Surface translation

The Contract of False Disguise [1]

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Humpty Dumpty and Hickory Dickory Dock emerge from their disguise into our linguistic consciousness.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle [2]

Résumé : À la différence de la traduction homophonique, terme qui, au sens large, s'applique à toute traduction cherchant à faire écho à la trame phonologique et phonétique du texte source, la traduction de surface semble avoir un objectif plus précis, celui d'un « faux déguisement ». Elle place le lecteur devant un amalgame linguistique qui cache (dissimule, masque) dans sa matière profonde un signifiant source, dont il produit un écho monstrueux. Monstrueux, hyperbolique, surdéterminée, le déguisement s'annonce « faux » dès le départ – un jeu révélé au préalable. Le texte source se transforme alors en objet de caricature, et finalement en noyau d'associations linguistiques insolites – signe grotesque et comique d'une régression cognitive et linguistique. En se référant à cinq poètes-traducteurs (Ernst Jandl, Howard Chace, Luis d'Antin van Rooten, Ormonde de Kay et John Hulme), ce chapitre propose une réflexion sur l'épistémologie comico-naïve qui conduit à cette pratique singulière de traduction, sur sa conceptualité (fortement analogue à celle du déguisement), et finalement sur ses fonctions caricaturales, grotesque et comiques.

1 Understanding surface translation

Scholarly reflection on 'surface translation' would do well, I believe, to launch from a characteristic of the practice that appears to have a high degree of presuppositional value. In my opening citation, Lecercle offers one that would appear acceptable with-

1. See also Fraser, Ryan, "Underground games: Surface translation and the grotesque", *TTR* 29 (2016): 2, p. 99-128.

2. Lecercle, Jean-Jacques, *The Violence of Language,* London/New York, Routledge, 1990, p. 71. See also J. J. Lecercle's chapter in this book.

out causing the least hesitation or qualm: the two surface translations in question are a type of physical dissimulation, of language disguise. Here, I believe, is a good place to start, for here there is already much to be said. A very specific type of understanding is reached between a reader and the more widely read and cited exemplars of surface translation: a contract of false disguise. [3] By the group of five poet-translators under examination in this article—Ernst Jandl [4], Howard Chace [5], Luis d'Antin van Rooten [6], Ormonde de Kay [7], and John Hulme [8]—source text phonations are not radically transformed as in conventional translation, but are instead materially overdetermined for the purpose of producing a disfigured facsimile that is telegraphed to the reader for immediate detection.

A contract of false disguise, I would argue, is sealed when a reader agrees to sensitize him- or herself to the creative potentialities of a language dissimulation always already detected, seen through. In the first part of this article, I will make some preliminary remarks about the type of epistemological process that appears to motivate surface translation, and then examine the conceptuality informing its method. Surface translation, it would seem, produces monstrous material amalgams that not only disguise source texts, but also caricature them. These amalgams, I will then argue in the second part, can overlay and invest source texts with new systems of signification, and even help the translator falsify entire contexts of poetic production. Finally, I will touch upon the ambivalent, grotesque-comic affect that is tapped by surface translation as it appeals to sub-conscious modes of language association, to what Jean-Jacques Lecercle calls "the remainder" [9], and what Arthur Koestler calls "underground games" [10].

2 "Surface translation": epistemology and disguise

Surface translation leverages an instinctual and pervasive language operation—the association of words by sound rather than meaning—for the purpose of creating an entirely unnatural and anomalous language art form. [11] None of the instinctual homophonic associations that we might produce in our waking and sleeping states would ever construct the type of extended and comprehensive transphonation observable in Jandl's version of Wordsworth's "My heart leaps up":

3. See Baker, Roger, *Drag,* London, Cassel, 1994, p. 14-15. First published as *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation*, London, Triton Books, 1968. I have Roger Baker to thank for the concept and the term. He uses it to characterize the postmodern 'drag queen' or performing female impersonator, who deliberately over-determines his female disguise for the purpose of being detected immediately by his audience.

4. Jandl, Ernst, *Sprechblasen*, Munich, Luchterhand, 1968. See also Dirk Weissmann's chapter in this volume.

5. Chace, Howard L, *Anguish Languish*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1956.

6. D'Antin van Rooten, Luis, *Mots D'Heures: Gousses, Rames: The D'Antin Manuscript*, New York, Grossman Publishers, 1967.

