ON PERVERSE READINGS, DECONSTRUCTION, AND TRANSLATION THEORY: A FEW COMMENTS ON ANTHONY PYM'S DOUBTS

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ABSTRACT: In an essay published in the 1995 issue of Tradterm, Anthony Pym attempts to find support for his critique of deconstructive approaches to translation in the "comparison of four versions of a sentence from Derrida" which he found in Barbara Johnson's, Andrew Benjamin's and Rosemary Arrojo's texts. My main objective in this essay is to comment on Pym's "deconstruction" chiefly on the basis of his own recognition that the readings which he proposes are "perverse" and "petty." As I intend to argue, given Pym's carelessness and lack of rigor, the "perverseness" and the "pettiness" of his critique are innocuous and unable to upset "the general pertinence of deconstruction" for translation theory, as originally intended.

KEY WORDS: Deconstruction; Philosophy; Translation theory.

RESUMO: Num ensaio publicado na edição de 1995 de Tradterm, Anthony Pym pretende fundamentar sua crítica às abordagens teóricas da tradução de ascendência desconstrutivista na "comparação de quatro versões de uma frase de Derrida" que encontra em textos de Barbara Johnson, Andrew Benjamin e Rosemary Arrojo. O presente trabalho tem como objetivo principal propor alguns comentários à suposta "desconstrução" perpetrada por Anthony Pym com base, principalmente, em sua própria declaração de que as leituras que apresenta são "perversas" e "pequenas". Como pretendo argumentar, a "perversidade" e a "trivialidade" de sua crítica, sobretudo por sua falta de rigor e cuidado, são essencialmente inócuas e não chegam a abalar, como quer Pym, "a pertinência geral da desconstrução" para uma teoria da tradução.

UNITERMOS: Desconstrução; Filosofia; Teoria de tradução.

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10

In "doubts about Deconstruction as a General Theory of Translation," Anthony Pym bases his critique of deconstructive approaches to translation chiefly on a comparison of "two or three disseminations of a sentence" from Jacques Derrida's *"La pharmacie de Platon"*: "*Avec ce problème de traduction nous n'aurons affaire à rien de moins qu'au problème du passage à la philosophie*" (1972:80). By means of a comparative reading of these "disseminations" – which he finds in Barbara Johnson's English version of *La dissémination*, in Andrew Benjamin's *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy*, and in an essay from my *Tradução, Desconstrução e Psicanálise* – and "in the spirit of quiet dissent," Pym attempts to raise "doubts" with respect to "the general pertinence of deconstruction, the possibility of extending its insight beyond source-text analysis, and the reasons for a certain residual inferiorization of translation" in the hopes of confirming his position that "translation theory should not be unduly upset by the fact that source texts are semantically unstable points of departure" (1995:11).

Also in the spirit of quiet dissent, I shall approach Pym's critical attempts not from the perspective of my obvious disagreement with him but, rather, from that vantage point in which the two of us seem to be in perfect agreement. In fact, my main goal here is precisely to argue that Anthony Pym is definitely right and does mean what he says when he appropriately refers to his "suspicions," reading strategies and arguments as being "petty," "willfully perverse," and "below the belt." Moreover, I intend to show that to reduce what he himself calls "the very important discussion" about the intimate relationship that deconstruction has explicitly established between translation and philosophy to the exploration of minor, "surely trivial differences"

among two or three versions of a single sentence is not only petty, but, even more importantly, irrelevant. Borrowing from Pym's own words, one could say that his "willfully perverse" reading aimed "below the belt" surely misses its target. Given the superficiality and the carelessness of Pym's supposedly "close" readings of a few, isolated "deconstructionist" sentences, it is the "very important discussion" in question which remains virtually untouched. Translation theory, on the other hand, has been definitely – and positively – affected by deconstruction, as the work of various theoreticians has demonstrated in recent years,[1] a fact which Pym's doubts and doubtful arguments have not been able to upset, at least not in the *Tradterm* essay in question.

