

SNOBISSIMO BY PIERRE DANINOS;

AN EXERCISE IN TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT: A translation of three chapters from Snobissimo  
by Pierre Daninos. A discussion of the problems  
encountered in translating this satirical text.

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TO THE INIMITABLE (Sir Norman) JEEVES

AND

TO TOM

who have both helped me more than words  
could ever say.

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## INTRODUCTION

We have been caught up in the business of translation... What does the ideal Translator do? It is easier initially to say what he does not do: he avoids those features so often adopted mechanically by the petty translator without the capital T; that is, he refuses literalness (or the insensitive use of general dictionary meanings without regard to accompanying contextual conditions) and he abhors verticalese (or the linear word-by-word progress in defiance of the natural preferences of the target language). In a word, he is concerned with a correct play of semantics and a natural sequence of syntax. But there exist other considerations of a less simplistic nature.

In attempting to translate any text the generally accepted point of view among translators appears to be that a piece of successful translation will show more than passive semantic awareness and will read like original writing. The main criterion by which a 'good' translation is judged is whether or not the text reads easily and naturally in the target language. It is to be avoided at any cost to have the resulting text sound as if it belonged to a 'third language' — a mixture of features from the source as well as target languages. To this end it may be justifiable — under particular circumstances and after careful analysis — to add certain expressions in the target language, or to suppress certain words that appear in

the source language but confuse matters or obstruct a natural flow in the target language.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike literal translation, semantic translation respects the context of the original. It "sometimes has to interpret, even explain a metaphor, if it is meaningless in the target language", and "the translator's first loyalty is to his author".<sup>2</sup> The criterion of a translation is "its measure of accuracy, its ability to reproduce the greatest possible degree of the meaning of the original".<sup>3</sup> That is to say that it considers the text not to be just the sum of the simple juxtaposed words in a sentence, but rather a subtle intertwining of meanings producing a range of varied and delicate reactions.

There exist of course several different ways of translating and diverse reasons for translation. Where a text is purely concerned with information, especially factual (such as scientific texts, simultaneous interpretation, etc.), it is important to use correct terminology and accepted phraseology, so that what we might call "effects of style" are not overly important. In fact they should probably be suppressed,

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Duff, The Third Language, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Newmark, Approaches to Translation, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 66.

since the register of such a text aims at the banality of the would-be objective style of the reasoning scientist or thinker devoid of personal idiosyncrasy. In the translation of popular novels, newspaper articles (especially the yellow press), etc. there is no great preoccupation with accuracy, as long as the reader "gets the drift". In this type of general storytelling it is the flow of the language and the general impression that matter, not the absolute accuracy in all points.

Whereas these are 'simple' texts there exists also the category of literary works, where the text ceases to be 'simple'. Here we are no longer faced with pure information but with complex texts where the words have more than one function in the total message, going beyond the bare referential meaning of the word demanded by the context. For example, the level or register of a word may be significant; a word may exploit supplementary values like archaism or affectivity; a word may have a derived rather than a primary basic role, such as a metaphorical or ironic usage; a word may employ two or more of its dictionary senses simultaneously<sup>4</sup>, either for punning or for richness of meaning; a word may capitalize on its suggestivity or implications ... to mention but a few of these additional or incremental values attaching to words. The most complex form of writing of course is poetry, since here we have to go

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<sup>4</sup>W. Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.

beyond the meaning of the words and move from the semantic level of language activity, concerned with the meaning of text, to the phonetic level concerned with the physical stuff of language (i.e. sounds, sound production, sounds in sequence) and consider features like rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, sound values, etc.

This is a thumbnail sketch of some of the issues and complexities that face the efficient translator and consequently render his life challenging and stimulating. A more complete picture is given in the works of Peter Newmark<sup>5</sup> and Alan Duff<sup>6</sup>. The translator's activities have indeed become a respectable area for academic study.

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The next item for discussion is: given the intrinsic interest of translation, why have we opted to deal with the text Snobissimo by Pierre Daninos<sup>7</sup>? This writer, better known for his series on Le Major Thompson, holds the belief, despite his calling as a professional journalist, that language goes

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<sup>5</sup>Peter Newmark, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup>Alan Duff, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Pierre Daninos, Snobissimo, Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1964.

beyond the plain conveying of factual information and is essentially multi-layered and creative. He knows his language inside out and utilizes all the linguistic possibilities French offers him. Whereas some texts are straightforward, here we are faced with extremely diversified and humorous language in which punning and word-play are used extensively and which goes far beyond the point where things have simple labels, like 'table' or 'dog', 'vote' or 'president'. For instance: the statues of scantily-clad ladies which flank the Obelisk on the Place de la Concorde are described as maritornes (S. p. 163<sup>\*</sup>) ("slattern", p. 64), with the exploitation of humorous implication.

It is easy to see, since examples abound, that Daninos is also a very creative writer who will constantly invent new language (e.g. "les lèvres les plus saint-honorés" — S. p. 23 — of people who reside in the Faubourg St.-Honoré) or find fresh ways of using everyday language (e.g. the compound "Mme Boucicaut-qui-faisait-elle-même-son-ménage", S. p. 44). The challenge to us is to attempt to do the same in English, using language that does not simply call a spade a spade and thereby reaching that same degree of subtle suggestivity achieved by Daninos. Furthermore, since the original work is a criticism of social behaviour within a given culture, we have

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<sup>\*</sup> S plus a page number hereafter refers to the page in the original; a page number alone refers to this paper.

to find cultural equivalences that can be understood by an English reader without losing the intrinsically French flavour of the book. For example, no dictionary appears to give a translation of Paname (S. p. 164) with its popular resonance of Parisian gaiety, which is expressed neither by the term Paris (culture, elegance, architecture ...) nor the original word Paname (void of any meaning for the Anglo-American and representing virtually a semantic zero). How do we catch the cultural reverberations? As Alan Duff says: "a well-written text deserves to be well translated ... (and) the translator must think with the writer."<sup>8</sup>

In order to produce the same result Daninos does, we have to give thought to two basic considerations: firstly, the reading public envisaged by the author and, secondly, the tone of the passage. As Duff states:

The translator will have to consider (...) what public the work is intended for and what degree of specialist knowledge the reader is expected to have. This means he will have to decide on the register (formal - informal, official - inofficial) and maintain this register throughout.<sup>9</sup>

Newmark echoes this by saying:

The tone of a passage is the key to its communicative effectiveness and has to

<sup>8</sup> A. Duff, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>9</sup> ibid., p. 7.

be determined by the translator.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly Daninos is not writing for the plebs, nor the scandal-lovers of France Dimanche or Ici Paris, nor the specialists of sport, photography or gastronomy (which he does actually discuss). He is addressing a highly educated and rather select reading audience with plenty of savoir vivre, wordly knowledge and general culture — an audience able to react to all kinds of references, whether everyday or arcane: otherwise the joke or the inference is missed. Indeed, the very subject of the book implies this erudite knowledgeability since a snob is "une personne qui cherche à être assimilée aux gens distingués\* de la haute société\*, en faisant étalage des manières, des goûts, des modes qu'elle lui emprunte sans discernement et sans besoin profond, ainsi que des relations qu'elle y peut avoir."<sup>11</sup> At the same time, as he is often discussing select groups or circles, he requires that the reader take a critical stance to his actions and thereby demonstrate that he has arrived at a balanced judgement of human social activity: in a word, a poised intellectual attitude. Again, one of the highest forms of human behaviour appears in an extreme and refined mastery of that most typical of human tools, without

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\* our underlining.

<sup>10</sup> P. Newmark, op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Robert, Le Petit Robert 1, Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française, Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1985, p. 1822.

which human reason and communication could not function: language. The reader of Daninos has to be able to appreciate the linguistic acrobatics of the writer: indeed there is a kind of Daninos snobbery which excludes all but the most linguistically competent. And all the more so because words, rather than situations, that is mental structures rather than physical references, are used to produce humour: not "le gros rire" or belly laugh but the gentle, informed and appreciative smile. This poses quite a task for the translator, for he is first of all a reader, passively, and then a recreator, actively, in another language and must in some way pretend to possess skills somewhat similar to those of Daninos in his use of language. This clearly will make demands not required in the translation of a cheap adventure novel or of a weekly journal.

What about the tone of the work? It is that of a relatively self-conscious writer performing at a high literary level; he pulls out all the stops and in doing so enters into a kind of refined literary collusion with the reader who is supposed to appreciate the vast and diverse vocabulary on one hand and the longish and fairly complex sentences on the other. But since the writer ranges high and low through various registers, partly in the name of realism, partly to achieve effects, he also makes use of baser levels of speech. But since there is a wide variance in colloquial usage (which abounds in Snobissimo) between American and British English

we had to weigh carefully at which culture to aim the translation. We decided that an educated Englishman would more probably appreciate Daninos' style than an American — in view of the fact that the English and the French share something of the rather more stringent approach to language education common in Europe. Also, given the close ties linking European civilisations, the former would also be more likely to understand Continental cultural references and need less interference — in the form of explanations — from the translator. Lastly, if we ever wanted to publish a translation of the entire book, we would find a market for it much more easily in Britain than in the United States.

The tone of the book naturally depends on the tone of the original. Daninos instils us with a feeling as if he were not just writing for us, but rather, talking to us — in a slightly conspiratorial tone, as if he wanted to say "Let's all have a good time and make fun of snobs!" Thus despite the elegant exploitation of language, the tone still maintains something of the personal man-to-man approach. Therefore we will use contractions like 'didn't' or 'we're' rather than the written forms 'did not' or 'we are' — wherever feasible — in order to suggest a more intimate spoken tone, if not exactly a colloquial one (e.g. implied by Daninos when he interjects: " — je n'invente rien —" S. p. 149).

