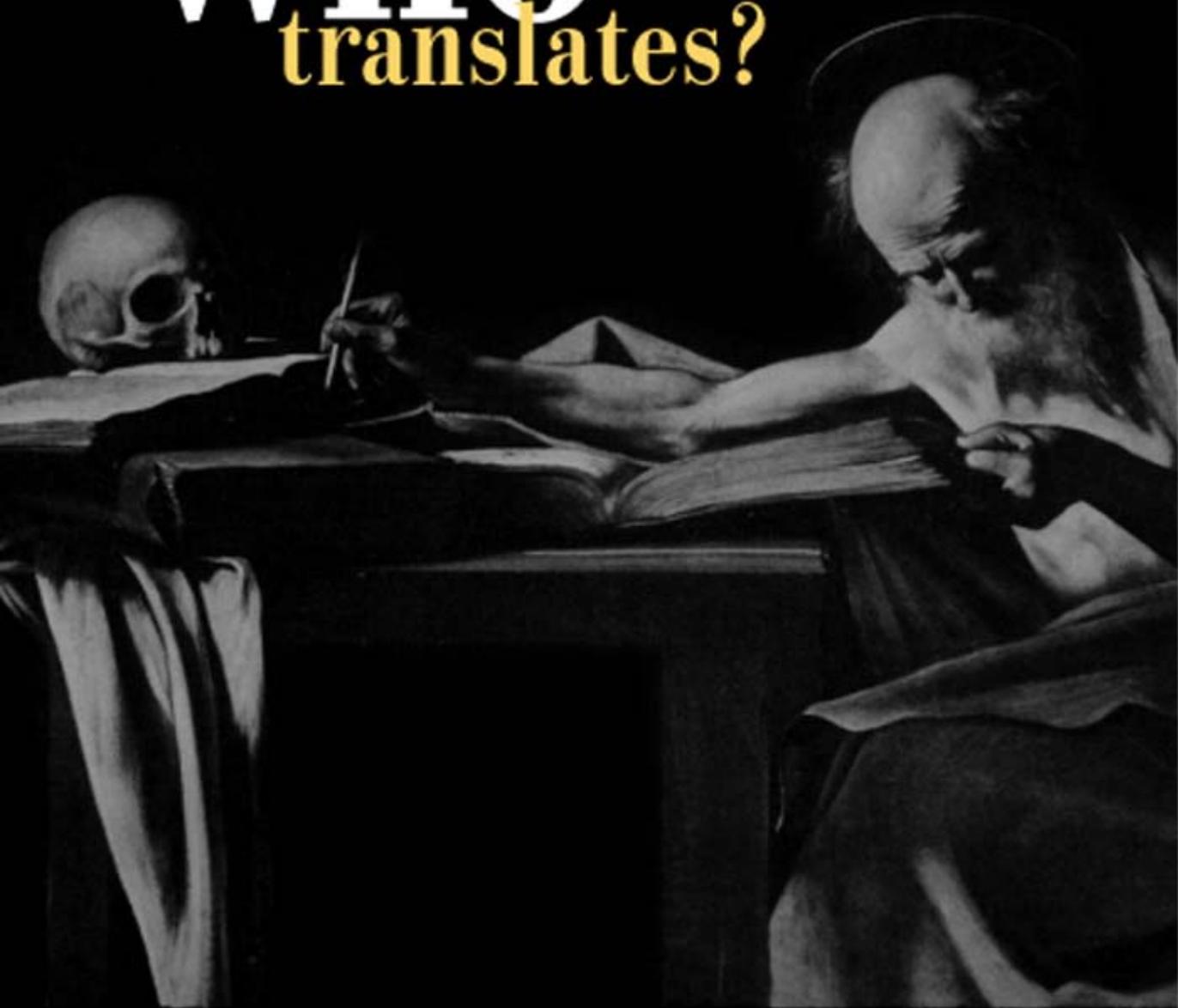


who translates?



*translator subjectivities
beyond reason*

douglas robinson

Who Translates?