The "pettiness" of Pym's approach is clear from the very beginning of his text when he actually takes the time to conduct a comparison between Benjamin's sentence – "With the problem of translation we are dealing with nothing less than the problem of the passage to philosophy" (1989:1, quoted by Pym, 1995:12) – and what he sees as "the significantly different version on the back cover of the book in question: 'With the problem of philosophy [sic] we are dealing with nothing less than the passage to philosophy'." As Pym so aptly points out, however, "to make much" of such a "slip" – easily

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1 See, for example, Derrida's *Living on Border Lines* (1979), *Des Tours de Babel* (1985a), and *The Ear of the Other – Otobiography, Transference, Translation* (1985b); Andrew Benjamin's *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy – A New Theory of Words* (1989); the essays collected and edited by Joseph Graham in *Difference in Translation* (1985); and Arrojo's *Oficina de Tradução – A Teoria na Prática* (1986 and 1992), *O Signo Descons-truído – Implicações para a Tradução, a Leitura e o Ensino* (1992), and *Tradução, Desconstrução e Psicanálise* (1993), just to mention some of the works of the "deconstructionists" cited by Pym.

recognizable as a printing error by any reader more interested in Benjamin's actual text than in the accidental misprints on the book's back cover – would be more than "petty," it would be "decidedly below the belt". Yet, that is precisely what he does in order to justify his conclusion that Benjamin's translation

"would have worked, no doubt, had its status not been tainted by the unfortunate back cover (which arouses the question of what Derrida really said) and, less unfortunately, by Johnson's previously available version, itself re-cited and prominently disseminated in the volume edited by Graham." (Idem)

What is not made clear, though, is what Benjamin's "slip" would in fact mean if we were to accept Pym's argument. If we were to take such a "slip" or printing error as a possible English version of what Derrida's French really meant, that is, "if the problem of philosophy" were in fact "the passage to philosophy," what would Derrida (or Benjamin, or even Pym) actually be talking about? Even if we did try to make some sense out of such a peculiar sentence, how would it be related to the context in which it occurs? How would Benjamin's and, for that matter, Derrida's texts be affected by such a "difference"?

(Incidentally, if we were to take Pym's reading strategy as an example to be followed, how should our reading of his essay be affected by the fact that the opening sentence of the Portuguese version of his abstract differs "significantly" from its original, placed right beside it? While in Pym's English, we read "Comparison of four versions of a sentence from Derrida poses the question of how deconstructionist philosophy should be related to translation theory," his – or, most probably, his translator's – Portuguese states that *"A comparação de quatro versões de uma frase de Derrida coloca a questão da redação da filosofia desconstrutivista com a teoria da tradução"* [1995: 11, my emphasis]. That is, while the English deals with the "relationship" between "deconstructionist philosophy" and "translation theory," in its Portuguese version what is at stake is the "question of the writing" – *"a questão da redação"* – "of deconstructive philosophy with the theory of translation." Should we "perversely" take the time and energy to ponder the "different" meanings involved in these sentences? If so, shouldn't we be expected to relate our "newly" found "meaning" to the abstract and essay in question? If we merely concentrated on Pym's "slip," wouldn't our "perverseness" also be a form of conscious blindness, since we would necessarily and explicitly be disregarding Pym's essay in order to emphasize an obvious "slip" or error, whose "authorship" is quite probably not even his? In brief, what is the purpose of a "willfully perverse reading" which cannot claim to account for more than a single sentence or a fragment? It seems that even in perverse readings, one needs to be rigorous and consistent if there is a point to be made.