Keeping in mind Peter Newmark's caution that

a translation can no more be definitive than the interpretation of a piece of music or a solo performance in an orchestral work, <sup>12</sup>

let us now proceed to the central concern of this paper: the translation of Chapters 2, 3 and 8 of Pierre Daninos' Snobissimo, which will form our first three chapters.

In Chapter IV we shall discuss a number of problems encountered in the translation of these chapters which vary widely in topic: linguistic snobbery, snobbery of possession and social status and nationalistic and regional snobbery.

Here, in order to get us in the right mood for what follows, is a quotation from the seventeenth century — which, we are certain, is also in the spirit of Pierre Daninos:

Don't destroy the idols in anger, break them in play. (Sade)<sup>13</sup>

Whatever his indignation, Daninos perpetually rejoices in playing with language, the mark of great penmanship.

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<sup>12</sup>ibid., p. 140.

<sup>13</sup>E. Gilman, The Curious Perspective: Literary and Pictorial Wit in the Seventeenth Century, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978, p. 263.

## CHAPTER I

The Bastardization of the Middle Classes

"Salami cum Red-Wine Party"

"The Kids"

Society...encourages the commoner  
to be snobbishly mean, and the  
noble to be snobbishly arrogant.

W.M. Thackeray

In days of yore — not so very long ago, but time flits by much faster now than once upon a time — one of the hall-marks of good form was at least to appear distinguished, even if you didn't come by it naturally. In those days Snobs would even say quite soigné. But that has become antiquated. Or rather — as you'd say these days — because antiquated is becoming antiquated — it's out. Nobody, at least nobody who's fairly quick off the mark, would be caught dead declaring "He's very distinguished"<sup>1</sup> in order to speak highly of someone.

That would seem just as silly as to say "intelligent". So childishly silly in fact, that one of several ways of poking fun at some upstart would be to lisp: "That's a weally distinguished guy!" Among the great gentlefolk set the simple word great — as in "he's a really great fellow, you know", "that chap's as great as they come" — has swept away the outmoded, overly precise qualifier; right now great with a mere five letters expresses so much more than any other epithet. Dis-  
tinguished, well-bred and intelligent are left to those poor souls who are still searching for the right word.

Today even a refined intonation is regarded as being off-key, nay flatly suspicious. A refined tone is heard only

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<sup>1</sup>Nonetheless you can still say: "She's frightfully common."

with female voices on the radio who seem to encrust their vocabulary with paste jewels and gild their words in order to advertise a stylish, de luxe (?) ballpoint pen available in all the colours of the rainbow. This phony manner of speaking — mentioned by Thackeray — is totally out of style. As for the Modom, so often followed by charmed, I'm sure in those days when well-shaped lips would never dream of uttering the a's other than becomingly rounded in reverence, it has now become the prerogative of ladies' companions or company hostesses.

\* \* \* \*

Could the world possibly have gone topsy-turvy? But even that wouldn't mean much: the underside is after all just as good as the topside. To prove my point, here is a conversation accidentally overhead in the oh so luxurious entrance of a very chic restaurant (I am lagging behind the times, too). Two small liveried attendants were commenting on a lady-cum-chihuahua<sup>1</sup> of mature years, who had just delivered herself into their hands (cloakroom for the mink, walk for the dog):

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<sup>1</sup>A very snobbish kind of dog, at least this one. I want to offend neither each and every Chihuahua extant, nor their owners. For snobbish dogs in general, see Chapter IX.

"Just get a load of that golden leash... What a nasty piece of work! And as stuck up as a hat pin...<sup>1</sup> You can't imagine!... It's enough to make a pig sick!"

The manager, passing by, heard and reproachfully admonished them ("I say! not so loud, if you don't mind!"). Then, leaning across towards me, an acquaintance of long standing:

"What are things coming to if my employees start talking like high society?!"

I do not want to fall into hasty generalizations, but snobbery has gone democratic. Whereas those poor backward creatures at the bottom of the social ladder struggle clumsily but ever hopefully to attain new heights by acting distinguished, the people who have reached patrician status bastardize their language because it is 'in' to appear to belong to the plebs. That goes hand in hand with the everchanging trendy taste for coalmen's tops — one of the best private clubs recently established in Paris is the très select Coalmerchant's Club. If you name the year in which Beethoven composed his Ninth, they'll serve you a complimentary cognac... — sewerworkers' waders, fishermen's sou'westers, waiters' waistcoats or

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<sup>1</sup>You can also say "putting on the dog". Why? Never ask why! That reminds me of that other, better-known story of the valet who answers: "One moment, I will call milord." to the voice on the telephone that asks: "Is that you, dog-face?"

striped butchers' jackets that are advertised one after the other in our magazines as the last word in fashion.

Naturally it is all a matter of degree. You have to take into account the how and the how much. Certain expressions are now so commonplace, that nobody even notices them anymore. In my youth they would have helped to size a man up — as you'd say in the case of diminished social stature. And I'm not only talking about such expressions as to earn some dough, quack, he's a pain in the neck, to fall flat on your kisser or to rack one's brains which are part of our everyday language, even though our fathers would never have used them — apart from maybe in the army. But take this one — if I dare write it down: He's such a b.....! These four-letter-plus words all beginning with b and ending in -er or -ard are used extensively. Go to any restaurant between 1:15 and 3:00 p.m. and you'll hear 'He's such a b.....! — and in the plural, more often than not — going forth and multiplying at a surprising rate — especially among groups of businessmen. The conversation of this nation — purportedly the 'crème de la crème' — is quite liberally peppered with these piquant little morsels.

I've already mentioned the use of my old man affected by some female members of the upper middleclasses when they are talking about their husbands: My old man is ... out doing his eighteen holes is not at all bad. To pig out (at Maxim's) isn't bad either: who would have even thought of that before the

war? The same goes for ... looks smashing! thirty years ago that would have been quite daring, but today it thrives even among the honoured nobility of the Faubourg St.-Honoré. On the other hand, people of good background are now balking at breeding ('She's got real breeding': I'd like to see that as an effect of the German occupation, but I am prepared to regard it as a need for equality.)

As for those six letters, by themselves (as a simple adjective) or followed by ...hell, they're flying around now as if by airmail. You mislay a glove: oh! Bl.... hell! You miss a train, you've got to stop for a red light, you get a bill, you've got to fill out your income-tax-return — Eliza Dolittle's famous expression comes to mind so naturally, it seems there's never ever been any Rats! Damn! or Sh...ucks! This current national catchword is a currency now devalued by overuse, thus hugely enhancing the value of the more moderate BORE. I've witnessed the first steps in divorce proceedings set in motion by the husband passing the remark:

"Darling, it's not your sheer bl... mindedness. No, I'd go much farther: you're a crashing BORE."

\* \* \* \*

The democratization of snobbery has at least its own calling-card, if not its own coat of arms. Many an invita-

tion to a cocktail party carries the remark: Salami-Red Wine.<sup>1</sup>  
 The fact that Delaroche the Youngers invite their friends to the Rue de Varenne for a Salami-Red Wine Party doesn't by any means rule out their having caviar, whisky and petits fours served by white-gloved, tuxedo-ed maître d's, as well as lively discussions on Marie-Anne de Chabrulon's latest face-saving face-lift and Pablito's latest, health-saving check-up at Bircher's in Zurich.

I'm sure that it is the people at these soirées who show the most savoir-faire when it comes to those things I just mentioned. Take this for example: It was absolutely divine... there was this doll— I'm telling you, old man: an improved version of Botticelli's Venus... I'm sure that stinker of a Rubi made a hit with her — a real scream, don't you think?"

In that great cocktail of words where a touch of the gentlemanly is discernible through the coarseness, one notices a certain degree of shyness: faced with using a term that is a shade 'recherché', many gentlefolk deal with the situation by adding a "stuff" to it — thus coating the hard-to-swallow pill so as not to be taxed with being pedantic:

"Ah! Is that the guy who's interested in that numismatic stuff?..."

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<sup>1</sup> I've just received an invitation where these words have been replaced by an engraved drawing of a noggin and a stick of salami.

...Or:

"Ah! so that's the tone on that iconoclastic stuff, eh?"

This "stuff" is sometimes replaced by what (quite simply a bit of Second Empire, what?), an often unconscious mannerism that has become a way of nonchalantly passing off one's expertise whilst demonstrating that one has it anyway.

It is a mystery how so many products of the secondary school system scarcely dare speak properly in a country that prides itself on having a lot of taste, and especially a taste for grammar.

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On top of having bastardized their vocabulary, the middle classes are now doing the same to their children. Forgive me! their kids. Because this is a fact not to be denied for once: there-are-no-more-children — the only thing left are kids. You can't escape the expression 'kid' — you feel as if you're being drowned in a veritable flood of it. Not so very long ago it was sole property of those classes who had at least a right to shout: "Rich Kid!", but now, at the expense of the poorer classes, the term has been appropriated by the ruling classes. Stumpf-Quichelier, Esquire, would say: Sabine and I are going to Sicily for a couple of weeks, so we're sending the kids to Champlâtreux to stay

with their grandmother. We might lament the more becoming "(the) children", but let's not complain too readily. By 1980 they may well have changed into brats.

Meanwhile it's raining kids, and the same families who would have looked askance if their son had associated with one of those urchins from the local primary school before the war, regard it now almost as a singular privilege to send their children to this same school (now that its pupils are entitled to a free highschool education). It has become standard to say "There's nothing like the good old local school." (That nothing like works just as well in There's nothing like Cambridge, and may be uttered by the same person talking about the same child. The first statement implies that one shouldn't be afraid of rubbing shoulders with the plebs before you exploit them one way or another. The second, acknowledging the need for a finishing school supplying a polish that, after all, let's admit it, only England can produce.

