From défrichement to déchiffrement: the linguistic cultivation of rural France in the nineteenth century and the aftermath of traductologie

Samuel Trainor

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1. *Défrichement*

Picture this. Imagine someone cultivating French. What calls itself *le français*. Someone that *le français* is cultivating. And who, as a French citizen to boot, would be a subject of French *culture*. Suppose, for example, that one day this subject of French *culture* were to come up to you and say[1]:

> Il est deux langues que j'adore
> Et que je parlais autrefois ;
> Il me vient des pleurs dans la voix
> Si parfois je les parle encore ;
>
> Et je sens un trouble soudain
> Dont toute mon âme est saisie,
> Au moindre mot de poésie
> Ou de patois périgourdin...
>
> Il me semble que je m'abuse
> Quand j'entends ces sons inouïs,
> Le doux parler de mon pays
> Et le doux parler de la Muse ;
>
> Et je savoure tour à tour
> Cette double réminiscence,
> L'idiome de mon enfance
> Et le langage de l'amour.
>
> (Tarde, 1879 : 242)

[1] This entire paragraph is, of course, a loose translation of Derrida's opening gambit in *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (Derrida 1996 : 13). *Ce qui s'appelle le français* cannot logically be translated as "That which calls itself French", but the loss of the reflexive would be a shame. The option of non translation seems best. As for *culture* in Italics, I mean to emphasise its Frenchness. This is an effect of *francisation* intended to mirror the *anglicisme* of French pronunciations of the more outré (putative) English loanwords, like *un brushing*, which is always a little *tiré par les cheveux*.

It would be almost paradoxical. It is an evocation in French of a lost dialect; and it is a generic contradiction (an elegy for poetic language), *rhétorique qui fait l'impossible avec le sens*. There is also something *dépaysant,* something 'outlandish', about it. It is written using the *In Memoriam* stanza of Lord Tennyson[2]. A form, not of the troubadours, but of Victorian pastoral elegy. And it contains the Wordsworthian image of an old, illiterate and *patoisant* peasant as the locus of poetic memory:

> je n'oublîrai pas
> Vos poétiques idiomes,
>
> Tant qu'il restera dans nos champs
> Quelque laboureur centenaire
> Qui de l'*adisias* ordinaire
> Salûra de loin les passants,
>
> (Tarde 1879 : 245)

These are 'our fields', in French (*nos champs*): fields of *la patrie*. And the 'poetic idiom' of the Muses is also French. The poet was initiated into it by the rebarbative toil of learning French: "*Plus tard, quand je sus le français, / (Et j'eus de la peine à l'apprendre) / J'étais grand ; survint l'âge tendre, / Je fis des vers, j'en pâlissais !*" He blanches at the memory. Yet he implies the idiom of the Muses survives only in the memory (*in memoriam* itself) and only in so far as an old peasant, who cannot speak French, lives on in the French fields to say not *au revoir*, not *adieu*, but the Occitan *adisias*, both *adieu* and *au revoir* to those who pass by on their verges: a clear antinomy in French, but in both Occitan and the Tennysonian memory, it is the only way for the present, focused on the past, to address the future. How might such a problematic subject of French *culture* mark

[2] Tennyson rejected suggestions that he had copied the form from the minor seventeenth century poet Lord Herbert of Cherbury (Edward Herbert, George's elder brother). See Christopher Ricks's headnote to *In Memoriam* in *The Poems of Tennyson* (vol. II), London, Longman, 1987, p. 311–12. The first stanza of the French renaissance *rondel* was often an octosyllabic envelope quatrain, but no evidence is forthcoming that this had an influence on Herbert, even as English ambassador to France in the 1620s. Besides, Herbert made much more use of the Italian quatrain. Tarde probably picked the stanza up from Sully Prudhomme, and Sully Prudhomme is more likely to have been influenced by Tennyson than Charles d'Orléans.

out a new 'field' of enquiry? In his address to the inaugural symposium of the *Congrès International de Sociologie* in 1894, Tarde says:

> [C]herchons avec toute la précision désirable, mais sans prétendre pour la science qui nous est chère à une autonomie absolue, les limites du champ qu'elle est appelée à défricher. (Tarde, 1898 [1895] : 63)[3]

We might well remark on the similarities between such a carefully pruned statement of intent and the problematic demarcations of translation studies. The same pastoral metaphors apply. Michel Ballard, for example, introducing an essay by Guy Bocquet revisiting this recent history, says: "*il esquisse, entre autres, les débats autour de la dénomination et de la délimitation du champ*" (2006 : 8) And Bocquet's own foundational discourse could not sound more Tardean:

> La naissance d'une science suppose l'établissement des critères de sa démarcation par rapport aux sciences plus anciennes. L'existence et les limites d'une science sont bien souvent question de conjoncture […], jamais personne n'a pu sérieusement affirmer que l'acte de traduire, l'opération traduisante, fût lui-même scientifique : l'acte de traduire est un phénomène social […]. Cela n'empêche nullement qu'on puisse étudier ce phénomène selon les principes qui fondent les sciences dites du réel, qu'elles soient physiques ou humaines, et dont l'objet est d'observer et de décrire un phénomène[4].

For the hired-hand English translator, however, the immediate problem in Tarde's mission statement is its last word – *défricher* – which seems to demand a bit of extra spade work.

It is a word that would have come as no surprise to contemporary readers. In particular, those who had been schooled (as Tarde had) in French *grammaire* in the provinces during the nineteenth century would naturally accept that clearing and cultivating a neglected field, however thorny a task, was a worthy vocation,

[3] My annotated translation (Tarde 2012) of Tarde's foundational essay in Sociology (a critique of Durkheim's *les Règles de la méthode sociologique*) is based both upon the edition cited in the bibliography below and on the original conference paper, published under the title "la Sociologie élémentaire" in *Annales de l'Institut International de Sociologie*, Vol. 1, edited by René Worms, 1895, Paris, V. Giard & E. Brière.