Moreover, it is never made clear how the "discovery" of a "slip" on the back cover of Benjamin's book can help Anthony Pym deny "the general pertinence of deconstruction" for a reflection on translation. Instead of explaining the relevance – or the usefulness – of his approach to Benjamin's text, Pym proceeds to make comments on my "Brazilian Portuguese version" of Derrida's sentence: *"Ao lidarmos com o problema da tradução, estamos lidando com nada menos do que o problema da passagem para a filosofia"* (1993: 75, quoted in Pym, 1995: 12). Although he states that my

12

version "possibly owes much to Benjamin's English", Pym unabashedly claims to find in my version "justification" for the version on Benjamin's back cover. In order to support his puzzling reasoning, Pym affirms having found "a new ambiguity" in my sentence:

> "The Portuguese 'para' would normally read as 'to', rendering the idea of a 'passage to philosophy'. However, with a pause after the term 'passagem', it could also be read as 'for', suggesting that the real problem here could be 'for philosophy'." (1995: 13)

At this point, Pym's reading is not simply perverse or beside the point, but incoherent. If we accept his suggestion that, in my sentence "*para*" could also be read as "for" – in a sentence whose English equivalent would be "As we deal with the problem of translation, we are dealing with nothing less than the problem of the passage for philosophy" – what kind of "passage" are we talking about? Even though it would not be totally impossible for a reader, particularly for one that is not very familiar with Portuguese, to "find" the "new ambiguity" in question, and even if we consider that such a "passage" could be a metaphor for translation itself, it seems reasonable to expect that, in a reading not inspired by perverseness, any such "ambiguity" would be quickly dismissed if the rest of the sentence and/or context could not accommodate it. Yet, without bothering to explain what kind of "problem" his "new" reading attributes to philosophy in my "ambiguous" sentence, and how all this could be coherently related to the "slip" he finds in Benjamin's back cover, Pym continues that which resembles a poor imitation of Derrida's often playful textual approach and claims to find validation for his

reading in my own text or, to be precise, in his English version of this text:

> "If the passage of a signified from one language to another, from one context, time and place to another context, time and place, is irredeemably marked by difference and displacement, if that which is supposed to be the 'same' is revealed to be 'different' and 'other' in an implacable game, how can philosophy protect its inaugural interest in the possibility of a 'passage' for a universal truth, anterior and exterior to any language?" (1993: 75, quoted in Pym 1995: 13, my emphasis)[2]

Now that which was a "new ambiguity" found in my sentence becomes part of what Pym considers to be my "gloss" as he translates the Portuguese "*como poderá a filosofia proteger desse jogo implacável seu interesse inaugural na possibilidade de uma 'passagem' para uma verdade universal, anterior e exterior a qualquer língua?*" into "how can philosophy protect its inaugural interest in the possibility of a **'passage' for** a universal truth, anterior and exterior to any language?" (my emphasis). Pym's version and, thus, also his reading are particularly problematic if we consider, for example, that at the beginning of the same paragraph ("*se a passagem de um significa-*

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2 In the original: "*Se a passagem de um significado de uma língua para outra, de um contexto, de um tempo e lugar para outros, é irremediavelmente marcada pela diferença e pelo adiamento, se aquele que supomos ser o "mesmo" é flagrado como "diferente" e como «outro» nessa passagem de uma língua para outra, como poderá a filosofia proteger desse jogo implacável seu interesse inaugural na possibilidade de uma "passagem" para uma verdade universal, anterior e exterior a qualquer língua?*" (1993: 75).

do de uma língua para outra", which he aptly translates as "If the **passage** of a signified from one language **to** another" [my emphasis]) and, also, in a fragment that he omits in his version ("*se aquele que supomos ser o 'mesmo' é flagrado como 'diferente' e como 'outro' nessa* **passagem** *de uma língua* **para** *outra*" [Idem]), the "**passage**" in question is undoubtedly "**a passage to.**"

What Anthony Pym's insistence on misreading my Portuguese prepositions seems to parallel and reflect is his similarly stubborn insistence on limiting and trivializing the impact of deconstruction for a reflection about translation. In his version of my text, the problem of philosophy is reduced to the mere protection of its unquestioned "universal truth, anterior and exterior to any language" from the "passage" and the losses involved in translations between different languages. Such a version is obviously unacceptable if we take into account the very basic notions which have been widely related to deconstructive thought. As Andrew Benjamin rightly argues in the same book which Pym claims to have read, one of the important consequences of an exploration of the interface translation/psychoanalysis, which he also relates to the intersection between translation and philosophy, is precisely the "possibility of a semantics and therefore of a theory of interpretation that is not constructed around the interrelated poles of loss and recovery" (1989: 129).Thus, what has to be at stake in my "deconstructionist" text is in fact that which philosophy can actually learn from translation. That is, if a process of translation is always already at work within what we still call the "same" language – for example, between Greek and Greek, in the "violent difficulty" of a passage from a nonphilosopheme into a philosopheme, as Derrida's "*La pharmacie de Platon*" suggests – how can