In the school word-book the simple word loc-al, which would conjure up images of grimy smocks in the old days and which would rhyme with hospit-al<sup>1</sup> has lost its sadly pejora-

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<sup>1</sup>Hospital, more specifically the American Hospital at Neuilly, has also lost its poorhouse aura. Referring to the Neuilly hospital the That's where they take the very best care of you is a classic byword. Only a few people who still have some misgivings and feel slightly embarrassed at sending some old aunt to the hospital deem it necessary, at least in conversation, to stress the fact that That's were you find the very best specialists in Paris.

tive connotation. In Neuilly there is a primary school that has been nicknamed the "Rolls Royce Primary" by the neighbourhood — "so handy for the children: just around the corner from the Riding Stables of the Bois and only a stone's throw from the Bois de Boulogne Tennis-Skating Club. It's ~~exit~~ — closely watched over by chauffeurs in uniform — would relieve of his complexes any parent still troubled by associations with any old Tom, Dick or Harry.

Ever since highschoools have instituted stricter entrance requirements for secondary education, private schools have become all-powerful. Through their principals they have become the stage for a new kind of snobbery: that of summoning all the parents to a dressing down at the end of term. It has become quite the thing to make parents pay "a packet" for the privilege of having their children take their lessons crowded into dusty classrooms and for being reprimanded themselves in public meetings by some priggish schoolmaster bent on proving his independence of mind by reading out loud the names of some of those well-known families whose offspring he has had expelled for insolence or stupidity. Needless to say, these things were unheard of in those days when the rejects of highschoools didn't supply a huge mass of customers for this kind of institution. But, looking at it closely, this is just another one of those everyday snobberies — not all that different from the one that draws us into that trendy kind of pub where you pay an arm

and a leg for the prerogative of getting put in your place, as soon as you come in, by a proprietress who calls you by your first name, and the privilege of cooking your steak yourself.

The middle classes have always shown a rather masochistic affinity for taking a public whipping, provided they are amongst their peers — in the nightclub as well as in the theatre — where moreover the absurdities one pokes fun at are never one's own, but those of one's neighbour. Maurice Sachs recalls an incident in his memoirs<sup>1</sup> where Salvador Dali announced: "I piss on you!" during a lecture in front of an audience of rapturous middle class matrons who shouted "Bravo! Bravo!" Since then this masochistic kind of snobbery has spread to many other areas.

For example: it has become quite commonplace to hear a ski-instructor poke fun at the clumsiness of a Chairman of the Board of Directors on the ski-slopes. The CBD would never permit the slightest impropriety of language among his two thousand employees in Paris. But here he pays a fat fee in order to get told off like some snotty-nosed highschool kid by a mere yokel of the slopes, to get rapped in the hams with a stick for failing to bend at the knees and to have yelled at him — at an altitude of about 6500 feet — that he looks like a real idiot: "Don't you understand?! I said

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<sup>1</sup>Au temps du Boeuf sur le toit, édition de la Nouvelle, Revue Critique, 1939.

downhill-skiing! You've got to bend, for Chrissakes! Oh! if you could only see what you look like!"

Or just go to the poshest of our golf-courses and you'll hear the pro make fun of his illustrious pupil — who pays him thirty francs an hour for it — by shouting (and the voice grows louder in proportion to the number of witnesses present):

"You hold your club like a broomstick! Use the interlocking grip! Keep it loose! Plenty of energy now, come on! And really swivel those hips! Keep your head down and your body in line! But do pivot, for Chrissakes! You're still too stiff ... eyes wandering again?!<sup>1</sup> Now, let's do that again, and without hoeing out enough divots to sod a new lawn, if possible!<sup>2</sup> Go to it!"

If episodes of this kind are commonplace in golfing, skiing and shooting, then it must be in antiques — the modern pastime of antiquing — that the "Snobbery of snubbery" reaches its heights, and the most profitable returns for the snubber. At a specialist's in Louis XIII-Style Furniture on

<sup>1</sup>The beginner who is often anxious — in the two senses of keen or worried — to know where his ball is going to come down, tends to follow it with his eyes, instead of keeping his head absolutely in the right position — down! — on the upswing.

<sup>2</sup>Specialized terminology describing flying pieces of turf common when a player is hitting, or thinks he's hitting the ball.

the Boulevard Saint Germain, my eldest daughter (who has no need to disguise herself as a student, since that is what she is) couldn't even find out the price of a Louis XIII chest. After looking her over from head to foot and disgustedly taking particular note of her down-at-the-heel mocassins, the man smirked at her boldness:

"I'm afraid, miss, that this is not quite your style ..."

And when she — quite politely — insisted on knowing the price, the Louis XIII Style-man drawled:

"First of all I would have to see what else you've got at home. You must understand, a 'bibelot' like this... isn't that right, Julien? (and aside to his — apparently intimate — partner) can't just exist all by itself... or worse... in an environment of a different time-period..."

So my daughter expressed such a knowledgeable appreciation of the style of Louis XIII that the antiquarian was led to believe that he was dealing with a more or less well-stocked mind. He was willing to make a concession:

"If you insist we might let you have it on approval... if you take care of the delivery costs... but you know, a gem like this... if we weren't sure it was going to have the proper backdrop... we would much rather not sell."

After this futile attempt at finding out anything about the price she left.

Needless to say that uttering this We would much rather

not sell to more serious clients is occasionally the best way of inducing them to buy. Just like a tailor confronted with a suit he didn't make, antique-dealers and decorators — who are experts at the brush-off — never lose their look of being sick at heart when they make their way through the strange apartment of an unknown client after deigning to follow up their delivery "on approval". First of all they will find something — an armchair, a pedestal table or a candelabra — in the room or gallery that houses the "bibelot" (which is anything but a thing of beauty) that upsets the whole ruddy applecart and, after a contemptuous inspection, invites the comment:

"Really sir, I would like nothing better than to accommodate you, but I don't think we speak the same language..."

That's how you raise prices. A while ago I chanced to be present when one of our most gifted decorator-designers visited an ultra-rich industrialist who had just recently settled into one of those gilt-edged apartments (private movie-theatre included) on the Avenue de Friedland. This upstanding citizen might be a genius when it comes to metal-stampings, but his taste had got stuck in the eighteenth century and his furnishings were quite obviously way-off course. As a result of having seen the catastrophe, one of his close friends succeeded in getting the most famous and most expensive decorating-expert in the whole of Paris to

come and act as a consultant. Faced with this clutter of chests of drawers, bergères, secrétaires and Louis-quinzi-fied Chinese cabinets, our art expert was flabbergasted. His immediate, pukka F.O.-style reaction was to talk diplomatic nonsense — which was nonetheless quite intelligible to the industrialist and the three others present:

"But... I say, old chap...! only a schizo would live in a place like this!"

You, I guess, would have kicked him out. But we pressed on, into a small circular room where the owner seemed not at all displeased (And what do you have to say about this?!) to treat his guest to the sight of three marvelous small armchairs, carrying the Delaporte mark, no less, and with — so we were led to believe — faultless curves. Next reaction from the expert:

"Rather plain, aren't they?"

"What do you mean, plain?" the entrepreneur protested loudly. "I forked out five grand for those!"

"I find them plain!" was the impassive reply of the Master.

But finally, one thing leading to another, or rather, having moved from nitpicking to faultfinding, our Designer of Interiors agreed to look at this extreme interior problem "in a fresh light". Stating that he had to start again from scratch from the ground floor up, as it were, he went on to raise the price through the roof. — to the tune of five hundred

million old francs — the total of this temporary estimate to be approved in due course by the customer he had called schizo in front of witnesses (but after all, our Would-be Gentleman from the Avenue de Friedland still, maybe, didn't know whether or not his case was a dire one).

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This succinct description of the bastardization of the middle-classes would not be complete without some allusion to the influence of the automobile. When we quoted the watchword There's nothing like the good old local school a moment ago, we should have completed it with its customary addition: to break in a kid.

This whiff of the garage has been invading our language for quite a while now. And accordingly into our children's as well. And I'm not even talking about those mechanics who ask you in a perfectly natural tone of voice, whether you burn a lot of oil — I'm talking about you and me. Who could grow up uninfluenced surrounded by grown-ups who constantly want to know what kind of "mileage" they're getting, who are always turning new corners, get all revved up, talk about going into reverse at top speed, go for a spin, who 'get moving' or slacken speed, who complain at having to 'idle' while they are waiting for the green light from the Banks, can always find something that isn't ticking over properly

in the affairs of others, claim that they've been overtaken by events, bemoan the fact that they are all alone at the wheel, start to sputter when their career seems to be running out of fuel, declare that they're stuck in a rut, find other people too 'souped up', sigh that they're ready to blow up or to break down, want to keep switched on even if their batteries are running low, talk of going for a pitstop, every once in a while blow off steam through some enigmatic safety-valve, shout "Isn't she a beauty!" when they see a nice little car and "Look at those lines!" about a (rather trim) female, are astonished to find that today's 'old timers' are either full of go or being parked in old-folks homes by their families as soon as they get a little rusty around the edges and, when the exam season comes round, get all chummy asking their offspring whether they're all tuned up, if everything is running smoothly, if they're ticking over properly, whether they've polished up on things — in a word, whether they're ready to step on the gas and begin the race of life...?

Having thus been submitted to the family's semantic grease-job even before they had been introduced to glycerides in chemistry class, the next generation lay it on thick, selecting their own "super" to suit them. Small wonder, then, that as a result they only need the slightest spark to set them off.

