

PATRICK J. MAHONY

NOTE

Freud and Translation

The subject of Freud and translation can be treated in three parts: Freud as theorist of translation, Freud as translator, and the translations of Freud's own works.

Freud merits to be classed among the principal theorists and innovators of translation, for he gives it a scope and depth unprecedented in history. Freud made translation a unified field concept that encompasses the interaction of intrasystemic, intersystemic, and interpsychic phenomena. More specifically, Freud deemed the following to be translations: dreams; generalized hysterical, obsessive, and phobic symptomatology; parapraxes; fetishes; the choice of suicidal means; and the analyst's interpretations.

Informing Freud's conception of the analyst's interpretations is the secondary use of the German word *Übersetzung* (translation) to mean transposition. Thus, in two 1896 letters to Fliess (1985, 187–90, 207–14), Freud portrayed the individual as a series of "successive registrations" representing "the psychic achievement of successive epochs of life. At the boundary between two such epochs a translation of the psychic material must take place." But a pathological reaction, Freud continues, may interfere with this psychic development; such a reaction constitutes "a failure of translation—this is what is clinically known as 'repression.' The motive for it is always a release of the unpleasure that would be generated by a translation; it is as though this unpleasure provokes a disturbance of thought that does not permit the work of translation."

In sum, if the patient may be psychically conceived as an accumulation of translations—as when the hysteric turns into an obsessional and thus becomes a bilingual document (Freud 1913, 319)—the analyst assumes the complementary role of a translator. By means of translations the analyst effects a trans-

position of what is unconscious into consciousness (Freud 1915, 166; 1916–17, 435; 1940, 159, 186).

As translator, Freud singlehandedly rendered five complete books into German: the twelfth volume of John Stuart Mill's works, which appeared in Vienna in 1880; the third volume of Charcot's *Leçons sur les maladies du système nerveux* (1886) and *Leçons du Mardi à la Salpêtrière* (1887–88); and Bernheim's *De la suggestion et de ses applications à la thérapeutique* (1886) and *Hypnotisme, suggestion et psychothérapie* (1892). He also translated the section on Samuel Butler in Israel Levine's *The Unconscious* (1923; the German text appearing in the *Internationale Psychoanalytische Bibliothek*, 20[1926]); and, with his daughter Anna, he translated Marie Bonaparte's *Topsy* (1937). As Jones (1953) reports, Freud translated rapidly, using his photographic memory: "Instead of laboriously translating from the foreign language, idioms and all, he would read a passage, close the book, and consider how a German writer would have clothed the same thoughts" (55).

The question of translating Freud involves the following three issues: the textual status of the primary sources in German; Freud's magisterial use of the native language; and the nature of the extant and ideal translations of his works. With respect to the first issue, Grubrich-Simitis (1993) has made a vast survey of the primary sources in notes and fair copies; in addition, she has discussed the history and textual accuracy of Freud's printed texts and outlined a plan for a future historical-critical edition of his works.

Linguistically, Freud is one of the greatest prose writers and rhetoricians in German literature. He shows his mastery of so many expository factors—modulated ironies, wide-ranging analogies, evocativeness, subtle use of deictics, and dialectical techniques of familiarization and defamiliarization (Mahony 1987, 1989). Partly overlapping with the preceding list is Freud's remarkably creative exploitation of the polysemous and other expressive potentials of his native German language (Ornston 1982; Altounian 1983; Pollak-Cornillot 1986; Bourguignon et al. 1989; Laplanche et al. 1992).

The latter point chiefly informs the polemical discussions concerning extant and ideal translations of Freud's works. Historically, the greatest attention has been given to the

English-language version commonly called the *Standard Edition*. Strachey, moreover, is frequently referred to as its sole translator, although he was assisted in part by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. Leaving aside Strachey's silent editorial corrections of Freud's texts (Mahony 1992), his translations have drawn both harshly negative and glowingly positive criticism (Bettelheim 1983; Wilson 1987; Ornston 1992).