philosophy claim to reach any universal truth, free from the constraints of language? As we deal with the problem of translation – that is, with the impossibility of reproducing the totality of an "original" and, thus, with the inevitable difference (and *différance*) which any act of repetition entails – we are also dealing with the problem of the passage **into** philosophy, i.e., with the problem of the passage **into** the realm of universal truths, supposedly free from the implacable game of difference and deferral that constitutes language. From such a perspective, translation necessarily deconstructs the assumptions of traditional, logocentric philosophy. In the wake of Derridian thought what is at stake in my "sentence" (as well as in Benjamin's and Johnson's, I may add) transcends that which has been traditionally regarded as the "problem" of translation. What has been traditionally addressed as the "problem" or the "limitation" of translation is in truth the "problem" or the "limitation" of philosophy, or of any branch of knowledge inspired by transcendental or theological aspirations and assumptions.

Anthony Pym's blatant misreading of the paragraph and argument in question is all the more perverse if we consider, for example, that the explicit goal of the essay in which it is found, significantly entitled "*A Tradução Passada a Limpo e a Visibilidade do Tradutor*," is to argue that it is precisely from the perspective of deconstructive thought that we can begin to question the age-old theoretical prejudices which have always hindered the recognition of the founding role played by translation in the shaping of culture and language. Thus, Pym's reading is not merely petty or perverse. It is downright irresponsible, since he consciously disregards my text – and all the "deconstructionist" texts he claims to have read – and chooses to base his arguments solely on the explicit mis-

14

reading of a single preposition and a printing mistake found on a book's back cover. It is solely on the basis of his deliberate misreading of a single sentence from my essay that Pym concludes, for instance, that

> *"Arrojo's version of Derrida's sentence eclipses the passage from Greek to Greek. Her translation seems peculiarly unworried by any return to original languages or anterior contexts. The resulting approach can even deconstruct Laplanche's translation of Freud without any visible return to the French or German texts. Such analysis admirably escapes the aspiration attributed to philosophy."* (1995: 13)

Similarly, the "sense" which my sentence "makes" is not "the same as Benjamin's and Johnson's reference to a 'passage to philosophy'." That is, while "the English-language versions concern translation within Greek", "Arrojo's problem [...] is the translation of philosophy from one language to another" (1995: 13). To this crude misreading of what my "problem" might in fact be, Anthony Pym adds yet another prime example of theoretical naiveté as he actually proposes to answer the "fairly easy" question rhetorically asked by what he considers to be my "gloss" ("how can philosophy protect its inaugural interest in the possibility of a 'passage' for a universal truth, anterior and exterior to any language?"): "Philosophy could protect itself from translation by not being translated, by aspiring to the formalized language of music, logic or mathematics. Alternatively, it might make its readers learn languages" (1995: 13). If philosophy could actually protect itself from translation by simply not being "translated," or by making its readers "learn languages," why

does Pym even bother to think about translation at all? From such a simplistic perspective, the "problem" of translation is obviously "easy" to tackle. In fact, it is not even a "problem", it is at most a nuisance that could be simply done away with.

In such terms, it is undoubtedly "easy" for Pym to disregard the arguments developed in my text, as well as any other that could positively link deconstruction and translation. Instead of actually pointing out what might be inconsistent or irrelevant in such a link, Pym prefers to rely either on perverseness or on platitudes such as the following: "If translation is not philosophy, there is no reason why translation theory should be embedded in a philosophy" (1995: 13). In such a frame, "problems" are either easily "solved" or merely dismissed in a rather authoritarian fashion: if philosophy desires to be protected from translation, it should simply ban translation. If philosophy is not translation, translation theory should simply ban philosophy.

