boundaries between original and translation, could only be an obstacle to the project of Ernest Jones and James Strachey, whose declared goal was to bring Freud's text corpus into definitive form.

The story of the relationship between Freud and his first American translator ends with a rather surprising episode. In December 1938, after his arrival in exile in London, Freud received a check from Brill, who had retired from all institutional functions two years earlier, and learned to his great surprise that his disciple had published all his translations in a thousand-page volume entitled *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* at Random House. Freud doubted that he was entitled to the money and was surprised that the publisher had not even cared to send him a copy: “As the author, I do have a right to it”. Brill's introduction to this volume composed for a general audience shows how much he considered his role as a translator to be central to the history of psychoanalysis:

“Psychoanalysis was unknown in this country until I introduced it in 1908. Ever since then, I have been translating, lecturing and writing on this subject both for physicians and laymen [...]. The psychoanalytic terminology, some of which I was the first to coin into English expressions, can now be found in all in standard English dictionaries. Words like *abreaction, transference, repression, displacement, unconscious*, which I introduced as Freudian concepts, have been adopted and are used to give new meanings, new values to our knowledge of normal and abnormal behavior.” (Brill 1938, 3)

Brill rightly insisted on his formative role in establishing Freud's central terms in English, a role that seemed to be forgotten in view of the further terminological standardization work of the British group led by Jones and a historiography that tended to centre around Freud's zealous disciple and future biographer (Steiner 1987; 1991). However, the self-apologetic tone with which Brill celebrated his own contribution to the rise of psychoanalysis in American culture tended to obscure the fact of collective parallel translation processes through which psychoanalysis entered the Anglo-American world (Forrester and Cameron, 2016). One has to note that Brill presented to the public a highly personal canon that limited Freud's major work primarily to the six works that he himself had translated: the 'Psychopathology of Everyday Life', the 'Interpretation of Dreams', the 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', 'Jokes and its Relationships to the Unconscious', 'Totem and Taboo' and the 'History of the Psychoanalytic Movement'. The fact that this canon did not include the later theoretical revisions of the theory of the neuroses and the drive theory, as Freud deplored, did not pose a problem for his translator. According to Brill, these later metapsychological works were possibly of interest to the “psychoanalytic therapist”, but not to the general public, whose interest was in the analysis of dreams and jokes.

III

The case of Brill's first English translations of Freud's major works opens up a number of questions, when those early translations are not, as is usually done, entirely dismissed from the start as flawed products, but rather studied as the outcome of a specific practice conceived in response to an early model of translation derived from Freud's conception of self-analysis. The main concern was not, as one would have expected, an exclusive focus on terminological choices, stylistic criteria, or on the question of the absolute fidelity to the text, but rather whether psychoanalysis, as a new technique of self-exploration relying in its beginnings heavily on the practices of reading and writing, could be made workable in another language. The first translations were conceived in tune with a point made by Freud in his *Introductory Lectures*, namely that one cannot learn psychoanalysis by conventional pedagogical means such as lectures, demonstrations or manuals, but only "on oneself, by studying one's own personality" (SE XV:19). And if those early translations, with all their imperfections, also speak of a fundamental ambivalence towards the text and the author Freud, it is not in the sense of a universally postulated characteristic of the modern translator, but rather in the sense of the self-understanding of those actors who, in the early days of psychoanalysis, created the basis for the collective transfer of its theories and techniques between languages and cultures.

The early psychoanalytic model of translation raises a number of questions that need to be further pursued. What are the lessons to be drawn from a historical study of translations that are considered "bad" or at least deeply flawed? An important one, I reckon, interesting both to scholars and analysts is to reveal historical dimensions of the theory and practice of psychoanalysis which appear nowadays exotic or odd, not least because they have become invisible through the later efforts of turning Freud into a canonical author endowed with a consistent terminology throughout his entire career, an effect that has been reinforced by the choices of the new French translation of the *Oeuvres Complètes* and the *Revised Standard Edition*. One could then shift the criteria for evaluating translations of psychoanalytic works from a primarily conceptual perspective (without sacrificing this dimension entirely) to the question to what extent such translations can integrate historical and contextual elements of the very practice of psychoanalysis. On the level of further historical work, it seems necessary to produce an analytical framework that can integrate cross-cultural connections and transnational comparisons for a better understanding of the specific dynamics of the successes and failures of translating psychoanalysis throughout the world.