7. De Kay, Ormonde, *N'Heures Souris Rames: The Coucy Castle Manuscript*, New York, Clarkson N. Potter, 1980.

8. Hulme, John, *Mörder Guss Reims*: *From the Original Manuscript of Professor Leberwurst,* London/Sydney/Melbourne, Angus and Robertson, 1981. See also *Guillaume Chequespierre and the Oise Salon: An Anthology Selected & Edited by John Hulme,* London/Sydney/ Melbourne, Angus and Robertson, 1985. See also Camille Bloomfield's chapter in this book.

9. Lecercle, *op. cit.*

10. Koestler, Arthur, *The Act of Creation*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1964.

11. Brisset, Annie, "La traduction comme transformation para-doxale", *Texte*, vol. IV, p. 191-207, 1985.

mai hart lieb zapfen eibe hold
er renn bohr in sees kai
so was sieht wenn mai läuft begehen
so es sieht nahe emma mähen
so biet wenn ärschel grollt
ohr leck mit ei!
seht steil dies fader rosse mähen
in teig kurt wisch mai desto bier
baum deutsche deutsch bajonett schur alp eiertier [12]

Compare the English:

my heart leaps up when i behold
a rainbow in the sky
so was it when my life began
so is it now i am a man
so be it when i shall grow old
or let me die!
the child is father of the man
and i could wish my days to be
bound each to each by natural piety [13]

As a poet, Jandl experimented prolifically with verbal sound affinities, but only once, with this Wordsworth poem, did he create the specific form cited above. The poem was not chosen at random, I believe. Not only is it one of Wordsworth's most popular and quotable, but it is also about the naïve joy derived from asserting order upon nature's book—specifically, the child's delight in figuring out form from the confusion of sensory stimuli. Jandl invites the reader to do the same with his version, to detect Wordworth's original poem within a dissimulating confusion—this time artfully constructed—of languages. Jandl's version, it seems evident enough, demonstrates a comic-epistemological motivation of the same type that we find in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [14] when Bottom, as Pyramus, makes out the figure of his lover Thisbe in the darkness, [15] or in the ship scene toward the end of Rabelais's *Fourth Book*, where we find Gymnaste making toothpicks out of mastic twigs, Carpalim a tiny windmill out of a walnut, and Rhizotome a purse out of a tortoise shell. [16] The priority here is to re-live our primary experience of bringing the senses under rational control, and of ordering the chaos of nature's material offerings into discrete structures that have names and that serve. Both Wordsworth's poem and Jandl's version speak directly to this experience, as do the works of the other four translators in this study, all of

12. Jandl, *op. cit.* p. 51
13. *Ibid.*
14. Shakespeare, William, *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* 5.1.194-195, *in The Annotated* Shakespeare, New York, Greenwich House, p. 273.
15. Connor, Steven, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters, and other Vocalizations*, London, Reaktion Books, 2014.
16. Rabelais, François, *Quart livre, in* Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 687-688. First published as *Le quart livre des faicts et dicts heroiques du bon Pantagruel,* Paris, Michel Fezandat, 1552.

whom are preoccupied with the readily quotable verse forms, fairy tales, and school poetry of childhood and formative years. [17]

The concept of language disguise is strongly implied in Jandl's title: *Oberflächenübersetzung* ("surface translation"). If a text can be conceived as having a 'surface', it must necessarily have a 'depth' dimension as well. Consequently, if Jandl is proposing to limit his "trans-fer" (*Über-setzung*) to the text's "surface" (*Oberfläche*) exclusively (and to disregard its 'depths') then we must presume that these two dimensions have been split from each other in the poet's thinking, that they are capable of functioning independently from each other. At this point, there is but a small step to the more intriguing idea of a text's surface and depth functioning at cross-purposes with each other. If we remind ourselves that 'appearances' are traditionally ascribed to 'surfaces', and 'reality' to 'depths', then a summary implication from Jandl's title emerges: a text's 'appearance' (its 'surface') might be made to function at cross-purposes with its 'reality' (its 'depths'). And so we arrive at the idea of motivated physical dissimulation or disguise.