Pym's defensive attitude in relation to a possible link between translation and philosophy might also be explained by his unfounded assumption according to which philosophy and deconstruction "devalue" translation:

> *"It is a kind of devaluation inherent in philosophy as a discourse on great philosophical texts, at worst confused with a history of all texts, thus reducing translation to work on the same great texts. When "this problem" becomes "the passage to philosophy," the resulting theory follows Schleiermacher's "Methods of Translating" (1813) in eliminating from consideration all the lesser tasks of commerce, negotiation and interpretation, mere facts of everyday life. Since the only kind of*

*translation worth talking about becomes (written) work on great texts, no translation worth talking about is considered better than the plurality of its original, by definition accorded the textuality of greatness. **Philosophers have no real time for the rubbish most of us have to improve when we translate.**" (1995: 16, my emphasis).*

If Anthony Pym truly believes that "philosophers have no real time" for translations "that do not concern (written) work on great texts," i.e., if philosophy indeed "eliminates from consideration all the lesser tasks of commerce, negotiation and interpretation, mere facts of every day life," it is understandable that, on a personal level, he should wish to exclude both philosophy and philosophers from any reflection on the translator's task. Where, however, does Pym get such ideas? Who are the philosophers who disregard the "lesser tasks of commerce, negotiation and interpretation"? Besides, even if all philosophers and all philosophy explicitly disregarded translation and translators, it is obvious that the consequences of their conclusions on truth, language and culture would still have implications for the translator's task. In his twisted approach, it is Pym who utterly disregards philosophy and, more specifically, any difference between philosophy and deconstruction. As anyone vaguely familiar with deconstructive thought knows, it is the very critique of traditional philosophy's inaugural premises which has been of interest for Derrida's deconstruction. Also, as I have suggested, such a critique, as well as its intimate relationship with translation, is exactly what is at stake in all the texts from which Pym gets the "two or three disseminations" of a Derridian sentence that constitute the core of his essay. Andrew Benjamin's explicit goal in

his *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy*, for instance, is to explore the "fascination with translation" which he detects "within contemporary philosophical work" that has turned translation into a "concept" "in terms of which the possibility, if not the actual practice, of philosophy is discussed" (1989: 9). Thus, if Pym has actually read Benjamin, why does he ignore such a strong statement as well as the main argument that justifies Benjamin's book and choose to comment on the misprint he perversely found on the book's back cover? Similarly, how can Pym even attempt to question the relevance of deconstruction for a reflection on translation without even beginning to address the bases of Derrida's arguments?

Since the mark of Pym's reading strategy seems to be the sheer, careless "invention" of the "evidence" he claims to "find" in the sentences and fragments he explicitly misreads or mistranslates, it is no wonder that, for him, it is philosophy or deconstruction which disrespects and inferiorizes translation. However, as his own essay shows, it is Pym himself who actually describes the translator's task as the "improvement of rubbish." It is Pym himself who seems to consider the translator's job as inferior to that of philosophers, whose only "concern" is to work with "the great texts." It is Pym, the translator and also the translation scholar who, at the same time that he sees "no reason why translation theory should be embedded in a philosophy," is waiting for philosophers to provide him with the proper "ethical guidelines" to discipline his work:

"[Translators] have to make choices between available alternatives, many of which involve potentially beneficial reductions of plurality. Such choices require ethical guidelines. And yet the

16

question of ethics, which is where
translation theory needs real help from
philosophers, is precisely the point
obscured by fixations on origins."
(1995: 17)