A few months ago I went... for a tune up and general overhaul to Sestriere, one of our golden youth's favourite

Italian watering-hole-cum-recharging stations. The Italians may speak quite loudly, but we manage to do better. While I was taking a gondola up to the summits, the observations of my fellow Frenchmen quite blotted out the voices of the locals. Statements like ... makes me damn well sick that the buggers closed up Garnell! (Name of a ski-run) or Did you do that one? It's bloody marvelous!... got me thinking that if an Italian youngster who wanted to improve the French he is taught in his Turin highschool had made a recording of the "everyday conversation" of these skiers, the result would have been a really select sampling of pretty stinking; stinking fantastic; sh...y; take a peek at that creep. See that chap? What a klutz! and so on. Quite removed from the grammar book that dwells on "circumstantial relatives" and persists in spending the holidays with Aix-domiciled Aunt Agathas who are enamoured of Mérimée (well-known for his orthographically tricky prose), insist on Malmsey with a silent "l" and who put you through a spelling bee by trying to trip you up with choices like Welsh rarebit or wild rabbit for lunch. Then, even more maliciously they give you permission to take off through the clumps of rhododendrons and bougainvilleas, but only, of course, after having stipulated that you leave the scarabeid beetles to play on their lovely elytrons in the thyrsus-laurels and bay-laurels.

Nevertheless all these people basically speak the same language, although some of them have skidded off the straight and narrow —and how.

## CHAPTER II

### Of Cars and Licence Numbers

Carriage, horses, liveries, coat of arms — everything is noticed and nothing escapes the watchful eye of the curious and the spiteful; and people are either respected or disdained depending on how elaborate the whole equipage appears.

La Bruyère

Whether you take the steed, the carriage, the phaeton or the automobile, each of these mobile facades (subject to change throughout the centuries) has always derived from one and the same purpose: the public image.

Although the man who had his helmet equipped with a four-barred visor is separated by five centuries from the one who falls prey to the salesman's That'll put your car in a class all by itself and gets his car fitted with a pair of bevelled over-riders for his bumper-bars, they both have the same mentality. The only obvious difference between the two is, that the imitation Jackie Ickx is more offensive and runs graver risks "taking" the trunk road between Paris and Lyons than the phony Knight in Shining Armour charging through the countryside of Picardy.

Furthermore it should be pointed out that as little as ten years ago the That'll put your car in a class all by itself was still directed at solid, bona fide customers. Nowadays nobody but run-of-the-mill, suburban, nay lower-income nouveau-snobs who are easily contented with offers of hupcaps and mudguards get this treatment. No owner of a Bentley or a Rolls-Royce would ever conceive of making an alteration to the radiator cap — it absolutely has to be the original — or of having any trifling watchamacallit dangling from the rearview mirror. Here we get to the very heart of a matter whose

weighty import can elude nobody.

The Parisian upholders of the grand British make of car had already been cut to the quick in their prerogatives when Mr. Dubois, the Police Prefect, decreed that it was prohibited to sound, in the capital, the awe-inspiring and very exclusive low-pitched horn lovingly perfected by the philharmonic experts at the Rolls-Royce works in Crewe (Cheshire). But then they were even more deeply aggrieved by a recent edict banishing any blunt fitting or embellishment which might aggravate the effects of a percussive clash of bodies living or bodies wheeled. It would have been right and proper had these restrictions referred to only the outrageously prominent dorsal fins of those prehistoric-looking American nouveau-riche vehicles. But they were jolly well endangering the figure of Winged Victory<sup>\*</sup>! This, you understand — or rather, you see — is the name of the Silver Lady, the Rolls' radiator cap in the shape of a Garnier-style winged virgin, which was a 1911 creation by Charles Sykes of the Royal Academy of Arts, and which had remained inviolate in the teeth of two world wars and

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<sup>\*</sup>Translator's Note: Daninos made a mistake; the real name is Spirit of Ecstasy.

fifty-three changes of model.<sup>1</sup> This figure adorning the radiator cap, like the scroll of the Knight of the Garter, is a veritable rallying-point for all the members of the Rolls-Royce Club. When I say club, that is not merely a figure of speech. The most fervent of the chosen few of the Rolls-Royce Ghost Club — those who own ancestral "Phantoms", for which contesting American snobs will pay a king's ransom — organize pilgrimages to that Holy of Holies where the Goddess is assembled, have rallies at top speed on the London-Edinburgh run in open tourers dating back to 1920 and still running on the original engine with 400,000 miles on the odometer, go even so far as to buy antique ultra-silent models back from funeral directors, wager that half-a-crown (meaning two shillings and sixpence) placed on the radiator won't budge even a fraction of an inch at 75 miles per hour, and religiously commemorate with silence-parties the founder of the make, Sir Frederic Henry Royce, Bart, O.B.E., M.I. M.E., M.I.A.E., whose demise caused the initials RR, engraved on each

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<sup>1</sup>In 1936 there was actually a change attempted on the unveiling of the "Phantom III". After it had been proven that the Silver Lady could obstruct the driver's visibility on certain occasions, the Board of Directors at Rolls resolved to ask Charles Sykes to alter the Lady's posture. Mr. Sykes therefore created The Kneeling Lady — same lady, only this time on bended knee. The result: an almost universal outcry, since the true believers of the cult couldn't allow their goddess to be brought to her knees. The plan was dropped and the original model, slightly scaled down, reinstated.

radiator top<sup>1</sup>, to move from the red into the black.

Every once in a while the Rolls-Royce members munch on the caramel mudguard, bumper or cylinder of a pastry chef's 'chef d'oeuvre' in the shape of a Long Wheel Base "Phantom V" — the most expensive car on earth<sup>2</sup> — at an intimate dinner reunion in a private room at the Savoy or at Claridge's. They become ecstatic while listening to long-playing recordings of "Sir Henry" — the Goddess' engine was named after its inventor —

<sup>1</sup>As early as the 1920's Rolls-Royce had become purveyor by appointment to so many Royal or Imperial Highnesses (the King of Roumania, the King of Belgium, the Emperor of Japan, the Prince of Wales), that certain advertising consultants made the suggestion that Mr. Henry Royce's stamp should show three instead of two R's: Royal Rolls-Royce. But the future Sir Henry knew better than to risk blotting the family scutcheon with such an odd gamble. Before his association with the Honourable Charles Stewart Rolls, third son of the first Baron Llangattock and ultra-rich car-enthusiast famous for successfully finishing a 500 mile run during part of which his brakes were not operating, Henry Royce was a manufacturer of electric cranes in a small Manchester workshop. Since the racket made by automobiles got on his nerves, he swore to invent an engine so quiet that you couldn't tell whether or not things were happening under the bonnet.

— As far as the buying up of certain models from funeral directors, I've never witnessed such a transaction, although trustworthy people have told me about it. A few years ago at the French Motor Show I did, on the other hand, overhear the suggestion made by one of his friends to a young snob-millionaire whose wife had just died under somewhat mysterious circumstances. When the millionaire couldn't make up his mind whether to buy an Aston-Martin, a Mercedes or a Bentley, his friend advised: "Well, get a Rolls then, it's more in keeping with being a widower."

<sup>2</sup>17 million old francs.

moving from first to second and then to third gear, as well as records of the exclusive horn. Among the recorded works, particular note is given to the B-Minor Crewe Symphony, whose third movement is embellished by a horn solo taped at night on the Windsor Castle road and which counts as one of the masterpieces of contemporary automobile music.

In order to grasp properly the very legitimate agitation of the French Rolls-Royce owners at the news that they might have to part from the Silver Lady on pain of receiving a summons,<sup>1</sup> you really have to have the Rolls under your skin. But we have here a rare condition particular to a chosen few from among the international crème de la crème. A few medical clinicians have made a study of this instance of high-class dermatosis by examining the psycho-pathology of the Rolls clientele. The latest to date is Mr. Erwin Panofsky, an American. This professor emeritus of art history at Princeton University has just completed a treatise bearing the title The Psycho-Pathological Antecedents of the Rolls-Royce Radiator, which he confidently places in the VIIth century. The

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<sup>1</sup>Some of them gave her a place of honour in their drawing room, waiting for nothing so much as a reason to go abroad so that they might reinstate her in her proper place; other, more intrepid souls every day run the risk of getting a 50 franc fine; the most cautious ones have the Silver Lady mounted on a pivot so that she might be dropped at the slightest collision with the authorities.

professor<sup>1</sup> starts by noting that the Rolls' radiator grille (which has remained unchanged for more than 50 years, and which is constructed, as is common knowledge, of long vertical chromium-plated slats) draws its inspiration from the purest lines of the neo-Grecian — down to its most exquisite shapeliness — and expresses the Englishman's urge to remain conservative as well as his regard for understated elegance.

The unrelieved perpendicularity of the radiator shell<sup>2</sup> is offset by the Silver Lady's airy veils which, to be precise, are not really veils but the flowing material of a romantic dress made of tulle. In the form of the radiator you can therefore detect the never-ending struggle between the austere Victorian puritanism capable of swathing the legs of grand pianos in muslin, and that sometimes lascivious, often Byronic, ever intense sensuality of even the most school-fashioned daughters of Albion. Professor Panofsky puts it succinctly when he writes: "Twelve centuries of neuro-artistic antagonisms

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<sup>1</sup>I beg the sceptical reader to believe that I'm not making any of this up, especially not those items which may seem the most farfetched. Professor Panofsky sketched out the broad lines of his theory to a group of students in the Philosophical Hall in Philadelphia on 11 November 1962.

<sup>2</sup>Which isn't actually as vertical as all that: and precisely what makes it so beautiful — and so expensive. The nobleness of the RR radiator, which is handmade 'in toto' and doesn't have a single absolutely flat surface, raises its price to the tune of 100 pounds Sterling over that of its twin sister, the Bentley.

gaze down on us from the top of that radiator."