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Who Translates?

Translator Subjectivities Beyond Reason

Douglas Robinson

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

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For information, address State University of New York Press,
State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y., 12246

Production by Kelli Williams
Marketing by Dana E. Yanulavich

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Robinson, Douglas.

Who translates? : translator subjectivities beyond reason / Douglas
Robinson.

p.cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7914-4863-0 (alk. paper)—ISBN 0-7914-4864-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Translating and interpreting. 2. Subjectivity. I. Title.

P306 .R644 2001
418'.02—dc21

00-057354

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Acknowledgments

Here are some of the people who contributed to whatever kind of “success” this book ends up having out there in the real world: Bill Kaul, Joanna Sheldon, Bob Ashley, Fred Will, Anthony Pym, Daniel Simeoni, Marcella Alohalani Boido, Michael Cronin, Sean Golden, the participants in the translation colloquium at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona where I presented some of these ideas in March 1997, Don Robinson, Don Kartiganer, Dena Shunra, Jussara Simões, Chris DeSantis, Marilyn Gaddis Rose and the four other unnamed readers who read the manuscript for SUNY Press (Marilyn twice) and made useful comments. James Peltz at SUNY Press continued to believe in the project over the long haul, and for that I am grateful.

Bill Kaul says he thinks Shakespeare’s spirit probably helped me some too. But then he’s been wrong before.

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Introduction: Who Translates?

Preliminary Questions

Who translates?

Silly question: the translator translates. The translator is s/he who translates. Translating is what is done by the translator.

What could be simpler?

But read through the following exchange, taken off the translators' online discussion forum LANTRA-L:

PAUL MERRIAM: The American Translator's Association has in their Translators' Code of Professional Conduct and Business Practices in part 1A: "I will endeavor to translate with utmost accuracy and fidelity, so that I convey to the readers of the translation the same meaning and spirit the original conveyed to me." As I read this, if the original was sexist, the translation should be as well. I don't see any problem, however, with getting with the client and making a new product. (Isn't this called "localization"?)

CARLOS MAYOR: I agree with what someone said about changing examples in a text so that people featured in them are not WASP every time, *if and only if* the customer agrees. Let's not forget translating can look like writing, but it's not.

DOUG ROBINSON: Translating IS writing. When I translate I sit at the computer and form sentences in my head and my fingers move across the keyboard and words appear on the screen. Same thing I

do when I “write”—i.e., write “original” things, or write postings to lantra. There are differences, of course—my imagination is more constrained by someone else’s words when I translate than when I write articles or books or postings to lantra—but they aren’t absolute. My imagination has to be hard at work when I translate, too; and since I am choosing the target-language words, everything I write has to be filtered through my experience, my interpretations.

ALEX RYCHLEWSKI: That’s a very interesting and largely pragmatic approach to translating. My only quarrel with it (well, I had to quarrel with *something,* didn’t I?) is that you seem to minimize the constraint of sticking to the other person’s words when translating. This constraint is in fact terribly weighty.

GISSELLE BERTOLA: Don’t you think that “sticking to the other person’s words” is the same thing as “let’s not forget translating can look like writing, but it’s not”? If you have to stick to the other person’s words then it’s not writing, and here comes the ability of us translators to make it look as if it was written by the original author. So, is it writing or not?;) What I usually do is to sit down in front of my computer and let my imagination flow just like Doug’s, but it’s not me who’s *writing,* it’s (or at least I try to be) the original author (my own thoughts don’t play).

(From the LANTRA-L archives for August 14–16, 1996)

Who translates here? Who is the translator who translates? Is the translator a writer? Why or why not? What does the translator become if s/he is or is not a writer? If it is essential for the translator not to be a writer, does the translator then simply disappear, or become transparent or empty?