As consistency and perverseness do not
seem to go together in Pym's arguments, he
does not take his own conclusions very seri-
ously and does recognize that there is indeed at
least one reason why translation theory should
be closely associated to deconstruction: the re-
thinking of the traditional notion of stable mean-
ing, and, consequently, of the traditional notion
of translation as stable meaning transfer which
has been proposed by Jacques Derrida, Bar-
bara Johnson, Andrew Benjamin, and myself,
among others. Yet, even such a recognition is
hampered by Pym's blatant trivialization of the
full implications of a rigorous deconstruction of
the possibility of stable meaning and of mean-
ing transfer. First, what seems to underlie his
commentary is a certain irritation with what he
sees as deconstructionists' pretensions of "gen-
erality" of "rather large dimensions." For him,
deconstructive approaches to translation "all
project a benighted notion of translation as the
transfer of stable meaning." Deconstruction

"can thus enter to dispel darkness and
confusion. What you thought was
transfer is revealed to be transforma-
tion: the generally accepted notion was
wrong, so the previously unseen prob-
lem must rightly be general. This is
similar to what students are told as they
enter some German translation insti-
tutes: whatever you think you know
about translation, you're wrong. But
here, in deconstruction, the new gen-
erality is of rather larger dimensions.

It must at least be postmodern, if not
post-Enlightenment, post-Christian,
post-western-metaphysics, post-logos
or even posted, belatedly, from Paris."
(1995: 14)

Apart from his irritation and from whatever
he might have against "some German transla-
tion institutes" and "postmodern" ideas or arti-
facts, particularly if "posted, belatedly, from
Paris," Pym's attempt to dismiss "the general
pertinence of deconstruction" for a theory of
translation is also beside the point for the simple
reason that he seems to ignore even the most
basic notions which have been widely associ-
ated with Derridian deconstruction. In his am-
bivalent approach, he tries, for example, to sub-
vert his own apparently sensible conclusion ac-
cording to which meaning transfer is definitely
"something more than a theorist's theory", but,
rather, an "assumption – certainly a social illu-
sion – operative in the use of translations as
translations" (1995: 15):

"Inasmuch as there are readers for
whom the source text is unavailable, this
assumption of meaning transfer is spe-
cifically external to actual translation
processes. No translator or translation
critic need believe that translation is the
transfer of stable meaning. Indeed, in-
asmuch as there is a plurality of trans-
lators for whom source-text meanings
differ, internal knowledge of translation
is quite likely to accept the initial plu-
rality of translation processes. Users
have to believe in meaning transfer, but
most translating translators are quite
likely to accept deconstructionist argu-
ments about the instability of their
sources." (1995: 14-15)

So what? I must ask. How does Pym's hypothesis according to which the instability of "source-text meaning" is not universally recognized by translators and translation critics neutralize or even reduce the impact of a reflection on translation inspired by deconstruction? On what basis can Pym relate the fact that "there are readers for whom the source text is unavailable" to his hypothesis that "the assumption of meaning transfer is specifically external to actual translation processes"? How can such a hypothesis be defended at all? Pym accuses deconstructive approaches to translation of "massive ignorance of the many historical alternatives to theories of translation as a transfer of stable meaning" (1995: 14), but does not mention any. As any translator or translation scholar knows, most of what is written or even talked about in matters of translation, at any level or in any context, either by theoreticians or translators themselves, still revolves around the possibility of stable meaning transfer, equivalence and fidelity. Moreover, the assumption of the possibility of stable meaning transfer is definitely not restricted to "twentieth-century linguistic theories of translation," as Pym suggests. Such an assumption is not merely the basis of traditional translation theories but is, first and foremost, the founding hypothesis of all essentialist philosophy and knowledge. Furthermore, it is also the basic, underlying assumption which guides Pym's confused critique. As we have seen, even in his (misinformed) commentary on his (inadequate) version of my allegedly "deconstructionist" fragment ("how can philosophy protect its inaugural interest in the possibility of a 'passage' for a universal truth, anterior and exterior to any language?"), the possibility of stable meaning — as represented by the possibility of "a universal truth, anterior and exterior to any language" — is not questioned. Similarly, why