Discovering the nature of this dissimulation is a matter of following Jandl's metaphor further. It is safe to assume, first of all, that by the "surface" of the poem, he is referring to the memory of Wordworth's English language phonation—a phonetic articulation. This, presumably, is what he would wish to "transfer" over. As I have just argued, if there is a surface, there must be depth. This depth dimension, for its part, would have to encompass everything about the source poem that is not a simple phonetic articulation, but that is crucial in every other respect for making the source poem viable linguistically: the supports of English-language lexis, grammar, and graphology, as well as any discursive contextual support that might orient the poem's signification for an English speaker. In an "Oberflächenübersetzung", then, we would have to imagine that this phonatory surface could be prised away and held separate from all of the deeper supports just mentioned, context included. Then comes the transfer—Wordsworth's phonation is made explicit again in a bizarre iteration articulated by new and counterintuitive supports: words and small phrases selected from the German-language lexis according to their homophony with Wordsworth's source poem, and then cobbled together with little-to-no attention for German-language grammaticality.

Jandl's version is a material accretion to Wordsworth's phonation. The English language source text is iterated verbatim but also over-determined to the point of appearing to be—only appearing to be—a different text entirely. Transformation has indeed taken place, but not radical transformation, as we see in conventional translation practices. Rather, Jandl turns the poem into German by maintaining yet exceeding Wordsworth's own rooted Anglophone phonation—which becomes simply itself, once again, and at the same time a surplus to itself. In this I echo Jean-Jacques Lecercle,

17. Further, this naïve, comic-epistemological motivation is what differentiates the five surface translators of this study from other homophonic translators like Louis Zukofsky (see Zukofsky, Louis and Celia, *Catullus*, London, Cape Goliard Press, 1969) and David Melnick (see Melnick, David J., *Men in Aïda*, San Francisco, Uitgeverij, Den Haag Shtëpia Botuese, Tiranë Publishing, 1983, 1985), who do not speak primarily to the order but rather to the sensuality of a source text's phonation. The pleasures of the body moving through language—tactile, auditory, vibratory, respiratory—are at the centre of Zukofsky's and Melnick's homophonies. On Zukofsky see also Abigail Lang's chapter in this book.

who characterizes surface translation as a mode, *in extremis*, of mixing languages, of creating a type of foreign language quotation where the same sentence is both the framing language of the quotation (in Jandl's case, German) and the quotation itself (Wordsworth's English language poem). [18]

Jandl's version presents us with an absurd amalgamation of surfaces: one material surface (Wordsworth's original phonation, held in an a-contextual limbo) is pressed into another (a German lexical and graphological arrangement) at the morpho-syntactic level, and made unrecognizable by it—but of course only superficially so. Jandl burdens Wordsworth's English language signifier, needlessly compounds its phonatory and semantic load by artfully forcing its co-extension with new German-language supports, which are themselves another surface: German-language graphology and lexis are evident, but the text's German identity ends there, except for the occasional glimmer of an idiomatic arrangement that tempts the reader into making strained grammatical and contextual inferences. Further, these new German graphological and lexical supports are themselves over-burdened, tasked (to the point of 'torture', in the original sense of being twisted, warped, distorted) with underpinning an English language phonation for which they are not intended. The overall effect is suggestive of an extravagant gilding upon Wordsworth's lily, which distorts the lily's features toward caricature. Hence the disguise is saturated with irony; it enjoins the reader to see through it immediately. Jandl's is, by this token, a "false disguise".

3 Aural caricature and contextual fraud

A phonation allowed to run unchecked, to float in an a-contextual limbo, soon gathers unwanted accretions through homophonic association. This is the message of Howard L. Chace (1897-1982), a professor of Romance Languages at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio from 1938-1965. His work is *Anguish Languish* [19], a collection of surface translations developed in the 1940s and published by the American education materials publisher Prentice Hall in 1956. Second-language learners, Chace remarks, tend to be caught up in surfaces, seem to privilege rote pronunciation and dictation exercises over the more arduous task of probing the deeper contextual supports of the utterance. Without these supports, he argues, the confusion generated by homophones or near-homophones is especially difficult to sort out:

> A visiting professor [...] who, while learning to understand spoken English, was continually bewildered and embarrassed by the similarity of such expressions as boys and girls and poisoned gulls, used to exclaim: "Gracious! What a lot of words sound like each other! If it wasn't for the different situations in which we hear 'em, we'd have a difficult time saying which was which." [20]

Of course, as it is written above, "poisoned gulls" is already a deliberate dissimulation—"boys and girls" inscribed in alternative lexical and graphological supports. The en-