For an American citizen, Professor Panofsky merits more than a mere trifling of esteem: While he sings the praises of the Rolls-Royce radiator, he exhibits also an autocritical attitude towards the American show-off-manship, which found its most grotesque expression in the useless dorsal spurs on cars. According to our expert, these pretentious fins are the outward sign of the wish to be something one really isn't. We can also regard it as the fulfilment of an innate ambition: after a lengthy period of being reduced to making an impression on people only by putting up a front, the champions of the dorsal fin have finally succeeded in making an impression on them by turning their backs.<sup>1</sup>

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You will excuse my rambling discourse, or rather this Rolls-Roycian excursion at the very moment when I was going to talk about the car's registration number. But at least it is now easier to understand that, since any exterior accessory that wasn't issued at the factory is in bad taste on a thoroughbred of such noble lineage, only the licence number leaves room for the purchaser letting his imagination play, or rather making his weight felt. It is all a matter — thanks to the

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Panofsky drives a fin-less Cadillac. Under his influence dorsal exhibitionism is in the process of regressing even in America.

intervention of someone who can put in a word for you at Police Headquarters (every society has a man who knows his way around in those places) — of having a low number. As it happens, the simplest is the hardest to get. There can be no question of getting the 1 PR 75 which is reserved in principle for the President of the Republic\*, held by some to be less attractive than 2 B 75, which is less balanced than a 75 C 75 which is less personalized than a 37 EV 75, which belongs to a certain Edgar Vallon who was born one July 3rd. I know one owner who is quite pleased with his

1 KG 75

which — he feels — leaves a whiff of the British in the wake of his Bentley, since the KG conjures up images of the King and the Garter: King George and Knight of the Garter (because this species of snob is usually cut off from the experience of war, he would never see the visual parallel with Krieg's Gefangener<sup>1</sup> (sic) that might call up disturbing memories).

Diametrically opposed to the snob with the registration number is the antisnob of the big-wig-silk-merchant-from-Lyons breed, the Northern industrialist (just as big a wig)-type or the insurance-company President-Chairman of the Board-type, who can't afford to appear at French Lubricants or at Lyons

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\*Translator's Note: 1 being first in the country as head of state; 75 for Paris, the 75th administrative district.

<sup>1</sup>Prisoner of War.

Life in a Rolls — What would my employees say! — and works just as relentlessly at blending into the masses as the first one at staying separated from them.

For that very reason the company's liaison-officer with Police Headquarters is put to work at getting the cars of these exalted personages registered as discreetly as possible (no less than six numbers). The car in question is usually a black Peugeot 404 or a similarly black Citroën DS. Every working day, around 12:45 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., you can see scores of them going up the Champs-Élysées or the Avenue du Président-Wilson making their customary progress from the downtown area to Passy or Auteuil. On the front seat: a chauffeur in navy blue; on the rear shelf: the red patch of the Michelin guide and the black and yellow streak of the bamboo-handled umbrella; between the two: the captain of industry in dark grey, frequently in the company of his spit-image offspring in something scarcely lighter. The antisnob-snob, convinced of his duty towards the masses in general and Peugeot or Citroën in particular, and aware that his power is shielded by the anonymity of his standard and strictly utilitarian shell, looks askance at people who drive a Bentley cum interior telephone and detachable bar, and shamelessly display their wealth flying foreign colours. Although the owner of the 404 calls Geneva once a month for the statement of his account — not thinking twice about getting out and being on the spot in person to make essential decisions in

times of sudden tension in Cuba or Berlin — , he would never be able to admit of such excessive investments in Anglo-Saxon automobiles which purr along so silently on Monaco licence plates or the Swiss coat of arms. (It is hardly necessary to point out that, where his Paris bank account is concerned, the Peugeot-owning antisnob will blend nicely into the anonymity of the Lyonese Credit Union or the National Bank, while the Bentley-champion will happily draw his cheques from the Morgan Guaranty Trust in the Place Vendôme.)

Closing the present account(s), I am honour-bound to note that the Peugeot-owning antisnob's wealth is frequently more well-founded than that of the Jag-driving snob. And also, that that same magnate, so careful of not being seen in the Lyonese or Paris suburbs in anything but his man-in-the-street Peugeot from Sochaux or Citroën from Javel, keeps a Mercedes 300 SL at his hunting estate in Sologne, in which he barrels down the straight highway between Orleans and Vierzon at a cool 150 mph between midnight and three o'clock in the morning. Which goes to show even more clearly that this kind of man knows, better than the other, how to handle his fortune as well as his cars.

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Even higher on the scale of antisnob-snobbery, we find the man of the I-always-get-there-five-minutes-before-my-employees ilk who takes after the behind-the-times boyscout

as well as Mrs. Do-your-own-housework Boucicaut. Although I have never truly believed in the immaculate nature of these ascetics and am sorely tempted (probably by the devil) to regard their behaviour as an aspect of a type of snobbery or braggadocio<sup>1</sup>, I must admit that the discontinuing of third-class travel has dealt them a severe blow. For those industrialists whose prestige is built on such by-words as "He sleeps on an army-cot!" or "He has lunch in the staff cafeteria!", the custom of always traveling third class had a much more appealing taste of self-abasement than stating I never take anything but second class.

The baby Citroën appeared absolutely on the dot like an answer to the prayer of those parsimonious saints who are devoted to apparent discomfort and as far removed from the chauffeured Peugeot as the Bentley. Anyway, there is nobody who doesn't know that it's more comfortable than a Cadillac and that it's great, it'll go anywhere. And then there is I take the underground to work. If it's not my bike (one of our recent ministers has used the bicycle to establish his public image much more effectively than any make of car could have done).

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<sup>1</sup>Showing-off to make sure one is properly appreciated.

Those who have not got enough weight to throw around to obtain (by hook or by crook) something like a 2 KG 75 and who are reduced to accepting the number Police Headquarters assigns them — in a nutshell: common folk, those of moderate means, the majority of car-owners in general — these people still have numerous ways of attracting attention — a special one being reserved for those who are just running their car in and are sick at heart at not being able to show off right away everything within their (horse-)power. I read the following announcement in the rear window of a car with a pretty large cylinder capacity:

Running in — Now's your chance!

Those six words don't seem like much, but what arrogance they hide! If Freud had lived a little later, he would have been able to put the finishing touch to his list of complexes with the impact of the automobile; in the above case he would have diagnosed a pathological acceleration-repression — "You can pass me now, but watch out when I'm finished running her in!" — as well as an unwholesome obsession with spoiling the fun of the person passing you: who could still relish overtaking someone after reading such a gratuitous offer? We should have doctors to take care of this kind of speed-addict, of this neurotic who can't bear to be passed unless he makes it publicly known that he is afflicted with reduced power circumstances and for whom the running-in process is a kind of purgatory. Only statistics can tell whether this

purgatory is followed by heaven or hell.

Many others, who often don't have the means for fitting a tortoise-shell toilet-case into the rear window shelf (seen in a chauffeur-driven Austin Mini with cane motif), put up labels in their rear windows in the shape of regional stickers — sometimes to such an extent that one can hardly see through them anymore. Makes a good way of proving the extent of one's travels to date. You can never be too careful in passing a driver of this kind: in my opinion a motorist who can actually see you coming upon him from the direction of Poitiers only between Vesuvius and the Matterhorn suffers from a terminally dangerous case of triple vision and should only be passed with the greatest of care.

The snob who nonchalantly cruises along at 90 mph with his left elbow casually resting on the door frame — if he hasn't got his whole arm dangling out over the road — is just as much to be feared. That snob's languid arm, which every once in a while tosses out glowing cigar ashes, nay, the entire contents of the ashtray, suddenly tenses and with a peremptory gesture of the index finger (the other fingers are curled in on themselves) signals that he is going to turn left — and heaven help anyone in his way. An unhealthy authority complex.

There is pretty much the same number of people who like small objects drifting around in front of them as there is of people who are in favour of having something in the back. (Sometimes the two predilections coincide). These exhibi-

tionists will arrange spotted jaguars, toy dogs with wagging heads or ladders with blinking lights for jumping pet frogs on the rear shelf — and the driver in the car behind them fastens his distracted gaze — maybe his last — on them.

All of these folk — and the others — are privileged in one fundamental way: calling other people names. It goes without saying that, as soon as you get behind the wheel of a car you have the right to call the Prime Minister or Aga Khan any name you please, should he happen to draw level with you when he's done something that didn't meet with your approval.

And finally, something that Parisian motorists are uniquely entitled to: the 75, heir to the big R of the former Paris postal code and the big can(n)on of the capital's car registration. It is amazing to see the exaggerated sense of superiority this number, all by itself, can instil in its one and a half million licence-bearers, and what power it fuel-injects into their accelerator foot. Even the lowliest taxidriver will — at the slightest faulty manoeuvre, at the slightest hesitation of the driver in front of him — tell his customer:

"Not surprising ... He's a 78!"

Meaning one of those numskulls from the department of Seine-et-Oise, a crackbrain, a blockhead<sup>1</sup> — who bear a badge

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<sup>1</sup>Thierry Maulnier, himself a 78, heard and reported these epithets to me.

of infamy even more reviled than a 46 or an 84 — , since Seine-et-Oise, being close to home, is easily recognizable and because Parisian drivers have no time to waste on checking out the Lot and Vaucluse areas .

If having a 75 in one's artillery instils a sense of superiority in its owners, it is inevitable — since there is never smoke without fire, no rose without a thorn, no silver lining without a cloud or a snob without an anti-snob — that they have to pay heavily for it when they make incursions through provincial towns: the Parisian's slightest driving error, his most inconsequential transgression earns him a sarcastic:

"What else would you expect from a 75!"

The local constabulary keeps its eyes especially peeled for drivers with the above-mentioned kind of registration number.