[4] Guy Bocquet "L'histoire d'une démarche épistémologique" (in Ballard (ed.), 2006 : 28)

even a patriotic duty. Generations of them, for example, would have practised weeding errors out of their formations and pronunciations of plural nouns, in what was often their second language, by multiplying the grammatical fruits of the following vignette:

> LE CHAMP
> Mettez au pluriel les noms entre parenthèses.
>
> La cabane [clusado][5] du pauvre Nicolas était batie sur un terrain couvert de (*bruyère*) [brujo], de (*genêt*) [balaja], d'(*ajonc*) [roundal], de (*coudrier*) [nosilhiera], de (*ronce*) [roume], d'(*épine*) [fisson] et de (*buisson*) [randau / golatge] de toute (*sorte*). Il semblait que ce terrain ne dût jamais produire ni (*légume*), ni (*fruit*). Un jour qu'il faisait une chaleur excessive, justement à l'époque des (*moisson*) [medatge], Nicolas s'était étendu à l'ombre d'un de ces (*buisson*) [golatge]. Vint à passer un paysan conduisant une charrette attelée de deux (*bœuf*) [brau]. Cette charrette était remplie de magnifiques (*gerbe*) de blé. Au bruit que firent les (*roue*), Nicolas leva la tête et ne put s'empêcher de regarder avec des yeux d'envie le rustique équipage. Il ne se décida qu'avec peine à saluer le paysan.
>
> Le cultivateur, sans faire attention aux (*coup*) d'œil envieux de Nicolas, entama sur-le-champ une conversation : « Il ne tiendrait qu'à toi, lui dit-il de voir ton terrain produire des (*épi*) aussi beaux que les miens, des (*légumes*) superbes, des (*centaine*) de (*botte*) [plejon] d'un foin odorant et d'excellente qualité. Coupe ces (*arbuste*) [aubrisson] et ces (*buisson*) [golatge] qui encombrent ces (*friche*) [chauma / pelada], mets le feu à ces (*ronce*) [roume] et à ces (*genêt*) [balaja], à toutes ces (*plante*) inutiles ; répands-en les (*cendre*) à la surface de ton champ et commence à en labourer un peu tous les (*jour*). Quand tu n'en remuerais chaque fois que quelques (*mètre*) carrés, tu parviendras à nettoyer promptement ta propriété. »
>
> « Alors ensemence-la en (*céréale*) [grana], en (*graine*) [semnida] fourragères [poledo], en (*légume*) ; plante des (*pomme*) de terre [potato], des (*carotte*) [racina], des (*navet*) [rabissa], des (*haricot*) [monjon], des (*fève*) [fava], des (*artichaut*) [artrichau] ; puis attends le résultat de ton travail ; le temps de la moisson arrivera pour toi comme pour nous, et tu ne maudiras plus ton sort. »
>
> Nicolas goûta ces (*conseil*). Les (*arbuste*), les (*buisson*), les (*plante*) nuisibles disparurent grâce à ses travaux. En peu de temps il se procura un champ qui ne lui coûta que des (*sueur*), mais pas une obole, et qui, l'année suivante, lui donna une récolte suffisante pour le dédommager amplement de ses (*peine*).
>
> (Larive et Fleury, 1871a : 11)[6]

[5] The words in square brackets are Périgourdin Occitan translations taken from Colas (1905). They have been included to show how Gabriel Tarde might have named these things as a child.

[6] Larive and Fleury was the standard French grammar primer of the Third Republic. There were 229 reprints between 1871 and 1953.

The benefits to be reaped from this toil were abundant. The *élèves paysans* would glean not only the rules of the regular plural *-s*, a simple difference between written and spoken language, a clear Lockean sense of property and territory, a moral lesson about the value of an honest day's work, a reminder of the economic importance of agricultural industry, and so on, but crucially they would also learn to uproot whatever hardy remnants of their local *baragouin* were still entrenched in the semantic field of (indigenous) flora and replace them with a rich crop of French vocabulary: a real lexical cornucopia harvested from the more cultivated and productive language of the urban bourgeoisie.

The linguistic self-hatred engendered by the defamiliarisation of the local plants and arable crops so intrinsic to the rural milieu is a point that contemporary commentators did not overlook. Sonia Branca, for example, tells us that:

> Aurouze [Jean Aurouze, *Lou prouvençau à l'escolo* (Diéu : Empremarié Prouvençalo, 1907)] évoque la honte qui saisit les écoliers occitans incapables de parler de ce qu'ils connaissent pourtant bien, des plantes de leur pays : dès qu'il faut s'exprimer « en français », ça devient toute une affaire :
>
> Lis enfans s'asséton dins la classo. La leiçoun coumenço. Se vai parla de boutanico. Sus lou tabléu negre lou mèstre a marca en francès : de faióu, de pese, de civado, d'esparset, etc. sera pas empacha, dirés, lou brave escoulan, pèr parla de tout acó : vint cops dins l'estiéu, aqueli recordo i'an passa entre man.
>
> *Mai, lou vaqui que noun muto ! Resto nè, bouco badanto, cabesso vuejo. Aqueli mot francès revihon pas dins sa memóri lou mendre souveni, e li causo que pénso en prouvençau se véi que lou paure li pou pas espremi dins uno lenguo qu'es pas dins sa naturo, ni mai dins soun usage*. (Branca, 1979 : 57)[7]

Renée Balibar, who unearthed a treasure trove of early grammatical exercises by future writers like Charles Péguy from the *Exposition universelle* (Paris, 1878), implies that the eradication of such natural lexis from rural dialects was a

[7] "The children take their seats in the classroom. The lesson begins. They are going to talk about botany. The teacher writes on the blackboard in French: henbane, sweetpea, oats, honeysuckle, etc. The hearty rural pupil would not previously have had any problem talking about these things; he can remember touching them with his hands twenty times over the summer. But now he's lost for words. He is dumbfounded, his mouth wide open, his mind a blank. The French words awaken no memories of any sort in him because he thinks in Provençal and the poor child cannot express these ideas in a language which is unnatural to him, and which he certainly never uses." (My translation)

deliberate and systematic concern of the textbooks used in the *école nationale*. Larive and Fleury, for example, were so intent on instilling quasi-Linnaean taxonomies of national vocabulary that they even dabbled in an implausible kind of cognitive prescriptivism that sought to reverse-engineer dictionary definitions as something akin to semantic categorical imperatives:

> « Remplacez les points par les mots convenables. *Ecrivez* : Les feuilles des *arbres* (nom commun) sont vertes.
>
> 1) Les feuilles des … (nom commun) sont vertes. – 2) Les pieds des … (nom commun) sont fourchus. 3) […] »
>
> Le *Livre du Maître* donne : « 2) les pieds des *bœufs* sont fourchus. » « Bœufs » et « arbres » sont les « mots convenables » dans la représentation normative du monde rural, éliminant vaches, moutons, cerfs, chameaux ou diables, satyres ; ainsi que choux, rosiers etc. L'exercice ne porte pas sur des mots qui seraient « possibles ». Il enseigne que « chaque idée a un mot qui y correspond exactement, c'est à dire un mot *propre*. On doit chercher avec constance ce mot qui ne se présente pas toujours au premier abord. » (L. et Fl. *La Deuxième Année de Grammaire*, p. 92).
>
> Les règles du bon sens sont intimement fondues avec les règles de la syntaxe dans la moindre pratique du bon français. (Balibar, 1985 : 255)

The overarching intention, of course, was not principally to eradicate "possible" responses as they might be expressed in French, but to set up French as a fixed, stable, unitary code (for both communication and thought) which should replace the local dialects precisely because its semantic paradigms were universally inductive in this way and therefore immune to the plurality and relativism, the seemingly endless quibbles and variations, the *patois* brought to these semantic fields.

Such extreme logocentrism will always undermine itself. Despite propounding a tidy-minded precision that implicitly likens accurate language to a well-tended market garden, the verges of the Nicolas vignette ("LE CHAMP") are overrun by its own prolific metaphors: '*Le cultivateur … <u>entama sur-le-champ</u> une conversation*', '*Nicolas <u>goûta</u> ces conseils*' (my emphasis). This is, to take a clipping from Deleuze, a vivacious rhizome.

It goes almost without saying, then, that Nicolas's work is analogous to the pupil's, and the *cultivateur*'s words to the teacher's. (Notice that Nicolas is not

allowed to speak and the *cultivateur* addresses him as *tu*.) Just as the pupils of the *écoles rurales* were brought up to value literal *défrichement*, they also had implanted in them a recognition of the value of a metaphorical intellectual *défrichement*. It was a cliché, and one they were repeatedly called upon to copy down:

> Le paysan tel que je l'ai connu, avait un profond respect pour le sol en jachère ; […] il refusait de s'apercevoir que cette terre qu'il appelait au repos se mettait à produire d'elle-même […] d'épais ajoncs et même un arbrisseau tel que le genêt […]. [L]'oisiveté est tellement contre nature, que partout où elle règne, elle nuit. Les champs, pas plus que l'homme, ne sont faits pour elle. Dans l'homme, elle produit les pensées stériles, dans la terre, les plantes sauvages ou malsaines. Rien n'est plus agité qu'un homme oisif, et la terre livrée à elle-même se couvre d'une végétation désordonnée, plus fatigante à enfanter que des moissons bienfaisantes[8].

The linguistic analogy is blatant and perennial. As a means of carrying out just such a purge of their local dialects, pupils were made to note:

> *l'urgente nécessité de purger complétement le champ des racines envahissantes, entrelacées en tous sens, qui sont vivaces, très-rustiques, et extraordinairement difficiles à extirper et à détruire, lorsqu'elles s'en sont exclusivement emparées après s'y être paisiblement multipliées pendant plusieurs années.*[9]

The idea of the *dictée,* then, was to sow the seeds of standard French in the arable land of a newly marked out *ésprit national* which struggling pupils would probably have been baffled to learn was more fatigued by indolently generating the vivacious wildflowers of its local dialects than industriously cultivating the national staples and delicacies of an alien French grammar. And we should note the verb that is used: *enfanter*. The earth (*la terre*) is the mother of the plants, and she is tired of giving birth to weeds; she can be re-energised only by being cultivated at the behest of the cultivated French landowner, aware, from his reading in French, of modern crop-rotation techniques.

[8] Le Comte de Falloux, "Le paysan d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui" (in Heuzé, 1867 : 93-4)

[9] V. Yvart "La jachère d'été" (in Heuzé 1867 : 83)

How in the *école maternelle* would the painful labour of reproducing this kind of thing have related to a pupil's idea of what he would have learned to call his *langue maternelle*[10]? More to the point, how would such a conception have affected his socio-linguistic relationship with his own mother? For Tarde, the budding psycho-sociologist from the provinces, these would have been salient questions. And they were questions linked to key sociological changes in late nineteenth century France.

Principal amongst these changes was a burgeoning urban population and a relative decline in food production. Inevitably, perhaps, this resulted in a form of Malthusianism which (unlike Malthus himself, who was faced with a different geographical reality in Britain) routinely proposed *défrichement* as a solution:

> La cause de la cherté des substances alimentaires réside […] dans l'impuissance radicale, absolue, de la terre *actuellement cultivée*, de produire, même dans des circonstances ordinaires et malgré les efforts les plus énérgiques de l'homme, proportionnellement aux besoins sans cesse croissants d'une population dont le développement, en France, a dépassé, depuis longtemps, le niveau des moyens de subsistance. (Vignau, 1859 : 5)

The solution was not only to be an expansion of the land *actuellement cultivée* but a complete overhaul of farming, which would replace the various parochial rural mindsets, seen as holding back any such expansion beyond the traditional 'level of subsistence', and institute a fully integrated national system based on the bourgeois principles of trade, science and rational organisation. In short, the *défrichement* was both (literally) territorial and (figuratively) social.