18. Jandl, *op. cit.* p. 71.
19. *Chace,* op. cit.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 8-9

suing game is thus given away, and the reader expects that the rest of the collection will feature extended examples of similarly disguised items. There are abridged fairy and folk tale narratives. Among these are *Ladle Rat Rotten Hut* (*Little Red Riding Hood*) and *Guilty Looks Enter Tree Beers* (*Goldilocks and the Three Bears*).[21] There are also classic nursery rhymes, such as "Old Mother Hubbard", for example:

> Old Mother Hubbard
> Went to the cupboard
> To get her poor dog a bone

Compare Chace's version:

> Oiled Murder Harbored
> Wen tutor cardboard
> Toe garter pore darker born ...[22]

Chace may translate intra-linguistically—and therefore practice something that we might more accurately call "surface transformation"—but he does, nevertheless, refer to his versions as belonging to another language altogether, the titular Anguish Languish: "A word that has received a new meaning has become a wart, and when all the words in the passage have become warts, the passage is no longer English; it's Anguish"[23]. The "wart" of which he speaks is the material excess of the disguise—an excrescence sprouting from proper English words that have been deprived of context and thus exposed to homophonic infection. The word "Old Mother Hubbard", for example, sprouts a wart out of its own constituent sounds; and the wart (the word plus its accretion through homophony) is "Oiled murder harboured", the target phrase that continues to be its source phrase, yet is also something in surplus to it. Now, it has acquired some strange phonatory baggage imposing a slightly different pronunciation. Furthermore, the old woman has acquired the connotation of being a slick, homicidal, fugitive from justice, who may have found a safe haven somewhere.

By virtue of its material surcharge, Chace's "wart" has two potential identities: it is either an alternative pronunciation of the same word or an entirely separate and distinct word, potentially in some other "anguished"—materially burdened and syntactically tortured—language altogether. "Anguish" is not only Chace's over-wrought English, but it is also Jandl's German in "Mai hart lieb zapfen ...", and it is the French of Luis d'Antin van Rooten, Ormonde de Kay, and John Hulme. In the work of these last three translators, the contract of false disguise reaches its fullest elaboration. Like Jandl, they translate inter-linguistically, a strategy that allows them to exploit fully the comic potential of Chace's anguished word. Unlike Jandl and Chace, however, they construct an elaborate contextual fraud to carry the game forward.

Alternative pronunciations of words, when they create phonetically exaggerated facsimiles for the purposes of humour, find their parallel comic art form in caricature. As

21. *Ibid.*, p. 19 *et passim.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

it turns out, both surface translation and caricature share the same technique of iteration accompanied by material over-determination. We laugh, Bergson [24] argues, when the vicissitudes of base matter momentarily gain the upper hand over the intangible attributes of the intellect and spirit. His discussion of caricature—of facsimiles made humorous by the hyperbolic extension and distortion of noticeable physical traits of the human face —is in every respect applicable to surface translation as it unfolds in the oral/aural space of language performance. John Addington Symonds echoes with a similar conception, and places particular emphasis on the idea of distortion through material accretion:

> (Caricature) comes from the Italian *caricare*, to charge with a burden, or to surcharge. Thus *caricare un ritratto* means to exaggerate what is already prominent in the model, and in this way to produce a likeness which misrepresents the person, while it still remains recognisable. [25]

Using inter-linguistic homophones to disfigure the pronunciation of words can be a way to caricature accents and dialects—the idea acquires a special resonance when we consider the English-French surface translations of Luis d'Antin van Rooten in conjunction with his biography. Born in Mexico City (1906), he immigrated to the US after attending university in Pennsylvania, and finally settled in California to be an actor. There he had a few on-screen roles in 1940s film noir, but his forte was performing accents in Hollywood anti-Nazi propaganda films. [26] It was D'Antin van Rooten's voice that Douglas Sirk dubbed over Howard Freeman's performance as Heinrich Himmler in Hitler's Madmen, [27] and D'Antin van Rooten himself was on screen twice more to reprise the role of Himmler. After he retired in Massachusetts, he authored three books, among which *Mots d'Heures: Gousses, Rames* [28]. When performing any one of the collection's 40 translated nursery rhymes out loud (Rhyme 8: "Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater" = "Pis-terre, pis-terre / Pomme qui n'y terre ..."; Rhyme 10: "Little Miss Muffet" = "Lit-elle messe, moffette") [29], the reader has a strong sense of exaggerating the intonations of a Francophone accent to the point of caricature, and beyond, at times.