do users of translation have to believe in stable meaning transfer if it is, as Pym himself recognizes, a "social illusion"? How can Pym claim to isolate such an "illusion" – which he defines as "socially operative" and "external" – from what he calls a "professionally retained internal knowledge" that is supposedly shared by translators in general? A deconstructive approach to translation should be interested in questioning precisely that "social illusion" represented by the belief in the possibility of stable meaning transfer,[3] just as it would also be interested in rendering problematic that which, for Pym, seems to be a perfectly clear-cut distinction between a "socially operative external illusion" and a "professionally retained internal knowledge." Thus, if Pym believes that "the deconstructionist insult comes from confusing socially operative external illusions with professionally retained internal knowledge" (1995: 15), he has not even begun to understand what a deconstructionist approach to translation might even be about.

Just as Pym deliberately limits his critique of the texts addressed in his essay to the (willfully perverse) misreading of isolated sentences, his general assumptions about what translators, translation critics and users generally feel or think, as well as what deconstruction might actually be and its possible contribution to translation theory, are essentially compromised by a systematic lack of rigor and information and by a peculiarly insistent refusal to acknowledge what has actually been written on the very issues he brings up. Anthony Pym's major underlying interest seems to be an insistence on

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3 The consequences of such questioning are, again, what is also at stake in most of the essays collected in my *Tradução, Desconstrução e Psicanálise* (1993), from which Pym claims to have "read" at least a few fragments.

dismissing not only the relevance of deconstructive approaches to translation but also that of any theoretical approach that does not provide him with definite, immediate answers. As he seems to suggest, a successful approach proposed by any theory should give him definite answers on questions such as:

"Do we know how to translate, when and where to translate, or how to get paid for translating and retranslating? Can we make our internal knowledge compatible with external criteria that require us to limit the range of interpretations we present?" (1995: 16)

The ideal relationship which Anthony Pym implicitly envisages between any theoretical approach and the translator's task suggests that his basic assumption seems to be an essentialist belief in the possibility of an absolutely objective distinction between theory and practice in which it is the role of theory to dictate the rules which should be followed by all translators under all circumstances. Inasmuch as it disregards the different contexts and circumstances in which translations are produced, implying that one single set of rules is applicable to all translation acts, such an assumption is both authoritarian and naive and ends up privileging theory over practice; consequently, it ends up inferiorizing the "translating translator" whose practice is then implicitly relegated to intuition and to the absence of reflection.

In his surprisingly narrow vision of what deconstruction might be and of what any theory might do for the "translating translator," Pym's strategy of debunking deconstructive approaches to translation also includes an attempt to restrict the scope of Derrida's argument in

"*La pharmacie de Platon*" to the French context of the late 1960's:

"The passage to philosophy is a matter for new French philosophers, not for authoritative French translators of past generations. In this context some attention should also be paid to the place and date of the text's first publication: Tel Quel, 1968 [...] The questioning of authoritative translators was also a questioning of French authority. Derrida's text was of its age. But it may not be immediately applicable to subsequent conjunctures." (1995: 18)

Consequently, for Anthony Pym, if the force and the implications of Derrida's text are limited to the context in which it was written, a similar fate is attributed to its foreign disseminations:

"Translated into American English by Barbara Johnson in 1981 and commented upon by her in 1985, Derrida's 'Pharmacy' became something more than a contestation of official translators. In the United States, the established New Critical emphasis on reading made Derrida a theorist of reading, and thus an ally of translators as writers of critical readings. [...] When Benjamin cited Derrida in Britain in 1989, he did not do so as an acolyte unable to theorize without the master [...] He was instead indicating an established academic location with a certain contestational value in the English-speaking world. Indeed, he might have been trying to tap an established deconstructionist market, very belated in

*its arrival in Britain via a long Ameri-
can detour. [...] Translated from Ameri-
can English into Brazilian Portuguese
by Arrojo in the early 1990s, Derrida
is something else again. [...] To read
and translate Derrida in Brazil is a sign
of development, a sign of how trans-
lation should be in the developed
world, a sign to be pedagogically sim-
plified and imitated if one is to catch
up."* (1995: 18)