Key to this process was the rationalisation of the trades and professions. Local French vocabularies of work and social roles had to be fundamentally altered for this to occur. Eugene Weber's seminal study of the modernisation of rural France (Weber 1976), for example, places a good deal of emphasis on one of the basic terminological dichotomies of the Nicolas anecdote above: the simple

[10] "qu'il me soit permis de m'étonner qu'il faille faire des exercices si douloureux pour apprendre une langue qu'on nomme maternelle et que ma mère m'apprenait fort bien seulement en causant devant moi. Car elle parlait à ravir, ma mère!" Anatole France, 1885, *Le livre de mon ami*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, p. 137.

replacement of the term *paysan* with *cultivateur*. This was initially instigated by the simple fact that *paysan* had become an insult:

> [T]he word peasant itself became a term of contempt, to be rejected as an insult or accepted as an expression of humility, but in either case to be shed for a more honorable label at the first opportunity. And indeed an English traveler of the 1890's found the word falling into disuse: "just as soon as he can, the peasant becomes a *cultivateur*!" (Weber, 1976 : 7)

This was not merely a euphemistic change of job title (such as 'grave digger' becoming 'bereavement excavator'), but symbolic of an entire socio-economic paradigm shift, involving a process of territorial commodification:

> The sociologist Robert Redfield makes a distinction between the peasants for whom agriculture is a way of life, not a profit-making enterprise, and the farmer, who carries on agriculture as a business, looking on land as capital and commodity. In those terms, through much of the century, most French men who worked the land and many who owned it were peasants, maintaining the old ways, producing without worrying much about the market, relying above all on the natural productiveness of the land. It would be late in the century before a significant proportion of them tied their production to the needs of the market, because it would be late in the century before the market became significant and accessible to them. (Weber, 1976 : 117)

It is telling here that Weber ties the concept of 'accessibility' to that of 'significance', or perhaps even 'signification'. Self-evidently a national lingua franca broadens the geographical scope of trade, and therefore renders the so-called 'internal' market more accessible, but a subtler effect of this paradigm shift is its replacement not merely of signifiers but of the ideological modes of signification. One of the most obvious results was a national reclassification of the rural *métiers* which tended both to undermine locally specific trades (along with the words describing them)[11] and to impose a new bourgeois hierarchy of occupations. Just as they had done for the vocabulary of the natural world, school textbooks went to pains to inculcate this new paradigm of work. This meant that

[11] See Weber, 1976 : 225.

the examples in the grammar books made reference to working activities of which the authors had little knowledge:

> La plupart des textes racontaient un univers rural, « le travail aux champs et à l'atelier » avec un vocabulaire technique –, univers et vocabulaire dont citadins et bourgeois n'avaient aucune expérience immédiate. De leur côté les travailleurs ruraux, les artisans et ouvriers des villes communiquaient entre eux localement dans des situations et des langages qui ne figuraient pas tels quels sur le manuel. (Balibar, 1985 : 267)

It was very clear from the textbooks what sorts of trades the pupils were supposed to envisage for their future and that they were not only to be named in French, but taken from a strict, centralised French taxonomy. The same repetitive inductive method imposed a definitive activity for each *métier* as had imposed a definitive quality to each element of the natural world :

> Remplacez le nom propre d'homme par le nom commun du métier exercé par cet homme. *Ecrivez* : le *meunier* a moulu le blé.
>
> *Philippe* a *moulu* le blé. – […] *Edmond* construira une *charrue*. – *André* réparera les colliers des chevaux. – *Edouard* extrait d'énormes pierres de sa *carrière*. – […] *Félix* a abattu les arbres du petit bois.
>
> (Larive et Fleury, 1871a : 4)

Crucially, these trades were also identified by the standardisers as stubborn bastions of local dialect vocabulary that needed to be brought into linguistic line if their methods were to be rationalised and subordinated to the bourgeois *arts* and *sciences*. One of the first French-patois bilingual dictionaries written for use in the national schools puts it succinctly in the introduction:

> Le patois n'étant guère parlé que par des villageois ignorant les sciences et les arts, il renferme les mots qui se rapportent aux travaux agricoles ou manuels, aux différentes professions exercées à la campagne par l'ouvrier et l'artisan (Pétin, 1842 : ix)

This paradigm shift can not be exemplified any better than by the semantic and social change that was imposed upon the word *culture*. A term that had once been employed almost exclusively to refer to a process of crop production (and

metonymically the crop produced), was now being increasingly used within the acrolect to mean the abstract result of an exemplary education in the arts and sciences. This totemic reification (a seemingly quite deliberate shift from the Ciceronian literary metaphor of 'cultivation' to what Lakoff and Johnson have called a cognitive metaphor 'we live by'[12]) was seen to be precisely what distinguished the educated urban classes from the peasantry (hypocritically enough, considering the etymology), and therefore precisely what the *instituteurs* were seeking to 'institute' in the *école rurale*. They were bringing *culture* to the *paysans* and thus both being and creating *cultivateurs*.

Derrida was convinced of the shadowy importance of this reification in the history of an internal colonialism that went hand in hand with linguistic standardisation:

> Toute culture est originairement coloniale. Ne comptons pas seulement sur l'étymologie pour le rappeler. Toute culture s'institue par l'imposition unilatérale de quelque « politique » de la langue. La maîtrise, on le sait, commence par le pouvoir de nommer, d'imposer et de légitimer les appellations. On sait ce qu'il en fut du français en France même, dans la France révolutionnaire autant ou plus que dans la France monarchique. Cette mise en demeure souveraine peut être ouverte, légale, armée ou bien rusée, dissimulée sous les alibis de l'humanisme « universel », parfois de l'hospitalité la plus généreuse. Elle suit ou précède toujours la culture comme son ombre.
> (Derrida, 1996 : 68)

Merely by being able to use the word *culture* in this way, I would suggest, Derrida proves his point. Raymond Williams's analysis of the reification of 'culture' during this period of the nineteenth century, in "The Idea of Culture" (1953), is a foundational discourse in English cultural criticism to match Tarde's foundational critique of Durkheim's reification of *le fait social* in "*Les deux éléments de la*

[12] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, 1980, *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press.