Gisselle Bertola writes “it’s not me who’s *writing*”—what does this mean, exactly? What does she mean by “me,” and what does she mean by “*writing*”? By “*writing*” she presumably does not mean typing, since her body is almost certainly doing that (but does “me” mean her body?). She means something else, something transcendental, ideal, mental, something creative in a quasimystical sense. The original author writes through her typing. Writing is done by writers, not translators—even, it seems, when what a given translator is typing, and to all outward appearances writing, is a translation. Does this mean that the writer translates too—through the translator? Writers are those who write, but it does not follow from morphological parallelism that translators are those who translate. Writers write and writers translate.

Translators type. Translators serve as “borrowed bodies” for the writing of writers. But if this is the case, who is the “I” that, as Gisselle writes, tries to “be” the original author? Presumably the translator; but that translator clearly stands in a very problematic relation to the author s/he is trying to become. “My own thoughts don’t play”—except in their attempts to become someone else?

In my own contribution to the debate I argue a position that is philosophically opposed to Gisselle’s, and one that at first blush appears radical: the translator is a writer. The translator does not become *the* writer; s/he becomes *a* writer, one very like the original author, but only because they both write, and in much the same way, drawing on their own experiences of language and the world to formulate effective discourse. This position appears radical, and draws somewhat uneasy responses from Alex and Gisselle, because it seems to jettison the traditional safeguard of equivalence: a translator who is a writer might just write any old thing, without subordinating his or her imagination to the authority of the original text. “My imagination has to be hard at work when I translate, too; and since I am choosing the target-language words, everything I write has to be filtered through my experience, my interpretations.” In the normative tradition of Western translation theory, this sounds like giving the translator license to impose his or her experiences and interpretations onto everything s/he “writes”. . . or translates . . . or writes/ translates.

But all you have to do to convert my apparently radical position into the more traditional claims Paul and Carlos and Alex and Gisselle are making is to add subordination to the original author’s authority. “My imagination has to be hard at work *in the original author’s service*; and since I am choosing the target-language words *in the original author’s service*, everything I write *in the original author’s service* has to be filtered through my experience, my interpretations.” Put this way, my claim is perfectly orthodox.

Even so, my idea of writing/translating being filtered through the translator’s experience and interpretations still fills other translators and translation scholars with unease.

Who translates? Who is the subject of translation? Is the translator allowed to be a subject, to have a subjectivity? If so, what forces are active within it, and to what extent are those forces channeled into it from without? That is the main concern of this book—with special focus on the translator’s selfhood or individual agency in chapter five.

In virtually the same keystrokes as my paean to the translator’s experiences and interpretations I also work in what seems to be a very different direction: I deliberately empty the act of writing (whether by

an “original author” or a translator) of authority, specifically the authority of intentionality. “When I translate I sit at the computer and form sentences in my head and my fingers move across the keyboard and words appear on the screen.” This would make of both the translator and the writer automata; of their writing, automatic writing. They move their fingers and words appear. But whose words? Whose intentionality controls the act of writing?

The traditional wisdom would tell us that the author’s intentionality controls both: the author as sovereign subject intends the original text, and leaves that intention lying immanent in the text; the translator occupies that intention and “writes” the target text—and is a “writer” only in this sense.

But what of writers who claim to be inspired by God, or the muse? Must we discredit their claims? They say they were inspired, they say they surrendered their will to the speaking of a higher voice from within or above, but of course *we know* that that is merely a figure of speech, a metaphor, a primitive or perhaps even superstitious way of saying that they were geniuses whose creative subjectivity so far exceeds our own as translators that we might even be inclined to believe them when they speak of divine inspiration—if we didn’t already know better.

And if we don’t take this demystifying rationalist tack, must we then think of these “inspired” authors as translators too? Just as we are possessed by the spirit (or intention, or meaning) of the original author, they too were possessed by the spirit of something higher, a god or a muse. In translating them we are simply reenacting the spirit-channeling that created the source text in the first place.

Or is it enough to say that the intentionality of any piece of writing comes from *somewhere*, we know not where? Writing about the translator/writer as personally and experientially creative, I seemed in the first part of that 1996 lantran post close to the spirit of my book *The Translator’s Turn*; writing about the writer/translator as automaton, I seemed in its second part closer to the spirit of *Who Translates?* Reading those words today, just a few months after they were written, I honestly don’t know where they came from and how such different conceptions of the translator managed to “possess” my writing fingers in such rapid succession.