In this collection of homophonically translated nursery rhymes, D'Antin van Rooten illustrates what Chace merely suggests: a text that is really just a caricature of a foreign accent can appear to be in another language altogether. He compounds the language disguise with a playful philological fraud, attempts to make his collection pass as a series of (possibly) medieval French poems lost to scholarship since the 18th century and delivered to him in manuscript form by chance:

24. Bergson, Henri, "Laughter", *in* Sypher, Wylie (Ed.), *Comedy,* Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1980, p. 77-79. Original publication: "Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique", *Revue de Paris,* February 1, February 15, and March 1, 1900.

25. Addington Symonds, John, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, New York, AMS press, 1970, p. 240.

26. D'Antin van Rooten's biographical profile and work in Hollywood is publicly available on the IMBD (Internet Movie Data Base).

27. Sirk, Douglas, *Hitler's Madmen*, Columbia, 1943.

28. D'Antin van Rooten, *op. cit.*

29. *Ibid.*, rhymes 8-10 *et passim.* D'Antin van Rooten's collection has no page numbers, but rather numbers the rhymes sequentially.

> the cryptic phrasing, the disconnected thoughts ... suggest an affinity to the prophetic quatrains of Nostradamus ... [or] some cultural link between François Rabelais on the one hand and James Joyce on the other. [30]

The French language versions are presented without their Anglophone source texts in parallel (these are appended at the end of the collection), and their "cryptic phrasing" is glossed with further speculation as to the individual poems' meanings. The first of the collection is probably the most cited specimen of surface translation in the critical literature—D'Antin van Rooten's French version of "Humpty Dumpty" [31]:

> Un petit d'un petit[1]
> S'étonne aux Halles[2]
> Un petit d'un petit
> Ah! degrés te fallent[3]
> Indolent qui ne sort cesse[4]
> Indolent qui ne se mène[5]
> Qu'importe un petit d'un petit
> Tout Gai de Reguennes.[6]
>
> [1] The inevitable result of a child marriage.
> [2] The subject of this epigrammatic poem is obviously from the provinces, since a native Parisian would take this famous old market for granted.
> [3] Since this personage bears no titles, we are lead to believe that the poet writes of one of those unfortunate idiot-children that in olden days existed as a living skeleton in their family's closet [...]
> [4, 5] Another misdirection. Obviously is was not laziness that prevented this person's going out and taking himself places.
> [6] He was obviously prevented from fulfilling his destiny, since he is compared to Gai de Reguennes. This was a young squire [...] who died at the tender age of twelve [...] [32]

Exemplified by "Un petit d'un petit" and 39 other French versions of English rhymes, D'Antin van Rooten's manuscript-in-a-bottle elaboration of the contract of false disguise was influential. It caught the attention of American freelance writer Ormonde de Kay, who is most noteworthy for his more conventional French language translation of Mother Goose, *Rimes de la Mère Oie* [33]. In 1980, De Kay dedicated to the recently deceased D'Antin van Rooten his own collection following precisely the same formula, *N'Heures Souris Rames* [34]. Finally, British interpreter, educator, and Royal Air Force officer John Hulme offered a homophonic German version of Mother Goose, *Mörder Guss Reims* [35], as well as French versions of memorable verses from the canon of English poetry, *Guillaume Chesquespierre and the Oise Salon* [36]. To those who followed D'Antin van Rooten's model can be added the poets and critics who wrote about him in literary reviews. "Un petit d'un Petit" caught the attention of the French Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle) in its prime in the late

30. *Ibid.*, foreword.

31. Compare the English: Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall / Humpty Dumpty had a great fall / All the king's horses / And all the king's men / Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty / Together again. (traditional)

32. D'Antin van Rooten, *op. cit.*, rhyme 1.

33. De Kay, Ormonde, *Rimes de la mère oie: Mother Goose Rhymes rendered into French by Ormonde de Kay Jr.*, Boston, Push Pin Studios, and Toronto, Little Brown & Company, 1971.

34. De Kay, *N'Heures Souris Rames*, *op. cit.*

35. Hulme, *Mörder Guss Reims*, *op. cit.* The little biographical information that I found on Hulme comes from the back flap of the cover jacket of this publication.