References

Andreas Mayer, *The Ambivalent Translator* (version: January 4, 2023, submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History*, 21 pages, 9000 words; under review; not to be cited or circulated without author's written permission)

- Berman, A. (1984), *L'épreuve de l'étranger*, Paris: Gallimard. (engl. Trans. *Experience of the Foreign*)
- Bettelheim, B. (1982), *Freud and Man's Soul*, New York: Basic Books.
- Bass, A (1985), On the history of a mistranslation and the psychoanalytic movement, in: *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph Graham, Ithaca, N. Y., 102-141.
- Bourguignon A. et al. (1989) *Traduire Freud*, Paris: PUF.
- Bourguignon A. & Bourguignon, O. (1983), Singularité d'une histoire. *Revue française de psychanalyse* 47, 1260-1279.
- Brill, A. A. (1911), Freud's theory of wit. *Journal of abnormal psychology* 6, 279-316.
- Brill, A. A. (1938) (ed), *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Random House.
- Cassin, B. (2004) (ed), *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- Cassin et al. (2014) (ed), *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*. Princeton University Press.
- Chartier, R. (2021), *Éditer et traduire. Mobilité et matérialité des textes (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, Paris, EHESS, Gallimard et Seuil, Hautes études.
- Derrida, J. (1979), *Living on/borderlines*. In H. Bllom et al. (Eds.), *Deconstruction and criticism*. New York: Seabury Press
- Forrester, J. (1980), *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Forrester, J. & Cameron, L. (2016), *Freud in Cambridge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Freud (1970 [1905], *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*. In: *Studienausgabe*, vol. IV, Frankfurt: Fischer, 9-219.
- Freud, S. (1909), *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses*, trans. A.A. Brill, New York/Washington, New York Nervous and Mental Disease Pub. Co.
- Freud, S. (1910), *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory*, trans. A.A. Brill and introduced by J.J. Putnam, New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Pub. Co.
- Freud, S. (1911), *Die Traumdeutung*, 3rd ed. Vienna: Deuticke.
- Freud, S. (1912) *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses*, trans. A.A. Brill, New York/Washington, 2nd ed.
- Freud, S. (1913), *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill, London : George Allan & Unwin ; New York : The Macmillan Company.
- Freud, S. (1914), *Die Traumdeutung*. 4th edition, Wien: Deuticke.

- Freud, S. (1916a), *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. A.A. Brill, New York: Moffat, Yard & Co.
- Freud, S. (1916b), *Leonardo da Vinci. A Psychosexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence*, trans. Brill, New York.
- Freud, S. (1918), *Totem and Taboo. Resemblances between the psychic lives of savages and neurotics*, trad. et introduit par A.A. Brill, New York: Moffat, Yard & Co.
- Freud, S. (1931), *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill, London : George Allan & Unwin ; New York : The Macmillan Company.
- Freud, S. and E. Jones, 1993 *Complete Correspondence 1908-1939*, ed. A. Paskauskas, Cambridge, Mass. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
- Giboux, A. (2019), *Psychanalyse et psychologie*. In: *Histoire des traductions en langue française*, ed. Bernard Banoun et al. Lagrasse: Verdier, 1613-1686.
- Hale, N. (1971) (ed), *James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis. Letters between Putnam and Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones, William James, Sandor Ferenczi, and Morton Prince, 1877-1917*, Cambridge, Mass.
- Ginzburg, C. (2017) *Ethnophilologie. Deux études de cas*. *Socio-anthropologie*, 36.
- Jones, E. (1955), *Sigmund Freud. Life and Work. Vol. II : Years of Maturity 1901-1919*, London, The Hogarth Press.
- Kristal, E. (2002), *Invisible Work. Borges and Translation*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Mahony, P. J. (1980). *Toward the understanding of translation in psychoanalysis*. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 28(2), 461–475.
- Marinelli, L. & Mayer, A. (2003[2002]) *Dreaming by the Book: A History of Freud's 'The Interpretation of Dreams' and the Psychoanalytic Movement*. Trans. S. Fairfield. New York: Other Press.
- Marinelli, L. & Mayer, A. (2006) *Forgetting Freud? For a new historiography of psychoanalysis*. *Science in Context* 19(1): 1–13.
- Marinelli, L. 2009 [1999], *Psyches Kanon. Zur Publikationsgeschichte rund um den Internationalen Psychoanalytischen Verlag*. Wien/Berlin : Turia und Kant.
- Mayer, A., 2013 [2002], *Sites of the Unconscious. Hypnosis and the Emergence of Psychoanalysis*, trans. C. Barber, Chicago: Chicago University Press
- Mijolla, A. de (2010), *Freud et la France (1885-1945)*, Paris: PUF.
- Steiner, R. (1987), *A Worldwide International Trademark of Genuineness? International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 14.