Who translates? Who writes? Who controls the act of writing/translating? Whose voice speaks when “we” write or translate?

And what of those translators whose writings/translations have also been regarded as divinely inspired—indeed, more inspired than the originals? The Hebrew Bible was written by many hands, over

many centuries; the Septuagint, according to the legend propagated by Philo Judaeus and accepted by every major Church Father except Jerome until the Renaissance, was written by God Himself through the collective instrument of 72 translators in 72 cells—proof positive of the inspired nature of what they wrote being that all 72 translations were verbatim identical. The monks were God’s automata; their writing/translating was automatic. They channeled the Septuagint to the Hellenized Jewish community in Alexandria—not from the *human* original authors, but from the divine one. Jerome ridicules this notion, which we will be taking a closer look at in chapter two, in 401 in his *Praefatio in Pentateuchem*:

I know not who was the first lying author to construct the seventy cells at Alexandria, in which they were separated and yet all wrote the same words, whereas Aristeeas, one of the bodyguard of the said Ptolemy, and long after him Josephus have said nothing of the sort, but write that they were assembled in a single hall and conferred together, not that they prophesied. For it is one thing to be a prophet, another to be an interpreter. (Moses Hadas’ translation, in Robinson *Western* 30)

And ironically enough, the same fate befell Jerome himself: the Bible translation he cobbled together from existing Latin versions by revising and checking them against the original languages became for the medieval Church not a Latin translation of the Bible but *the Bible*. Erasmus was attacked by conservative churchmen in 1518 for making a new Latin translation of the Bible from the original Greek—as if Jerome’s Vulgate were nothing! Assaulted in print by the Scottish theologian Edward Lee, Erasmus wrote (an open letter, probably with the idea of having it published, which he did) to his friend Maarten Lips:

Meanwhile he dreams up the idea [as if Lee had invented what the Church had been saying for centuries!] that the Latin translator [Jerome] produced what we now have under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, though Jerome himself in his preface openly testifies that each translator renders to the best of his ability what he is capable of understanding. Otherwise, Jerome himself would be grossly irreligious, in that he is not afraid to find fault sometimes with what we have in this [the Vulgate] edition. (R.A.B. Mynori and D.E.S. Thomson’s translation, in Robinson *Western* 67)

Just a few years later, in the 1520s, Martin Luther too drew conservative fire for “adding” a word to his 1522 German New Testament that was not in Jerome’s Latin. “Adding to” or “subtracting from” the Bible in a German or other vernacular translation constituted distorting the

Vulgate; and distorting the Vulgate was distorting the Bible. In his 1530 *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen* Luther defended his translation by reference to Jerome's own sense-for-sense translation method, the "modern" rationalist notion that "the Bible" consists not of divinely inspired Latin or Hebrew/Aramaic/Greek words but of transcendental meanings, and noted that Jerome faced the same kind of criticism in his day as well:

They say when you work in public, everybody's a critic, and that's certainly been true for me. All these people who can't even talk right, let alone translate, try to teach *me* how to do it! And if I'd asked them how to translate the first two words of Matthew 1:1, *Liber Generationis*, not one of them could've said jack, yet these fine journeymen would pronounce judgment on the whole Bible. St. Jerome faced the same thing when he did his Latin translation: everybody knew better than him how to do it, and people bitched and moaned about his work as weren't fit to shine his shoes. It takes a heap of patience to try to do any public service; everybody's got to be Mister Knowitall and get everything bass-ackwards, teaching everyone and knowing nothing. That's just the way they are; a leopard can't change his spots. (My translation, in Robinson *Western* 85)

Note, however, that like his critics Luther too quotes here from "the Bible" not in the original Greek but in Jerome's Latin: *Liber Generationis*.