36. Hulme, *Guillaume Chesquespierre and the Oise Salon*, *op. cit.*

1960s. From there, it received further attention in *Change*[37], in an issue dedicated to the use of translation to develop avant garde techniques for poetic transformation. Finally, "Un petit d'un petit" was cited by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes*, where we discover the portmanteau label suggested by Léonce Nadirpher for this type of re-writing: "traducson" (*traduction*+*son*).[38]

4 The "remainder", or "underground games"

Disguise and caricature notwithstanding, there is another powerful source of affect tapped by surface translation: the reader's intuitions regarding aspects of language that escape conscious control—what Lecercle understands in his concept of "the remainder", and Arthur Koestler in his concept of "the underground". Accidents of verbal expression—logorrhoea or somniloquy, for example—are there to remind us that language is not strictly something that we will into being. It is also an epiphenomenon of neurological impulse: it simply happens to us, and over it we exercise limited controls that are fated to fail us eventually. Lecercle reserves the term 'remainder' for this part of language that "speaks us"[39], becomes the source of much of what we experience as unsettling, uncanny. In so doing, he echoes a long psychoanalytic tradition that projects the same idea according to Freud's topographic metaphor: the controls of attention and directed cognition operate at a threshold between an aboveground of linguistic expression (where the law is discrimination and coherence) and an underground flux of sub-conscious speech forms (where instinct compels us toward radical de-discrimination and unlawful material participation). The idea of a 'language underground' comes from Koestler's summation of Freud's topography of the psyche, and I am partial to it because he uses it in connection with homophonic word play and the affects associated with it:

> Next to repetition, association by sound affinity [...] is one of the notorious games of the underground, manifested in dreams, in the punning mania of children, and in mental disorders... In normal, rationally controlled speech, association by pure sound is prohibited, for, if given free rein, it would destroy coherence and meaning [...]; once one tunes into the matrix of sound-associations, a number of quite idiotic puns and rhymes will invade the mind. No effort is required to produce them; on the contrary, when concentration flags, and the rational controls are relaxed, thinking has a tendency to revert, by its own gravity as it were, to matrices governed by more primitive rules of the game. Among these, association by sound-affinities plays a prominent part.[40]

"Idiotic" is Koestler's characterization. Its full impact as a value judgement should be supplemented with its more subtle implication: control over linguistic expression is routinely frustrated by eruptions from the "underground", which clash with our sense

37. Roubaud, Sylvia, "Mots d'Heures: Gousses, Rames", *Change*, vol. 14, p. 97-111, 1973.

38. Genette, Gérard, *Palimpsestes: Literature in the second degree,* trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. 40-41. First published as *Palimpsestes, littérature au second degré*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1982.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 5-6, *et passim.*

40. Lecercle, *op. cit.*, p. 314-315.

of correctness and generate the affect associated with 'idiocy'. This affect follows through quite naturally from the homophonies of impulse-driven language to those that our surface translators exploit deliberately, artfully, perhaps even ingeniously. In their work, we hear the echo—now refracted and amplified by the conscious control of art—of those unlawful participations that we ascribe to the underground and feel to be cognitively regressive. When the schizophrenic demonstrates them, we call them a symptom. [41] When a translator-poet stages them in the frame of play, we call them humour.

Surface translations are funny, then. They stimulate quite naturally all of the affects associated with 'idiocy' at its most grotesque-comical. We direct these affects toward their form, or the contents of their fictional worlds, or even our own unreasonable indulgence in them. Forced to read these texts according to two contracts (as an orthodox poem in a source language or as a monstrous amalgam in the target language), we are satisfied by neither: "Un petit d'un petit" is too unlike "Humpty Dumpty" for us to perceive the latter in the former immediately; yet at the same time, it is too much an iteration to escape the banality of being derivative in the silliest possible way. And so we drift tentatively in exploratory readings through the oneiric syntax and imagery of the French amalgam, comparing both to the English-language source. And we laugh, as a roundly 'idiotic' personage is sketched out before us: the hapless "Un petit d'un petit" may not "have a great fall" quite like his Anglophone counterpart, but he is de-based nonetheless—he has no titles ("Ah! degrés te fallent"), is a closeted "idiot child", and is the "illegitimate offspring of some noble house". A denizen of the language underground, he is either the protoplasmic precursor or the decaying successor of more elevated speech forms. He is, in the end, 'fallen language'.

41. Wolfson, Louis, *Le schizo et les langues*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970.