sociologie"[13]. Williams famously identifies Matthew Arnold as the writer who fixed this analogous 'elevation' of 'culture':

> Arnold, one might say, performed the final act of abstraction […] [*Culture and Anarchy*] offered the thing in itself. But whatever the exact provenance, the decisive change is clear; in the nineteenth century the word had become the Idea […]. ['Culture'] became in the nineteenth century the focus of a deeply significant response to a society in the throes of a radical and painful change. (Williams, 1953 : 244)

Williams's early essay remains exemplary, but his doubts about the 'exact provenance' of the reification of 'culture' are justified. Even within Arnold's work he misses the real source of this 'final act of abstraction'. It was actually in the introduction to an official report on the French provincial school system that Arnold first used the word 'culture' in this way:

> [C]haracter without culture is […] something raw, blind, and dangerous: the most interesting, the most glorious peoples, are those in which the alliance of the two has been effected most successfully, and its result spread most widely. This is why the spectacle of ancient Athens has such profound interest for a rational man; that it is the spectacle of the culture of a *people*.
> (Arnold, 1861b : xliii–xliv)

This is an implicit eulogy of the French education system, of course. As such, it is hardly unique in Arnold's work. In *England and the Italian Question* (1859), he makes clear that he considers the successful dissemination of linguistic 'culture' to be the "bright feature" of French civilisation: "her common people can understand and appreciate language which elsewhere meets with a response only from the educated and refined classes." (cit. Trilling, 1949 : 162-3)

[13] Crucially both essays mentioned here hinge upon what I call an accusation of 'reification'. Neither writer uses the term, however. Tarde would obviously not have known it. Instead, what he sees as Durkheim's unjustifiable 'elevation' of social facts 'to the status of resurrected Platonic Ideas', he refers to as an 'ontological illusion'. Williams, on the other hand, an avowed Marxist who had much in common with commentators like Lukács and the Frankfurt School (even Althusser) who used analogous terms extensively, nevertheless avoids what he probably considered a bit of continental neo-Marxist jargon and not suited to his project to bring left-wing cultural criticism into the sphere of traditional English literary scholarship.

And in the infamous essay that Williams cites, *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold comes as close as possible to a calque of the French *défrichement* when expounding the 'grounds' of his notion of culture:

> There is a view in which all the love of our neighbour, the impulses towards action, help and beneficence, the desire for removing human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it, – motives eminently such as are called social, – come in as part of the grounds of culture, and the main and pre-eminent part. (Arnold, 1993 [1867] : 59) (my emphasis)

Perhaps this is a case of *déformation professionnelle*, but this sentence reads to me like a rather unidiomatic (ironically what Venuti might call 'foreignized') translation, rather than a piece of 'transparent' English. Even in learned Victorian prose, which had a tendency for the syntactically Latinate, phrases like 'the desire for removing' (instead of 'the desire to remove') and 'motives eminently such as are called social' (instead of 'motives that are considered/called eminently social' or simply 'eminently social motives') are formal oddities. The former construction is a common 'overcorrection' in French translations into English. The latter is a particularly obscure bit of pseudo-synthetic syntax: the kind of thing one might expect to result from a Latin *version* exercise in the *lycée*. I have no hesitation in confessing I would correct them both if a student presented them to me in a *thème* class. Is it too much of a leap to suggest that Arnold is actually thinking, at least partially, in French? The influence of Sainte-Beuve on Arnold is often mentioned, and Lionel Trilling spent a good deal of his doctoral thesis tracing Arnold's francophilia (Trilling 1949 [1939]), but I would go much further even than Trilling and suggest that Arnold was such a proponent of French culture (and specifically of the French idea of 'culture') that he actually allowed it to have a 'cultivating' influence on his English prose.

By far the strangest phrase, however, is 'clearing human confusion'. Why 'clearing'? It has a self-deconstructive lack of clarity. The extant French translation of this sentence is instructive:

> C'est une conception où entrent tout l'amour de notre prochain, les élans qui nous poussent à agir, à secourir, à faire le bien, le désir d'éliminer l'erreur

> humaine, de réduire le désordre humain et de soulager la misère humaine, la noble aspiration à laisser le monde meilleur et plus heureux que nous ne l'avons trouvé – mobiles qui méritent éminemment d'être appelés « sociaux » – tous y entrent comme faisant partie des bases de la culture, et comme en constituant la partie principale et pré-éminente. (Arnold, 1984 [1867] : 61)

The translation has certainly cleared some of the confusion, or rather 'reduced' some of the 'disorder' of Arnold's unruly sentence. Where this specific phrase is concerned, however, it has completely eradicated what I think is Arnold's implicit allusion to the psycho-social 'clearing' (*défrichement*) of the provincial masses which he witnessed in the *écoles rurales* in 1861. As we have seen, part and parcel of this process was the attempt to impose unitary, stable French paradigms whose inductive semantics would 'clear human confusion'. Simply put, for the francophile Arnold, 'culture' implied *défrichement*.

2. *Déchiffrement*[14]

But what precisely does all this have to do with translation studies? Sticking with Arnold, for a moment, but without wishing to revisit in any great detail the careworn debate with Francis Newman about the translation of Homer[15], two points can be made about Arnold's embryonic *traductologie*. Firstly, his general approach to translation was typically influenced by French *culture* (itself both a

[14] The spoonerism of *défrichement* as *déchiffrement* is not included here merely as a bit of whimsical deconstructionism. The two words coincide in the Tarde essay whose translation prompted this study: 'Il y avait, avant Champollion, force lois ou maximes égyptiennes qui n'étaient plus pratiquées ni connues depuis des milliers d'années, mais dont les formules étaient gravées en caractères hiéroglyphiques au fond de tombeaux gardés par des sphinx […] quand Champollion ou ses disciples eurent déchiffré ces normes de l'ancienne Égypte, est-ce que ce déchiffrement a eu la vertu de les faire revivre ?' (Tarde, 1898 [1895] : 69)