The Rheims-Douai Bible, the first full English translation approved by the Catholic Church, was a literal translation from the Vulgate; and with the notable exception of Erasmus, Catholic translators continued to translate literally from the Vulgate rather than the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts until the twentieth century. Jerome channeled the Source Author of the Bible, and so displaced the "originals" that he himself so venerated. The intensely and irascibly subjective translator who gleefully itemized all the mistakes made by the Seventy became the voice of the Lord for well over a thousand years.

Who translates, then? God? The Holy Spirit?

Or do we have to discount these stories too, scoff at them just as Jerome did, laugh (un)easily at them, call them naive superstitions that mask a more obvious truth (because more rational, and hence more in line with our own belief structures): that Jerome submitted his subjectivity to the authority not of some supernatural being (as if!) but of the original texts?

And if we do that, in what sense are we not merely secularizing the notion of channeling? Jerome channels the Source Author of the Bible; Jerome channels the source authors of the Bible. The verb "channels" remains tendentious in that latter proposition, because it continues to imply some sort of spiritual or mystical access to discarnate sources of

meaning; but secularize “channels” one tiny step further and say that Jerome lets the source authors of the Bible speak through him, and hardly anyone would argue.

Channeling

That the territory loosely marked off by this series of questions is a heavily invested one for translators, and for translation theorists, should be clear. The socioemotional origins of that investment in medieval dogma and ancient mystical taboos were central concerns in my earlier books *The Translator’s Turn* and *Translation and Taboo*, respectively; I am not going to be exploring those origins further here. What I propose to do instead is to map out the complexly crisscrossing byways of thought about the translator’s normative or “desirable” subordinated or instrumentalized subjectivity, through the powerful analogue I raised above, channeling.

What forces or voices or intentionalities or subjectivities—what “spirits” or “ghosts” or “demons”—does the translator channel? Who (all) is the translator when s/he translates? How does the translator negotiate the different types and conceptions of channeling in translating, and in presenting him/herself as a translator? Just what sorts of channel is the translator allowed to be, encouraged to be, expected to be, required to be? Are any specific forms of channeling expressly off-limits to translators?

Presumably a translator in the present who claimed to be psychically channeling the dead spirit of Homer, for example, and thus to know exactly what Homer wanted to say in the target language, would be looked on with a certain amount of suspicion or contemptuous amusement. And yet the famous debate in the early 1860s between Francis Newman and Matthew Arnold over the former’s Homer translations revolves around almost identical claims to know exactly what Homer wanted to say in English—only in a slightly secularized form that make those claims palatable to a rationalist age.

This is not, let me make plain at the outset, a book about translation as spirit-channeling. It is a book about the complex forces impinging, from “within” and “without” (as if we knew what that distinction meant), on the translator’s subjectivity. My argument is grounded historically, specifically in chapter two on the most famous “spirit-channeled” translations I know of, the Septuagint, the Book of Mormon, and St. Paul’s call for spirit-channeled interpreters in 1 Corinthians 14. I do believe, in other words, that some conception of translation as spirit-channeling

lies historically behind many of our deepest and most normative beliefs about translation, especially the insistence that it is the translator's task to step aside and let the source author speak through him or her. But I am not interested in developing that historical argument at full length here; as I say, my main focus in the book is not really spirit-channeled translation. Spirit-channeling will operate primarily as a heuristic, or as I say in the title of part one a "model," a collection of recorded or reported mystical experiences that we can employ metaphorically to complicate our sense of what is going on in the "other-directed" act of translation:

- philosophically, psychoanalytically, and politically in part two through explorations of the intertwining of ideology and translation in Freud's *Wolf Man* and Heidegger's *Der Satz vom Grund* (chapter three), and in two Finnish texts based on *King Lear*, a translation and a poem, and a reading of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Marx on translation, spirits, and ghosts (chapter four); and
- psychosocially and socioeconomically in part three, through investigations into the multiplicity of subjective agents in the individual, drawing on the work of Jacques Lacan and Daniel Dennett (chapter five); and through explorations of Adam Smith's "invisible hand," the mysterious force that guides economic systems, to exfoliate a postrational theory of economic agents (chapter six).