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The least well-equipped man where cars are concerned, i.e. the pedestrian, is not defenceless when he comes face to face with the owners of Bentleys and other distinguished makes. And even though he has no licence-number he can do his very own personal "number". That number is staged every Sunday on pedestrian crossings in Paris itself or at its gates, at the time when relatively uncrowded boulevards allow drivers to "step on it" along the main thoroughfares. Seeing these

meteoric bodies whose speed she has gauged, the frightened woman forges across the street, shouting "get on with it!" at her husband, who has got left behind. "They'll stop all right, you'll see!" answers the man, wanting to prove his masculinity: they won't get him to scurry like a woman! Deep down he would almost like to put a halt to it — and he might have done, had he been by himself. But his wife's panic-stricken reaction has galvanized the heroic streak within him. The crossing becomes his Sunday-Waterloo: the thin red line will hold! Faced with the power of the two hundred horses (taxably speaking) that are charging savagely at him, he slows down, feigns indifference, challenges the 60 mph-ites with his sang-froid. He has confidence neither in himself, nor in the protection the crossing might give, nor in the enemy's brakes that scream impending death at him... He realizes that he is risking all, but nothing is too much risk for the man who can't bear to look as if he were scared stiff... And it is with rapidly beating heart—hidden beneath his, to all appearances casual, exterior — that he reaches the distant shore, commenting to his wife: "Well, they jolly well did stop, didn't they?"

He has saved face and carried out man's most ambitious dream: to make the whole world stop and take notice.

... The world at the top: the world of Jaguars, of Facels, of Lancias and of Rolls-Royces. Unfortunately, he does not realize that when he curses the lofty Rolls, he also curses the U.S.S.R. Because the choicest, noblest-born Rolls

wood, that spectacular wood of the Rolls dashboard and marquetry, the Walnut Veneer, the light burr-walnut whose marblings are so restful to the eyes of millionaires, but are sometimes so hard on those of mere proletarians — issues directly from the Caucasus. We're not aware that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (under the leadership of a Stalin or even a Krushchev) has ever refused delivery to the crassest of Capitalists.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I will tell my unbelieving reader where I got my information: I had collected quite a few facts about Rolls-Royce, but I swear, I did not know where precisely their wood came from. Mr. Walter Sleator, President and Chairman of the Board of Franco-Britannic Ltd., the French moving spirit behind the British trademark, could not — although he is perfectly at home with things Rolls-Roycian — furnish me with the facts as quickly and precisely as he might have wished. He was nice enough to make enquiries among the experts at Crewe. I've got their "memo" in front of me and am going to quote its opening sentence directly, not only for reasons of remaining scrupulously veracious, but also because paraphrasing would mean diluting away its uniquely British flavour: "In the main, our Veneer comes from Caucasia, from trees which are upwards of 800 years in age. At this stage, the tree trunk develops a kind of mole at ground level, which continues to grow as the tree gets older." In other words, a walnut tree will only be pronounced all right by the buyers from Rolls-Royce if it has got something wrong with it. This well-grained burr-walnut with its ingrained infection derives for the most part from the Caucasus and is more than 800 years old, at which ripe old age the trunk grows excrescences of a sort that increase in size with age. It is in those swellings that one finds the loveliest effects of marbling — the grain — which eventually lends the dashboard its dignified character and its ancient patina.

## CHAPTER III

Of Nationalistic and Regional Snobbery:

The Tricoloured Heart

Parisian Gift of the Gab

Our arrogance is such that we should like to be recognized by the entire world (...) And our conceit such that we are beguiled and gratified by the good opinion of five or six persons around us.

Pascal

The prime examples of the Great World Powers, as for instance the Atomic Club, may well conjure up images of grammar school — the fagging, the cliques, the bullying, the all-powerful gang-leaders: all we do with advancing age is to switch playthings. It is therefore normal to come across, in a magnified form at the level of the state, all those snobberies, all those eccentricities and all those quirks that we find by putting the individual under a microscope.

As far as snobbery is indicative of the wish to steal the limelight, it reaches its most gargantuan dimensions in the international sphere. Where we had a Rolls we now find rockets, arrogance is termed prestige, the absorbing interest in what impression one makes changes into the preoccupation of not losing face. Nobody has ever contemplated estimating the amount of face that has been lost more or less everywhere in the world, since the Whites launched into coining phrases to talk about the Yellow Races. But you could easily count the tens of millions of human lives that have been needlessly forfeited to this dreadful concern with what-will-people-say.

As a matter of fact, given the relatively undeveloped state of our civilisation, it is difficult to decide which nationals are the least egocentric — be they the Great World Powers who act in the name of three hundred million souls provided with the "highest standard of living in the world" or gorged with cosmic scholarship; or the Medium-size Powers who

are consumed with complexes; or the Neutrals who seem to live a sterilised life apart, under a dressing of surgical gauze because they have become used to being kept out of the harmful way of any dangerous promiscuousness. We are usually in the habit of saying: the little people, the meek and the mild. But there again life duplicates on the national level what it produces in the individual: it is probably the little people who show the most morbid sensitivity, especially if their independence is of relatively short standing. An Albanian, speaking of his countrymen, will be sure to tell you They are people who hold their heads very high, as if that were a unique feature, even though the Belgians, Hungarians, Haitians, Guatemalans and a good three dozen other peoples possess this selfsame feature. The man from Montlucon will tell you in a conspiratorial tone of voice that The society here is very exclusive without seeming to conceive of the possibility that you've been told the same thing in Lille, Bordeaux, Bar-le-Duc and Aix-en-Provence.<sup>1</sup>

To cover all the snobbery in the world at the regional level would therefore involve tiresome repetitiousness.

Here they will explain that Wool looks down on Cotton,

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<sup>1</sup>We have to own up though, even if it's a letdown: right now there exists neither a provincial town where they would tell you The society here is very inclusive, nor a country where they will proclaim that All its people hang their heads.

which treats Beer like dirt.<sup>1</sup> There that Cod reigns supreme and sniffs at the Sardine. Elsewhere, sea-going folk — deep-sea fishing, shipbuilding or the Navy — unanimously look down on the landlubber world (in one large western port a ship's captain let three years pass before he would approve a capital young man's becoming his son-in-law, ostensibly because he could not allow at his table a young fellow who had done his military service under his orders as an ordinary seaman; although the young man has meanwhile become a success in real estate, the officer invites him no more than once a year — at Christmas). In a certain city in central France Boots and Shoes sit in state and don't invite Rubber. Now step a little to the left towards the capital of the South-West: The Bottle-Cork aristocracy there holds the Shoe in such poor regard that one Rope-Sole Sandal king, after having secured for himself a residence in the stronghold of the Chartron bigbusiness area by sheer force of effort and having taken up golfing, was nevertheless cold-shouldered by Bordeaux society and even found it impossible to gain the privilege for his wife of being a Lady Collection-Taker in Notre-Dame on Sundays.

Even if the order of precedence is not the same everywhere (nevertheless, on the whole, we might say that the manufacturing industries lord it over banking which in turn is one

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<sup>1</sup> We have to make it clear that Brushed Wool (or Virgin Wool) looks down its nose at Carded Wool (or loose Wool rejects).

up on the liberal professions — while trade, which has spawned everyone, or almost everyone, really contributes the most to keeping things going), you constantly hear them everywhere harping on the same old string: a very exclusive society, if they invite you here, they'll invite you anywhere, new money, desirable locality, undesirable locality, people here invite each other (it is understood that the X's invite the Y's in a circle from which the Z's are barred).

Passing through Clermont-Ferrand on the way from San Francisco to Johannesburg you'd quickly realize that regional snobs are as like as peas in a pod. The expression C'est bien habité ... C'est mal habité (good residential area or not) used in Nantes (Lille, Marseilles, etc.) are the exact twins of the already antiquated American expression the other side of the tracks, or the New Yorker's way of evaluating someone's social standing according to whether he lives East (good) or West (bad) of Fifth Avenue. Notwithstanding the distance of Froissart's homeland from the Brahmaputra, there is a flavour of India in the caste system in Valenciennes where the rajahs of the steel industry stand above bankers, and doctors devote all their energies to mounting an attack on the strongholds of the Boulevard Watteau (never to be pronounced Vatteau) or Boulevard Carpeaux. Isn't the New England snob, who goes as far as to flatter himself with the label native in order to set himself apart from the summer visitors, a lot like, nay the very image of, that staunch supporter of the South-West

who, retreating from the advancing vacationers, rents his house at a steep price to the enemy (after having removed its most valuable furnishings) and surrenders the Basque Coast for three months? The same taboos that exist at Angoulême can also be found in Zanzibar, and the Californian Snob with his never-ceasing This is where you can lead a better life than anywhere else in the world would be astonished to encounter the same assurance in his Aquitanian bloodbrother who prides himself on being 600 years ahead of the rest of the country. A large number of regional folk have got their province so much under their skin that you can't help ribbing them about it. Whenever I mention Brittany to him, a certain Breton, and what is more, he is a fake, always insists that "That's not the 'real' Brittany!"