[15] There is plenty of work available, by Ballard and others, which problematises Venuti's account of Newman vs Arnold as 'foreignizing' vs 'domesticating' translation. (See, for example, Ballard, 1992 : 243). Newman's (very English) ballad form can certainly not be considered more 'foreignized' than Arnold's blank hexametres. It simply makes more sense to understand their debate to be over two different modes of mimetic fidelity. For my part, I would only seek to lend my support to Trilling's observation that Arnold's approach to translation was heavily influenced by his admiration of French literary culture.

subject and an object of translation). In his essay about Tolstoy in the *Fortnightly Review* (1 July, 1887, p. 785), for example, he makes it clear that he considers French literary translations superior to their English counterparts: 'work of this kind [in this case the translation of *Anna Karenina*] is better done in France than in England.' Secondly, Arnold's views on classical translation were specifically influenced by his experience of the French provincial school system. Lionel Trilling points out that this unlikely overlap of the grandiose and the elementary poses no problem for a thinker so infused with the French idea of *culture*:

> When a man sees life under the aspect of a distinct and illuminating idea, all things become interrelated and it is no step at all from the investigation of Homer to the investigation of elementary schools. Before the lectures on Homer, Arnold had been sent on a pedagogical tour of France…
> (Trilling, 1949 : 178)

Most importantly, Arnold's approach to translation was implicitly concerned with the figurative *défrichement* he had no doubt witnessed in the teaching of French grammar. Compare, for example, his pithy summary of Homeric style[16] with the introduction to the prescriptivist chapter on *style* in the Larive and Fleury second year grammar:

> The translator of Homer should above all be penetrated by a sense of four qualities of his author:—that he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, that is, both in his syntax and in his words; that he is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought, that is, in his matter and ideas; and, finally, that he is eminently noble. (Arnold, 1861a : 9-10)

> Les principales qualités du style sont : la *noblesse*, la *correction,* la *précision*, le *naturel*, la *clarté*, l'*harmonie* et la *concision*. (Larive et Fleury, 1871b : 286)

They are not only similar in (self-referential) style and content, but they are both obviously concerned with 'clearing confusion.' This is *culture* applied to written language.

[16] Ironically, this is precisely the passage Lawrence Venuti cites as evidence of Arnold's 'domesticating' approach (Venuti, 1995: 107-20).

In response, Newman unpacked the implicit territorial analogy, redolent of the rather hackneyed opposition of French and English styles of landscape gardening: "Picturesqueness is not Stately, Wild Beauty is not to be confounded with Elegance: a Forest has its swamps and brushwood, as well as its tall trees." (Newman, 1861 : 5)

Arnold's approach to translation, then, was firmly rooted in an idea derived from French *culture*, which was itself derived to a very great extent from translation. The French language taught in the *école nationale*, for example, was implicitly the result of a standardisation project that had Latin *version* as its foundation stone. Think, for example, of the role of the *belles infideles* in the creation of the *Académie française* and, in turn, of their translations of Cicero in the cultivation of the idea of *culture*. In a broad theoretical sense, even by the early eighteenth century, standard literary French had come to be considered as the universal language of translation. It had replaced Latin precisely because it had assimilated into itself, by translation, everything that Latin could say. It was this process that had made French what it was: a language that rendered clear and broadly accessible to a modern rationalist society what had previously been obscure and impenetrable to all but an elite. Julie Candler Hayes provides us with Claude-Pierre Goujet as an example of an early proponent of this metanarrative:

> Goujet takes for granted that "content" can be extracted and transferred from one language to another without significant loss […]. The reflection on the advantages of reading in translation leads Goujet to announce the second motivation for offering his project: "To honor our nation by displaying its literary riches; by demonstrating that there is no aspect of literature, science, history or the arts that has not only been carefully cultivated in France, but treated in our language". Looking back to French literary glories of the previous century, Goujet proclaims that French has taken the place of Latin as "the universal language of Europe". French has incorporated the riches of other languages into itself, both through translation and through creative emulation […] Goujet's historical consciousness is intimately linked to his desire to set forth rules and systems […]. The gradual articulation of such rules indicates the arrival of French as an international language, as a machine through which everything may be translated. (Hayes, 2009 : 238-9)

But it was not just a matter of theory. The grammar exercises in the provincial primary schools were the practical offshoots of the *version* exercises in the *lycée*. Renée Balibar tells us :

> Lorsque les textes des lectures, exercices, exemples de grammaire et de rhétorique, étaient enseignés dans les petites classes des lycées, c'était comme préparation à des études franco-latines. Leur caractère artificiel était ouvertement rapporté à l'apprentissage de la traduction. […] Les mêmes textes une fois transférés dans l'enseignement monolingue ont changé d'aspect. […] Leur apparition semblait inconditionnelle, leur pouvoir d'expression absolu, leur logique indiscutable. L'immense majorité des Français qui ne pouvait penser ni au latin ni aux langages maternels pour faire ses devoirs, recevait le français des manuels comme une seconde nature, ou plutôt comme le seul langage naturel, le premier naturel, de la communauté française.
> (Balibar, 1999 : 284)

More than this, as strange as it might sound, the *version* exercise – the translation of a text into prescriptive standard French prose – had actually been maintained in the monolingual primary school and had retained some of the pre-eminence it enjoyed in the Latin-centred *lycée* as a mechanism and a trope of cognitive transformation. As such it was perhaps even more analogous to *défrichement* than the other grammar exercises:

> Parmi les devoirs rassemblés à l'Exposition [universelle de Paris] de 1878, beaucoup s'intitulent bizarrement pour un Français d'aujourd'hui, « traduction », « traduction en prose » : ce sont des transformations d'énoncés pris dans Boileau, La Fontaine, Rabelais, et récrit dans « l'ordre direct », c'est à dire dans l'ordre requis par la théorie grammaticale : sujet – verbe – complément d'objet – complément circonstanciel. (Balibar, 1999 : 280)