- Steiner, R. (1991), To explain our point of view to English readers in English words. *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 18(3), 351-392.
- Timpanaro, S. (1976) *The Freudian Slip: Psychoanalysis and Textual Criticism*. Trans. K. Soper. London: Verso.
- Venuti, L. (2002) The difference that translation makes: the translator's unconscious. In: *Translation Studies. Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*, ed. Alessandra Riccardi, Cambridge, 214-241.
- Ornston, D. (1985) The Invention of ›Cathexis‹ and Strachey's Strategy. *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 12, 391-399.
- Quine, W.V.O. (1960) *Word and Object*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

· Earlier versions of this paper were read in French and English in Paris, Caen and Berlin. I am grateful to Carlo Ginzburg, Isabelle Kalinowski and Efrain Kristal for their comments and criticisms. Submitted to *Psychoanalysis and History* in January 2023, under review. Please do not cite or circulate without author's written permission.

ⁱ There is no room to enter into these debates and the problems that these new translations raise. I will deal with this topic more extensively in a forthcoming book.

ⁱⁱ Both lack of philological rigour and such a reductive model of transmission prevail in the work written by English and French psychoanalyst on the history of the respective translations: see the work of Steiner (1987; 1991) and de Mijolla (2010) who has at least the merit of declaring the amateurish quality of his compilation. In contrast to the programmatic formulation to grant the translators fully the status of historical actors, the contribution on the encyclopedic History of translations into French, privileges the perspective of the choices of the team of the *Oeuvres Completes* without any critical discussion (see Giboux, 2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ This conception takes up important lessons from Quines (1960) famous thought experiment about "radical translation". For a productive perspective on the case of Borges' as a translator which bears a number of resemblances with the case I am developing in the following, see Kristal (2002). For the early modern period, see the recent work of Chartier (2021) and Ginzburg (2017).

^{iv} Freud to Putnam, 5.12.1909 (Hale 1971, 90).

^v Brill, 1911. See the following example: „Das Ehepaar X lebt auf ziemlich großem Fuße. Nach der Ansicht der einen soll der Mann viel verdient haben und sich dabei etwas zurückgelegt haben, nach anderen wieder soll sich die Frau etwas zurückgelegt und dabei viel verdient haben.' Ein geradezu diabolisch guter Witz! Und mit wie geringen Mitteln er hergestellt ist! Viel verdient — sich etwas zurückgelegt, sich etwas zurückgelegt — viel verdient; es ist eigentlich nichts als eine Umstellung dieser beiden Phrasen, wodurch sich das vom Manne Ausgesagte von dem über die Frau Angedeuteten unterscheidet. Allerdings ist dies auch hier wiederum nicht die ganze Technik des Witzes.“ Freud added here a footnote in the second German edition: „Ebensowenig wie in dem vortrefflichen, bei Brill (1911) angeführten Witz von Oliver Wendell Holmes: **'Put not your trust in money, but put your money in trust.'** Es wird hier ein Widerspruch angekündigt, der nicht erfolgt. Der zweite Teil des Satzes nimmt diesen Widerspruch zurück. Übrigens ein gutes Beispiel für die Unübersetzbarkeit der Witze von solcher Technik. » (Freud [1970] 1905, 34-35).