The wool-cotton-beer hierarchy of our Northerners finds its identical counterpart in Texas where the cotton king puts down the cattle baron who in turn snubs the upstart who's made his money in oil. The importance New York society ascribes to being mentioned in the extremely exclusive Social Register, has its equal in Lille which in the absence of a Who's Who publishes a Book of Families which glorifies the line of descendants and the origins of the members of our great families and whose founder was — and this is not a figment of my imagination —

Mr. Achille Glorieux-Toulemonde.\* In this comprehensive middle-class Who's Who, which commences with a Map of Lille's Castellany in 1667, every entry is followed, in brackets, by the number of offspring — (8) Bibiane, Maylie, Blandine, Emeric, Cyriaque, Xavier, Sigolène, Damien. Although there is no accepted abbreviation for a baby's bottle, the directory contains nonetheless a PARENTS' ROLL OF HONOUR in alphabetical order according to the number of children, which goes in ascending order from the Motte-Mottes with 7 (no roll of honour for 6) to the 20 of the Becquart-Rogeaux. One of the prefatory writers, Joseph Salembier, member of the French Poets Society, has his own way of glorifying "those hardworking and prolific people faithful to the secular traditions and sagacious upholders of the Race's fundamental virtues":\*\*

A splendid jewel set in the map of France,  
Crest of the Gallic Cock, our Northern Marches  
.....  
Bonapartes or Captains of Industry, all  
.....  
In other climes the days drift happily by  
As men sink into the beguiling arms of sloth  
But my land lives in a turmoil of endless toil  
.....  
The church tower dreams...  
A flowering monument of well hewn granite...<sup>1</sup>

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\*Translator's Note: Mr. A. Glorious-Everyman

\*\*Translator's Note: for more essential meaning see Note at the end of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup>The directory even makes a little room for the president of the Republic, in the following shape: III. Charles de Gaulle, General, G.C.\* , G.C.✱ , ✱ , ✱ , ✱ , ✱ , ✱ , \*\*\* President of the Republic and wife, née Forest Vendroux, Yvonne, Elysée Palace, Paris (8<sup>e</sup>). Tel. Bal. 20.00. Country seat "La Boiserie", Colmbey-les-Deux-Eglises (Haute Marne).

\*\*\*Translator's Note: Grand' Croix de la Legion d'Honneur, Médaille de la Résistance, Médaille Militaire, Croix de Guerre, Croix de Guerre, Croix de Guerre.

From Stockholm to Tierra del Fuego, the catalogue of snobberies makes the world take on the appearance of a gigantic club with three billion members who mix with each other but can't stand one another and, as Henri de Régnier pointed out, congregate less because they like being together, than in order to share their boredom: but once this goal has been reached, it runs the risk of no longer representing a constantly changing reality. Aeroplanes, bullet trains, television and magazines are at the root of colossal upheavals. Every day the cover-girls of Elle, Marie Claire and Marie-France force our conventional black-clad Lady of the Provinces to beat a retreat a little more. I dare say that regional snobberies have not totally disappeared, but they tend to become blurred, to become more and more one and the same, to blend into national and universal snobbery. What may still hold true for certain secluded squireens in Périgord or Liechtenstein can no longer be applied to the great middle-classes of Lille or Bordeaux who are constantly on the move. And if castes still exist, they are more pronounced in small towns like Mazamet or Barcelonnette than in places like Roubaix or Lyons: for example, it would be childish to continue saying about the latter city that Trucking cannot move in Silk circles.

In its early days it took a long time before the snobbery of affluence stopped wearing a ghastly mask of broken bottle-ends for me. I gauged affluence itself by the length of those dark grey walls bristling with greenish tooth-like stumps which

hid from the eyes of outsiders the almost limitless estates of silk merchants from Ecully — and that 2000 cc Bugatti 300, which you only knew was there because of the sounds of its throbbing engine, since it never left the shelter of its grounds. I therefore spent part of my summer vacation with an uncle in Lyons whose stinginess was so pathological that he would on average only give you two fingers to shake, three on good days, and he would extend his whole hand only for the likes of a Jarrosson, a Gillet, a Berliet. However sparingly he might offer his handshake or raise his hat (lightly touched with a finger, slightly raised or doffed with a flourish according to the importance of the encounter), this uncle was none the less snobbish or less disposed to gallant dalliances. In that area he had actually proved somewhat inventive: he would always go equipped with a cane when visiting his mistress in the Brotteaux quarter. Not because he had a sadistic streak, but simply because that would make him look like a harmless pedestrian out for a walk. Advancing towards the theatre of his foolish operations he would give the stick a few jaunty twirls and then hold it in both hands behind his back. Reaching the door he would let it drop behind him: an ingenious trick for turning round to pick it up and seeing whether he had been followed by anyone he knew (in that case he would go on with his walk and come back a little later).

Those broken bottleends remain hard to eradicate from the mind; a lot of Lyonese interiors that would do honour to

the Louvre take cover behind pockmarked facades that would be more in keeping with the disreputable Rue du Caire or Faubourg Saint-Antoine; the snobbery of close-fistedness that Thackeray mentions, still survives — and not only in Lyons: the lady of a house in Nantes, a multi-millionairess of the best stock (the kind that in days of old made a fortune in two-legged "Black Ivory"<sup>1</sup>), greeted me one morning in a gingham overall, grey wool stockings and floss-silk gloves. She was in the courtyard of her residence, setting about rescuing from the dustbin some still hot coalnuts her maid had thrown out: The girls these days! ... What a waste ... some of these are still quite usable! ... Throws out barely scorched ones!

But who would still expose himself, even armed with a cane, to the danger of embarrassing encounters in the street at a time when a three-hour trainride will get you from Lyons to Paris, that realm of anonymity!<sup>2</sup> The breed of Lyonese who would board a train first class at the Gare de Lyon with the ultra-conservative La Vie Parisienne under his arm and disembark from a third class car in Perrache Station in

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<sup>1</sup>Disgusting euphemism still being used in Nantes to describe the slave-trade.

<sup>2</sup>For the Parisian in need of an inconspicuous pied-à-terre the last anonymous haven is the airport hotel at Orly: here he can be fairly assured to run into no one but foreigners — or fellow countrymen on their way through.

Lyons carrying the socialist paper Le Progrès has died out almost simultaneously with the disappearance of third class rail travel and the supreme authority of La Vie Parisienne.

In a world that gets smaller and smaller by the day, the most class-conscious snobberies are up in arms against their own very good name. Let us take by way of example the very commonplace anglomania of Bordeaux: to be sure, people keep giving their children names like James, Patrick or Annie; there is always a Guestier or a Cruse in the process of finishing his education at Eton or Harrow; they still speak French with a British accent and English with a French accent (but not the local Bordeaux accent); high-society dinners are served on Johnston china<sup>1</sup>; and a story is told about a young whippersnapper — whose language was more influenced by anglo-saxonities than classical Latin — who, when he one day had to inform a gathering of Notables that a forthcoming Assembly had been cancelled, declared it to have been postponed sign dye (for sine die)... But the days are gone when it was good form to have lunch or even to be delivered of a baby on a British steamliner. Ever since simply any Parisian oaf can surround himself with fake English steamer trunks or Regency secretaires and can strut around in doublevented jackets, a certain ultra

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<sup>1</sup>The great gentle-folk pronounce it Jea(n)sto(n) to rhyme with their nasalized pronunciations of le bel enfon, while the general public correctly pronounces it John-Stonn...

snobbish citizen of Bordeaux (one of those who would say It's easy to see that he doesn't belong to our circle! about a novel-writing fellow citizen, simply because he wrote ringoir when he meant solitaire<sup>1</sup>) took down all his Fox-Hunting Prints, started drinking champagne instead of whiskey and removed the gun from his hall.

Although he is keeping some of his good English furniture, he now confines himself mainly to the most exquisite styles of the French 18th Century: those of Louis and of Tourny.

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As a citizen of a shrinking world which constantly sends back and forth images of itself over the airwaves and which, whether we like it or not, is on the way to becoming a State in which all nations will be reduced to provinces, I am consequently not tempted to systematically analyze the snobberies of confined enclaves, but rather to make a study of regional snobbery at a national level.

We would as lief bestow the laurels for this regional-nationalistic snobbery on the editor of the Times who came up with a headline that has become immortal: when a violent storm had closed down Channel crossings, the newspaper stated

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<sup>1</sup> Receptacle into which you empty your glass before starting on fresh wine.

Continent cut off.

It is most likely because France is not an island, that we have never reached such heights of egocentricity. Besides which we are quite able to be more than a match for even the English, since we have become used to telling each other that in the outside world there are on one hand the French and, on the other hand, the Non-French — with a capital as well as universal N. What Prime Minister after all has ever deemed it necessary to remind Her Majesty's subjects of their greatness?

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The Frenchman is perfectly entitled to believe that the Non-French — a very limited Company with a capital of three billion more or less Suspicious Characters — have their eyes on France, since our politicians and editorial writers keep affirming this. Every country, big or small, experiences internal differences. What makes the French situation so lamentable is, that it is on display for the Non-French to see, a feast for the eyes, like a strip-tease show. A lot of countries were or are well acquainted with the unpleasantness of inflation. But the one that threatens France every once in a while is not to be compared to theirs: it quite simply puts the country at the mercy of the Non-French — who won't show any. Does anyone ever declare the Non-French to be at the mercy of France? In any country the downfall of a ministry would be followed by grave repercussions. But none of them can know,

as France does, what it's like to ride out a crisis while the Non-French are waiting (with bated breath), and count the hours and days, with stopwatch in hand, leading up to the country's ruin. No, as far as we know there is no other people, at least on this earth, that is given such authoritative assurances that the Non-French are watching it. One might almost wonder whether the Non-French ever take the time to watch their own backyards, since they have their eyes so thoroughly riveted on France. Not unless a Frenchman visits Sioux City or Calcutta does he realize that the Iowan industrialist or the peasant from the Ganges does not get up every morning with a fixation about the state of France's wellbeing and that a change of government in Paris rates no more than three lines in the Des Moines Register.

Even when France owes her salvation to the external intervention of various others — as came to pass during the Second World War — the part played by the Non-French is hushed up judiciously after the event. In this way some families try to obliterate even the name of that ancestor from Krakow, to whom they owe the best part of their fortune. More than one history book used to teach primary school children emphasizes the major part played by the Resistance in the liberation of the country and mentions the Anglo-American invasion only incidentally. When you read the mode in which such recent History is sometimes recorded, the mind boggles at the thought of what might really have happened on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1789 at the storming

of the Bastille.