With the advent of the Third Republic, however, the natural superiority of French was called into question by a new generation of comparative linguists. Chief amongst the relativists was Michel Bréal, translator of Franz Bopp and the pioneer of French Semantics. Bréal presented an explicit vision of '*l'école qui tienne au sol*',

and debunked the widespread notion that local dialects were debased versions of French:

> Bréal, comparatiste, professeur au Collège de France et membre du Grand Conseil de l'Instruction Publique, publie en 1872 *Quelques mots sur l'Instruction publique en France* : dans cet ouvrage […] il revient sur les patois. […] Bréal y voit « des dialectes non moins anciens, non moins réguliers que le français proprement dit, lequel, pour avoir été le dialecte de l'Ile-de-France, est devenu la langue littéraire de notre pays. » (Branca, 1979 : 22)

Such a vision led to the introduction of a teaching practice in provincial primary schools which replaced the latent influence of Latin and the strange monolingual translation exercises with actual bilingual translations from local dialects into French, which were explicitly modelled on Latin *version*. Branca tells us:

> [Les provençalistes] vont alors tenter d'orienter dans un sens nouveau cet enseignement comparé. […] Il faut […] trouver un exercice qui fournisse un modèle, un appui aux élèves et une norme de correction au maître. Un exercice surtout où les élèves soient obligés de mener une recherche active. Aurouze songe à *la version,* qui permet de comparer deux langues et de regrouper tous les exercices autour d'un texte. […] Le plus célèbre de ces provençalistes fut Joseph Lhermite […]. Il avait publié en 1876 une anthologie des poètes provençaux qui devait servir de recueil de versions pour l'enseignement du français en Provence. En 1911 parut *La Lionide*, poème en langue provençale, préfacé par Mistral et Barrès et destiné à servir d'épopée à usage scolaire. (Branca, 1979 : 61)

Lhermite, going by his nom de plume, Savinian, became identified as the leading light in the so-called "Savinian method": a didactic strategy which, as Jacques Chaurand explains (Chaurand, 1985 : 342), insisted upon initially teaching rural primary school children in their native dialects, rather than in French.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the project of nationalist *défrichement* had been abandoned by this switch to pedagogic *déchiffrement*. On the contrary, it was the dialects and not French that were to be 'deciphered', and the basic idea was to render the process more effective. Even in the most sentimentally pro-dialect statements, the goal of making the French territory more

productive is implicit. Maurice Barrès, in his prefatory letter to Savinian in the bilingual edition of *La Lionide*, says:

> Sous le prétexte de faire des citoyens français, chaque jour on détruit ce qu'il y a sans doute de meilleur chez nous, nos petits paysans. On entend partout se plaindre que nos campagnes sont délaissées. Peut-il en être autrement ? On s'attache comme à plaisir, à relâcher, à briser tous les liens qui rattachent aujourd'hui l'enfant – et, demain, l'homme à sa terre.
> (Barrès in Savinian, 1911 : xi)

What is more, the reason for the increased efficacy of this method for disseminating a pure form of standard French was conceived in terms that were specifically linked to a new interest in translation theory. Specifically, the desire was to reduce linguistic 'interference'.

> [L]es deux systèmes doivent coexister parallèlement et intégralement sans interférer. D'un côté on corrige les gasconismes pour faire plus français, de l'autre on vitupère contre les francismes pour conserver plus purs gascon ou provençal. L'hostilité à l'égard du français régional est explicite chez Charles Brun qui écrit qu'en dehors de la méthode savinienne, l'enfant « n'arrivera à posséder qu'un 'français régional', c'est-à-dire, en somme un patois » (Chaurand, 1985 : 343)

In fact, even Bréal hints that the whole point of the *version* exercise is to extract the pupil from his local culture. A kind of cultural translation of the individual, which seems benign when referring to the study of Latin, but which, when transferred to the study of French by *patoisant* students, carries serious colonial implications along precisely the lines Derrida suggests:

> Le profit inestimable qui réside dans l'étude d'une langue […], c'est qu'elle dépayse l'esprit et l'oblige à entrer dans une autre manière de penser et de parler. Chaque construction, chaque règle grammaticale qui s'éloigne de l'usage de notre langue doit être pour l'élève une occasion de réfléchir. (Bréal, 1872 : 164) (my emphasis)

The *dépaysement* that Bréal refers to, however, is implicitly supposed to pre-empt a *repaysement*, if you like, a synthetic reconstruction of a new mental *pays* – on

the same lexical terrain as the old one – in the act of recreating a text. These kinds of statements hint at the influence of an embryonic translation theory with both cultural and epistemological elements. One might even be tempted to suggest that there is an analogical link being made here between an implicit deverbalisation (for the sake of reverbalisation) and an implicit *défrichement* (clearing terrain for the sake of cultivation).

Finally, the late nineteenth century saw the innovation of at least five new academic subjects in France, all of which were reliant on a marked increase in translation activity between European modern languages, namely Comparative Linguistics, Semantics, Stylistics, Anthropology and Sociology. I would argue that these are the direct antecedents of contemporary Translation Studies. There is an almost circular line of causality involved: increased intertranslation of European scientific discourses leads to an increased interest in metacultural and metalinguistic fields of study, which in turn leads to European Translation Studies.

3. Aftermath[17]

Some questions need to be asked. Why has European translation studies had so little to say about the internal delimitations of linguistic territorial boundaries? By which I mean to say, why does it pay relatively so little attention to 'translations' between so-called 'variations'? How, in turn, does this relate to the subject's own conceptions of the internal and external limits of its own research field? Why, for example, did Antoine Berman never explore the question of the internal *étranger* in any detail, despite the fact that at the same time as researching *l'Epreuve de l'étranger* (1984) he was translating Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen : the modernization of rural France* (1983) – a text which, as we have seen, focuses very heavily on the project of territorial transformation pre-empted by aggressive linguistic standardisation policies in rural schools? This seems a particularly

[17] Etymologically, 'aftermath' refers to the second crop of hay (the *arrière-foin*) that grows in late summer after the first mowing. (cf. Trainor, 2011 : 102-3.)

strange oversight when we consider how readily Weber seems to employ arguments related to cultural translation theory:

> A word calls up an image, or a whole covey of images, and there can be serious problems of adjustment when a word familiar in one's own speech carries quite different connotations in another—as was the case, among others, with the word *rentier*, which in the south denoted not a man who drew a rent and lived on it, but a man who paid it. Even on the level of sheer practicality, difficulties of mental adjustment may arise when an object endowed with a particular gender or personality in one frame of mind has to be given another in translation. Gaston Bonheur cites a striking illustration of this problem involving the river Aude. In the local patois the river was treated, not as an object, but as a person. The article was accordingly never employed in referring to it: one went to Aude, or said that Aude was high, that Aude growls, and so forth. A whole mentality had to be bent for a small article to be added. Small wonder children and adults both had difficulty in coping with a language that was not only alien in itself but also represented an alien vision. (Weber, 1976 : 93) (my emphases)

Comparing the underlined parts of this extract with the corresponding parts in Berman and Géniès's French version, we might be led to conclude that not only did Berman have a blind spot to this kind of 'internal foreignness' on a historical level, but on a practical level he also seems to have been inclined (hypocritically enough) to eradicate such internally problematic aspects when actually translating into French:

> Un mot évoque une image, ou un groupe d'images, et on peut rencontrer de sérieuses difficultés quand un mot familier dans votre propre langue comporte des connotations toutes différentes dans une autre ; c'était le cas, par exemple, du mot *rentier*, qui, dans le Sud, ne désignait pas un homme qui avait une rente et en vivait mais celui qui devait la payer. Même au niveau de la pure pratique, des problèmes d'ajustement mental peuvent surgir quand un objet doté d'un genre ou d'une personnalité particuliers dans une langue en reçoit d'autres par la traduction. Gaston Bonheur en cite un exemple frappant à propos de la rivière Aude. Dans le patois local, la rivière n'était pas traitée comme un objet, mais comme une personne. On n'employait pratiquement jamais l'article défini à son propos : on allait à Aude, on disait qu'Aude était haute, qu'Aude grognait, et ainsi de suite. Il fallut un changement de mentalité total pour qu'on ajoute un petit article au nom de la rivière. Il n'est pas étonnant que les enfants et les adultes aient eu des difficultés à employer une langue qui n'était pas

> seulement étrangère en elle-même, mais qui présentait aussi une vision du monde étrangère. (Weber, 1983 : 143–4) (my emphases)

To treat the underlined phrases one by one: the first, 'a whole covey of images,' is an emphatic, colourful and pointedly 'rural' noun phrase which sets the tone for a rhetorically charged paragraph. The central word is cognate with modern French *couvée*: 'a batch of eggs'. The French is much less commonly used in such a figurative way, of course, but *un groupe d'images* is a very diluted translation, which fails to capture the reflexive effects of a word which itself calls up a whole covey of images. Especially in the absence of an intensifier like the original 'whole' (*tout un groupe*, for example, would have been slightly closer), the French sounds much more cold, flat, abstract and scientific.

The second phrase, 'one frame of mind,' has become *une langue*. Weber's principle preoccupation in this passage is to hammer home a cultural-epistemological point (possibly linked to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis). It is very important that the French translation waters down the rhetorical effect of the repetition of mental references in this sentence whilst tidying up the logic.

'Accordingly never' is both categorical and an explicit claim that the language differences were the direct result of an extant cultural personification, (i.e. the local 'frame of mind'). The French *pratiquement jamais* introduces a weakening modality and does away with the explicit causal anaphora. The translators appear to want generally to dilute the rhetoric and specifically to correct Weber's categorical assertion.

'Bent' replaced with *changement* and the addition of *au nom de la rivière* involve what Berman elsewhere calls *clarification*[18]. The language is both less markedly metaphorical and less elliptical.

Finally, and perhaps most damningly, 'coping with a language' has become *employer une langue*. This is a very deformative bit of (meta)translation. The choice of verb badly skews the connotations attached to its thematic object ('a language' / *une langue*), which is implicitly the target language of the present translation: Standard Metropolitan French. The connotations of the original verb

[18] A. Berman, 1999, *La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du lointain*, Paris, Seuil.

are clearly negative: any object of the verb 'to cope with' is implicitly problematic and potentially threatening; whereas any object of the verb *employer* is implicitly useful and potentially valuable. The reader therefore infers from the original that the 'difficulty' arises from the problematic language (French), whereas the French version implies that the plural *difficultés* arise from problematic local language cultures which render people incapable of properly using a useful tool.

Not only does this translation flatten out the rhetorical effect of the original with a generally more measured and modalised approach, but crucially it also undermines the reflexive (metalinguistic) elements (like 'a whole covey of images'). The most worrying aspect is its implicit desire to correct Weber and to overturn the relatively negative portrayal of the French language in the original, to the extent that it reads like a deliberate act of ideological naturalisation on the part of the translators, one of whom forged a career (and almost defined a discipline) based on denouncing precisely this kind of thing.

But Weber's argument still manages to snake its way through the French terrain. Enforced translation of the local dialects into French produced a normalisation of cognitive geography. Seen in the historical context of a new unifying, transformative, expansionist and capitalist[19] vision of land-use, the deliberate *dépaysant* 'bending' of a mentality can literally be called *territorial translation*. To understand the psycho-social mechanisms via which such a 'translation' might be propagated beyond the standardising institutions – and more generally to inform our understanding of translation as a mimetic sociological mechanism – we would be well advised to look back at the work of Gabriel Tarde: a man who, after all, had first-hand experience of its mind-bending effects.

[19] Tobacco production is a particularly clear case of capitalist land use. Clearing forests for tobacco plantations was highly prevalent in the Dordogne department where Tarde was raised. The colonialist nature of this enterprise was made explicit in pamphlets with titles like: *Projet d'établissement de colonies agricoles pour la culture du tabac sur le sol français, pour occuper des enfants abondonnés et les classes pauvres de la société ; moyens économiques pour arriver à défricher les landes et les bruyères, par Michon fils,* Paris : impr. De N. Chaix, 1849.

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