In the itinerary which Anthony Pym has
drawn up to establish what is "original" and
what is not, what is "developed" and what is
not, who is the "master" and who is the "aco-
lyte," one can detect another common, petty
assumption. Without bothering to confirm the
validity of his arguments, Pym seems to as-
sume that, since they were written in Brazil
and in "Brazilian Portuguese," my texts on
translation and deconstruction are necessarily
belated, "simplified" repetitions of ideas origi-
nally produced (and already discarded) in the
"developed world." In the prejudiced plot Pym
has constructed in the essay in question, I play
the role of a "subaltern" who "cannot speak"
for myself, no matter what I write or say. In
such a context, no matter what I write or say,
my "subaltern" language and text will auto-
matically be subjected to Pym's "willfully per-
verse" reading style. In his misinformed com-
parison of my adoption of deconstructive
thought for a reflection on translation to the
importation of "Europe's old trains and air-
planes" (1995: 18), it is Pym who misses the
boat again. In his ignorance of what is actually
going on in Brazil and in "Brazilian Portu-
guese," he misses, for example, the fact that
Derrida's *De la grammatologie* – whose
translation into "American" (?) English by

Gayatri C. Spivak in 1976 was certainly instru-
mental for the "dissemination" of Derridian
thought in the United States – was translated
and published in Brazil in 1973. And since Pym
values chronology in the determination of sup-
posedly legitimate "origins" and spurious "rep-
etitions," he might as well learn that the first
text I ever wrote on translation and poststruc-
turalism was published in São Paulo in 1984 –
"'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote': Esboço
de uma Poética da Tradução via Borges" –
a year before the publication of Graham's
seminal *Difference in Translation*. In order
to set the record straight, and also to help Pym
review his original itinerary from Paris to São
Paulo (via Boston and Coventry?), I must say
that in the above mentioned essay, largely
based on my doctoral dissertation defended in
the United States, I explicitly relate poststruc-
turalism, and Derrida's deconstruction in par-
ticular, to that which is one of the most bril-
liant, economic reflections ever written on
reading and writing (and, thus, also on transla-
tion): Jorge Luís Borges's *"Pierre Menard,"*
first published in *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires,
1944). It might also do Pym some good to know
that the textual theory masterfully woven into
Borges's *ficciones* and *inquisiciones* actually
anticipates the reflection on language devel-
oped by the so-called French poststructural-
ists since the 1960's.[4] Perhaps no other "mas-
ter" is more enlightening than Borges himself
to shed some light on the complex issues of
influence and originality, which Pym naively re-
duces to a few dates and locations. It is pre-
cisely in the wake of Borges's explorations of
intertextuality (and even before Harold Bloom)
that it has become possible to reformulate,
among other things, our traditional notions of

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4 See Arrojo 1984a, particularly chapters I and II.

precursors and latecomers.[5] Thus, Derrida's text is certainly "of its age," as Pym declares, but it is definitely not idiosyncratic, as it is definitely not purely French or European, nor purely "original." In truth, in such a context, and also to help Pym extend his horizons and enrich the itinerary he has drawn up, one might also think of yet another important precursor of both Borges and Derrida: Friedrich Nietzsche,[6] another "philosopher" who was definitely interested in the mechanisms of translation, and whose "postmodern" views on truth and language are often commented on by most contemporary "deconstructionists."

However, the access to what all these texts may have to say about translation and translators do require an attitude and a reading strategy which are able to transcend the pettiness of one's prejudices. This is particularly important in an emerging discipline such as translation studies, in which there is so much to be done and learned and which deals precisely with the acceptance of otherness and difference. As a final reminder to Anthony Pym, I might add, always "in the spirit of quiet dissent," that it does not really pay to be perverse, particularly if such perverseness is associated with inaccuracy and lack of rigor.

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5 See, for example, Borges' *"Kafka y sus precursores"*, in *Otras Inquisiciones*, first published in Buenos Aires in 1952.
6 For a discussion on the relationship between Borges' textual theories and Nietzsche's philosophy, see Arrojo 1985.

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