Another way of putting this is that I'm much more interested in using the notion of spirit-channeled translation to ask *questions* about translation than in building a coherent historical argument about displacements of mystical thinking in translation across the centuries. My title is a question: who translates? And this introduction in particular, and more generally the book as a whole, are strings of unpacked versions of that question. Rhetorically, of course, questions complicate existing answers; questions are a theorist's most powerful weapons against petrified assumptions and entrenched dogmas. What is *really* going on here? "A person who possesses the art of questioning," as Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, thinking of his own Heidegger-influenced hermeneutical practice, "is a person who is able to prevent the suppression of a question by the dominant opinion" (quoted in Fiumara 37).

But there is also a potential hitch here. Gemma Corradi Fiumara reminds us in *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* that "it might also be the case that the dominant role of the question can suppress any kind of understanding that goes beyond the limited amount

it prepares us to receive" (37). In other words, the idiot questioner role, one of my personal rhetorical favorites—"But why isn't the emperor wearing any clothes?"—may be conditioned by the same will to power as the calm and confident knower role to which it poses a pointed challenge. By questioning established answers I open up new possibilities for seeing; but the specific questions I ask also close down other possibilities for seeing, simply by dint of their being *directed*. A dialogue (talking *and* listening, as Fiumara would insist) is far more fruitful for this sort of open questioning-and-answering than a monologue; and while an academic book is a difficult place to stage a dialogue, I will be insisting throughout, even if only implicitly, that this book should be thought of as merely a single utterance in an ongoing dialogue that also involves you talking and me listening. And in any case my revisions of this book between "completing" it and publishing it have been conditioned by repeated listenings to the suggestions and criticisms of readers (this paragraph and the one before it, for example, were suggested by a middle-aged undergraduate student who read the book for me).

As I interrogate the notion of channeling analogically, then, moving into the operation of ideology in part two and of inner demons and economic agents in part three, I will be pushing it way beyond the popular image of the psychic medium twitching in a trance, possessed by the spirit of a dead person. But in fact this extended use of the word "channel" has strong precedents in the channeling literature. The paranormal use of the word was coined by the twentieth-century American psychic Edgar Cayce, who insisted that it not be thought of narrowly as contact between the living and the dead; as Henry Reed writes in *Edgar Cayce on Channeling Your Higher Self* (one of a series of books published by the Association for Research and Enlightenment, founded by Cayce himself and headed today by his grandson Charles Thomas Cayce):

A channeler receives something that might otherwise be invisible to others, shapes it into a transmittable form, and presents it to others. With our lives, for example, we make visible our thoughts and motivations.

A channel also involves a specific form of application. We may experience our love for a person in the form of good feelings. When we channel those feelings, however, they may manifest in something specific, such as making dinner for that person, or helping someone with a problem.

Channeling has the special implication of transmitting something from beyond the channeler's personal self. A channeler brings forth information that's not part of the channeler's own learning or experience. . . .

A channeler may receive communications from a disembodied spirit, from God, from an angel, from plants or animals. The channeler may simply have an intuition. The channeler may then transmit what's received verbally, in writing,

by painting or other artwork, by actions, through community work, or by a smile. The channeler may be asleep, in meditation, in a trance, or awake while channeling. (17)

“From the perspective of the Cayce material,” Reed continues, “the type of channeling that’s a fad today, the kind that’s shown on TV, is but one special instance of a very general phenomenon. Speaking with the voice of a spirit is only one example of channeling. . . . Every day, in countless ways, you and I are channels of spirit, of ideas, and of resources that come from beyond our conscious personalities” (18).