Apart from the *Standard Edition*, Laplanche's ongoing *Sigmund Freud: Oeuvres complètes—psychanalyse* is the most ambitious undertaking thus far. That edition and its book-length programmatic rationale (Bourgignon et al. 1989) have received considerable attention on the continent, some of it hostile (Pollak-Cornillot 1993, 1994). Also ongoing is Mark Solms's edition of *The Complete Neuroscientific Works of Sigmund Freud*, which will be published in four volumes in 2003.

The recent publication of the *Konkordanz* (Guttman et al. 1995) to Freud's works has potentially a twofold value for translators. First of all, a comparison of the *Konkordanz* with the English *Concordance* (Guttman et al. 1980) to Freud's works usefully points up the difference between the two languages. The *Konkordanz* occupies considerably more shelf space than its English counterpart, due in large measure to the highly inflected nature of the German language and its fondness for compounds. This necessitates many more separate lexical entries for the German edition. The following list of index words with contrasting frequencies warns the translator against a naive expectation of correspondences: father (2182), *Vater* (1680); God (620), *Gott* (372); superego (375), *Überich* (220); libido (1038), *Libido* (777). Secondly, the computerized German *Konkordanz* now offers the possibility of identifying Freud's macrolinguistic DNA, i.e., to detect his phonetic, morphological, and syntactic patterns, some of which may be relatively stable while others vary according to his age, purpose, audience, subject matter, and use of literary genre. The future will reveal the continuing struggles of translators as they attempt to render Freud's linguistic DNA.

1297 Ovest, St.-Viateur
Outremont
Montréal, P.Q. H2V 1Z2
Canada
mahony@videotron.ca

References

- Altounian, J. 1983. Traduire Freud? Singularité d'une écriture. *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 47:1297–1327.
- Bettelheim, B. 1983. *Freud and Man's Soul*. New York: Knopf.
- Bourguignon, A., P. Cotet, J. Laplanche, and F. Robert. 1989. *Traduire Freud*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Freud, S. 1913. The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis. *S.E.*, 12:317–26.
- . 1915. The Unconscious. *S.E.*, 14:166–216.
- . 1916–17. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. *S.E.*, Vol. 16.
- . 1940. *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*. *S.E.*, 23:144–208.
- . 1985. *The Complete Letters to Wilhelm Fliess*. Ed. and trans. J. M. Masson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2003. *The Complete Neuroscientific Works*. 4 vols. Ed. and trans. M. Solms. London: Karnac Books.
- Grubrich-Simitis, I. 1993. *Back to Freud's Texts: Making Silent Documents Speak*. Trans. P. Slotkin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Guttman, S., et al. 1980. *The Concordance to the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. 6 vols. Boston: G. K. Hall.
- . 1995. *Konkordanz zu den Gesammelten Werken von Sigmund Freud*. 6 vols. Waterloo, Canada: North Waterloo Academic Press.
- Jones, E. 1953. *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 1. New York: Basic Books.
- Laplanche, J., A. Bourguignon, and C. Cotet. 1988. *Sigmund Freud: Oeuvres complètes—psychanalyse*. 21 vols. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- , ———, and ———. 1992. Translating Freud. In Ornston 1989, pp. 135–90.
- Mahony, P. 1987. *Freud as a Writer*. 2d ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 1989. *On Defining Freud's Discourse*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 1992. A Psychoanalytic Translation of Freud. In Ornston 1992, pp. 24–47.
- Ornston, D. 1982. Strachey's Influence: A Preliminary Report. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 63:409–26.
- , ed. 1992. *Translating Freud*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pollak-Cornillot, M. 1986. Freud traducteur: une contribution à la traduction de ses propres oeuvres. *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 50:1235–46.
- . 1993. Freud: une manière de traduire. *Topique*, 52:303–18.
- . 1994. Malaise dans la traduction. *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 58:239–51.
- Strachey, J., et al., ed. and trans. 1953–66. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. 24 vols. London: Hogarth Press.
- Wilson, E. 1987. Did Strachey Invent Freud? *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 14: 299–319.