In this broad sense, clearly, translators are invariably, by definition, channels or channelers. Translators channel the words and ideas of their source authors. Indeed, as the wording of the ATA translator’s code (quoted above by Paul Merriam) makes clear, they channel the “spirit” of their source authors: “I will endeavor to translate with utmost accuracy and fidelity, so that I convey to the readers of the translation the same meaning and *spirit* the original conveyed to me.” As long as we read that “spirit” in a figurative or abstract sense, as long as we keep the supernatural out of it, this characterization of the profession is unlikely to raise eyebrows. But I do plan to raise some eyebrows, both by pushing dead metaphors like the ATA’s “spirit” heuristically into the realm of the supernatural and by expanding even Reed’s or Cayce’s broad conception of channeling into areas that they did not envision, especially ideology, the channeling of the political unconscious, in part two, and various fragmented agents in part three.

I’m going to be arguing, in fact, that translators channel a wide variety of Other voices, using “Other” in the broadest sense possible to include everything vaguely indicated by Henry Reed’s claim that “Every day, in countless ways, you and I are channels of spirit, of ideas, and of resources that come from beyond our conscious personalities.” Whatever seems to come to us from the outside, or from beyond the realm of our conscious awareness or control, is Other—even when, as for Jacques Lacan and other twentieth-century theorists of Otherness, it speaks to us from “inside our heads.” As we’ll see in chapter five, Lacan wants to draw clear distinctions among the various types of Otherness: the “objects” we choose, including love objects (other people and things as invested by and with our needs); idealized forms of our ego, or our “self” as ego-ideal, modeled on parents and other authority figures; and large social-unconscious forces such as nations, genders, races, classes, age groups, professions, political and economic systems, scholarly disciplines, metaphysical traditions, and so on. All of these Others come from outside but speak (to) us from the inside; and without

sticking to Lacan's typologies of Otherness (except briefly, heuristically, in chapter five) I want to explore the ways in which translators channel, and especially how translators become and remain and present themselves as translators by channeling, all these Others, all these becoming-internalized forces, all these voices outside-and-inside our heads.

Another way of putting all this is to say that I am interested in exploring the gray area between the translator as a rational, fully conscious subject who is completely in control of all his thoughts and actions (this rationalist ideal is normatively male) and the translator as a mystical void filled with other voices, a channel or medium for the speech of others. Both ideals exist for translation, often in the same breath, the same sentence. That they are radically opposed to each other should go without saying, but *has* gone without saying for a long, long time. One of the things that the rational translator-subject is supposed to control, in fact, is the interference of his own control in the process of channeling the source author directly and immediately to the target reader. I want to argue that this dualism, like most dualisms, is harmful and limiting for the study of translation; and that what Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* calls "spectrality" or "the logic of the ghost" (traced in some detail in chapter four) is a powerful crowbar for opening that dualism up to real-world complexity.

The forces that "shape" or "speak" or "wield" the translator, from within or without, have been one of the recurrent themes of my theoretical work over the past decade. The ideosomatics of *The Translator's Turn* was an exploration of the ideological regulation of individual behavior through the somatic imprinting of collective norms on the autonomic nervous system. The double binds that I elucidated in *Ring Lardner and the Other* and have been developing for translation studies and publishing elsewhere (one appears in chapter five, in somewhat fragmented form) are attempts to articulate the inward regulatory "speaking" of ideology, in all its paralyzing conflictuality, through our bodies—what I called in *Lardner* the "esemphonic" shaping of individual and collective behavior through the speaking-us of various sociopolitical Others. My tracing in *Translation and Taboo* of the displacements of taboo in the schizoid/ascetic/metempsychotic intellectual/religious traditions of the West was an attempt to narrow in on a single powerful strand of ideological regulation. My "abusanalysis" of translation in the "(Dis)Abusing Translation" chapter of *What Is Translation?*—my discussion of the dynastic culture of abuse in the context of Philip Lewis's Derridean concept "abusive fidelity"—was likewise an attempt to untangle the complex webs by which we are taught to submit to and

be shaped by abuse, both as abusers and as abuse victims (typically, and complexly, both at once).

And my initial interest in spirit-channeling as this book was taking shape in my mind derived from precisely this three-way isomorphism: the possession of channels by discarnate spirits, the possession of the translator by the source author, and the possession of ideological subjects by collective forces. The first had always seemed to me a rather boring fraud, not even worth looking into; the second, a normative idealization that represented everything I hated most about traditional assumptions, worth taking seriously only long enough to launch an effective counterattack. But since the third was one of my most abiding scholarly interests, the parallels between it and the other two made me take another look at them, and generated this book.

Rationalism, Pre- and Post-

In my subtitle I promise an investigation into “translator subjectivities beyond reason,” a phrase that does not seem at first particularly forthcoming. Beyond what reason? Are we talking irrationality? Irrationalism? Rationalism does mark anything beyond reason as irrational, and I have long been interested in that particular borderland, in its shifting landscapes, in the history of rationalist attempts to police it, in the rich history also of cop-eluding crossings. What it means to be “beyond reason” is always mind-numbingly contingent on a welter of conflicting factors and forces, some controlled by rationalist tradition, most not.

Rationalism is the dominant philosophical movement of Western civilization. Rationalism has shaped the West not only philosophically, of course, but politically, culturally, ideologically. Calling it a philosophical movement is in this sense misleading, as if it were merely a trend or camp of interest only to a few philosophy professors. Rationalism constitutes a kind of ideological operating system for the West, the internalized programming that provides norms and values for virtually every aspect of psychosocial life. Arising in ancient Greece, finding its first great proponents in Plato and Aristotle, and taking hold on a large social and political scale in classical Rome, it swept Europe in the Renaissance and after, becoming the dominant form of all thought, pushing mysticism to the peripheries in every way, branding it insanity, stupidity, evil, sin . . . until the primary forms of mysticism in our day have become schizophrenia, drug highs, and sex.

But in fact in our ideological climate, saturated by reason, it makes

no sense to speak of mystical experience at all; everything that bears any degree of thematic resemblance to mysticism comes to us down rationalist channels, so that numb unthinking mysticism becomes *irrational*, determined mystical resistance becomes *antirational*, a mystical past in our historical reconstructions becomes *prerational*, and our imagination of a utopian mystical future becomes *postrational*. Even our power to envision alternatives to rationalist life is handed to us by reason, decked out in dualism, lashed to the mast of logic.

And it is in this severely compromised sense, with only the most self-consciously hobbled attempt at an antirationalist myth—a fall from some golden age of mystical holism into reason's atomism, the glorious return of the golden age after the fall of reason—that I put forward my tentative speculations on “translator subjectivities beyond reason,” specifically pre- and postrationalist translator subjectivities. Was there ever a time when translators *preceded* reason? Perhaps; but if there was, we have no access to it. We can only imagine it, and that only by subtracting from what we know of translation today everything we associate with rationalist regimes: no analysis, no planning, no use of dictionaries, surrender to mystical forces coming from somewhere “outside” the reasoning mind.

And is there any realistic sense in which it is viable to speak of post-rationalist translation, or postrationalist translator subjectivities? The term taken at face value makes us think of a changing of the guard, an end to rationalism and a wholly new beginning, cleansed of all contaminating rationalist elements. A silly, puerile thought.

I intend pre- and postrationalist in more or less the same radically mixed and imperfect sense as postcolonial scholars speak of pre- and postcolonialism: not as pure states that ever did or could exist, but rather as imaginary ciphers that mark off the boundaries of what we thematize as reason and empire—which are, in any case, powerfully congruent terms, the one more philosophical, the other more political, but together forming a Janus mask of control, reason's face on the inside, empire's out. Certainly reason has never perfectly controlled any human activity; and in a strict sense that “failure” to achieve perfect rational control would make everything we do incipiently prerationalist and always already postrationalist. Even the present, in other words, can be construed as prerationalist (just before the onset of rational control) and postrationalist (just after the failure of rational control). In this perspective, pre- and postrationalist become shorthand for a mixed, compromised, impure environment, a hybrid of the controlled and the uncontrolled, the unified and the fragmented, the becoming-rational and the becoming-mystical.