How about an example? The following are some of the answers garnered in Paris from a Form One class pertaining to the part De Gaulle played in the final phase of the last war: "De Gaulle saved Paris by launching the Allied invasion of Normandy ... It is he who commanded the Navy and the Air Force from England.<sup>1</sup>"

To get to the point where Form Ones believe that our liberation would have been achieved much earlier without the help of the British and the Americans, someone must have put them on the wrong track in the first place. This is how nationalistic snobbery comes into existence; this is how tri-coloured hearts are forged — just like English, American or Soviet hearts, since the Russian child at school in Kiev barely learns that something happened in Normandy at the end of the war.

But let us take our departure from the realm of History where the Non-French, in the view of children, are either Allied or part of the Coalition. And let us give thought to what the Non-French represent in peacetime. Of late we discovered that it doesn't take much to turn "our English friends" back into those Anglo-Saxons and to see them presented as the arch-enemy from time immemorial, just as dangerous

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<sup>1</sup>Quotations printed (and even photographed) in Candide, a publication by J.-L. Dabadie.

in the present day and age as they were when they waged war on our territory. Even though no political tensions have been set off, a mere nothing suffices to revive the ancient maritime hostility and to jar the snobbish nerves of our old salts. The seamanship of a steamship-captain who berthed the France in the harbour of Southampton without the help of tug-boats (since the pilots were on strike) sufficed to elicit comments about giving the raspberry to British seamanship<sup>1</sup> — represented in this case by the more fainthearted captain of the Queen Mary, whose passengers had to huddle together in the rain in the small boats that brought them ashore. Headline in a French newspaper: While the QUEEN MARY shied away from coming alongside the quay at Southampton without tug-boats, THE FRANCE SINGLEHANDEDLY COMPLETED THE MANOEUVRE. Another headline: Britain dumbfounded: FRANCE SWEEPED INTO SOUTHAMPTON HARBOUR UNDER NOSE OF IMMOBILIZED QUEEN MARY. Commentary: Many of the Queen Mary's passengers were incensed at seeing British prestige thus sullied. One of them declared: "When I saw the France sailing past us to dock at the quay, I was ashamed of being British."

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<sup>1</sup>The raspberry, the slap in the face and the box on the ear keep all their impact even at a time when they are dealt out only figuratively.

Even sports can't escape the sort of destiny that looms over the country because of Non-French ambitions. When the Non-French have stopped threatening our frontiers, they launch an attack on our stadiums and race-tracks.

Just about every Sunday offers new evidence that Frenchmen — be they rugbyplayers, horsemen, skiers, racing drivers or runners — never lose because of their own incompetence, but because they are beset by misfortunes. The wind was behind the Welsh, our skiers' skis were not properly waxed, our filly was jostled in the last bend, our tennisplayer was racked by a cramp when the Italian had the service — and you can register from here Louison "The Little Breton" Bobet's roar of pain as he skids, in the Tourmalet pass, on a banana-skin (imported of course) at the moment when he was just about to win the Tour de France. It is an idiosyncrasy of fate, or rather an idiocy of sport, that the Non-French are never afflicted with that sort of bad luck: if they are the ones who are beaten, then that's all, they're beaten all right! Furthermore, where they are concerned, the vocabulary shows a lot of variety: the tennis aficionados in the Roland-Garros stadium will call the American's drop-shot sneaky, but if only it had come from a Frenchman, he would have pulled off a superb backspin.

Something I heard on the radio a while ago struck me as even more extraordinary. France (that is, its soccer-team) had been beaten by Holland 1 to 0, but the commentator

explained it thus: we had been beset by such bad luck and "shown such superiority that you might as well have said that we won by 3 goals over 1." Really, I'm only writing what was actually said: I could never make something like that up. The expert, a celebrated and likeable champion runner whose stride was everlastingly imprinted on the visual memory of my generation, went on to say: "If in sport only the final score counts, that was not true here." As a matter of fact, the ball hit the (thick) Dutch goalpost three times, instead of bouncing into the net like a good little French ball. An atrocious misfortune, which was moreover confirmed by Le Figaro where it was stated that the changing-rooms were plunged in grief, because when it came to personal virtuosity, the French had taught their opponents a lesson. The same glaring injustice was committed shortly afterward, this time when they were playing against the triumphant Czech soccer-team, since, according to another sportscaster, "their players are essentially inferior to ours, but they nonetheless frequently score points off us in competition"... France is truly out of luck: two days later its amateur team lost against Senegal. The radio assured me again that in reality "we didn't really lose, because there was a Frenchman on the Senegalese team." I sighed with relief, just as I had sighed a month before when they told me: " France went under with flying colours at Twickenham." French women and children didn't have to hang their heads while leaving the stadium.

Rugby suffers similar misfortunes: after France had been beaten by Scotland (10 to 0) on a sodden pitch in Murrayfield, we were informed that "had the match been played twenty-four hours earlier, it would have had a different outcome: the pitch would have been dry and the ball not so slippery"; elsewhere: "France played the best rugby, but Scotland scored the points."

General de Gaulle's patriotism — the one thing these days nobody could call in question — seems lukewarm compared to that of our sports heralds who sing the praises of Kopa, Rodzik, Wiznieski, Di Nallo, Masnaghetti, Adamczyk or the masseur Wanono (if I figured in the list, everyone would be completely hoodwinked. Would those good citizens who scream "Kopa" or "Rodzik" from the stands of the stadium mouth those patronyms so cheerfully if they were not those of champions who wear the Gallic cockerel on their shirts? ...

It is understandable that our radio sportscasters get butterflies in their stomachs when they are commenting on victories or defeats: one of their number, when he was told to do the reporting on a challenge match between two rivals of Jazy in an attempt to beat his record, exclaimed: "I'd much rather not see it ... We so much want this record to remain in French hands!"

This regionalism — and I have no doubt that similar ones can be found outside our frontiers (where we call them chauvinism) — can attach itself not only to the legs of a

horse, but even to the wings of a pigeon. The planner of a pigeon-shooting championship severely reproached a reporter who had stressed the cruelty of this sport: "Actually, one out of three escapes us and will go to roost in our lovely forests. I also must point out that we use nothing but second-grade pigeons: either Belgian or Spanish ones. But never French pigeons<sup>1</sup>!"

And finally, who could ever forget the way the first sputterings of our rockets were proclaimed three years after other countries had made so bold as to send a man into orbit around the Earth for a week: "FIRST SPACE-CAT IS FRENCH"?

Under these circumstances why should we be astonished to discover that the Clamouse district proclaims in its brochure that The world's most beautiful cave is French and that so many of our towns announce their claim to fame as soon as you enter them: See the rock of EMBRUN! ... LONGWY: our fortifications were built by Vauban?<sup>\*</sup> All that is in the logic of things, though the logic is not exactly Cartesian. Likewise one of our newspapers can declare itself to be

<sup>1</sup>Mere chance, which often botches things, ordained that, on the same page, the account of the trial of one of the butchers of Auschwitz mentioned the following statement: "I only gave fatal injections to Jews — never to Aryans.

<sup>\*</sup>Translator's note: Famous builder of fortifications all over France.

French intelligentsia's weekly without getting itself laughed at. But what would we say if we came across a Turkish intelligentsia's weekly or the Bulgarian intelligentsia's magazine? We'd laugh, of course. What's more, they wouldn't dare try it on.

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The preeminence France holds in its citizens' minds suffers one and only one rival: Paris.

A Frenchman may call the Sacré-Coeur a cheese cover and the Opéra an example of the pastry cook's art; he may lament the existence of an Egyptian bombe glacée flanked by four battled slatterns on the Place de la Concorde; he may rail at the narrow streets, the boorish drivers, the cantankerous pedestrians, the unlovely suburbs, the grumpy Métro conductors, the vexatious traffic wardens — but he will see red at the slightest demurring when it comes to Paris.

Can anyone love Paris, as we do, more than any other city, find its charm unequalled anywhere and not constantly feel the need to shout it from the roof-tops, even if these are the roof-tops we cherish? Can anyone feel blessed by fate for living in this city and not ask the Non-French over and over again: "Isn't it after all far better than where you come from?"

This is not a thing that is often done. You'd be closer to the general feeling if you agreed with Victor Hugo

that "when Paris is out of sorts, the whole world has a headache." The most faithful exponent of this sentiment is the French 'chanson', a constantly renewed panegyric of the peerless, unique, inalienable glory of the City of Light, also known (I am quoting, or rather, singing) as the Great Lady of the Western World.

A City of Light whose virtues are typified by its murkiest alleyways, a Dowager Lady famous for her shabbiest rags. As minstrels of pubs and toppers, millionaire 'chansonniers' are turning a pretty penny from pennilessness. For snobbish audiences who bastardize themselves with their help, they don't sing of womanhood but of wenches, not of the posh Quai Conti but of the down-and-out Quai de Bercy, not the sculpted horses of Marly but the hackneys, not the Opéra but the popular dancehall, not the highclass Rue de la Paix but the populous Rue de Lappe. They are not toasting Paris but Gay Paree.

Gay Paree says it all. And there are so many ways of saying it: Go it, Gay Paree! How are things, Gay Paree? Gay Paree's smashing! People even go so far as to pat themselves on the back: Bravo, Gay Paree! Gay Paree, oh, Gay Paree! ... But what is it about you then, asks one ballad, for people so to love thee? ...

... Everything and, above all, nothing, since it is a well-known fact that what makes the Great Lady so enchanting are her mere nothings, those mere nothings of the dressmaker's girls who rig themselves out in the simplest thing, or as one

of those female voices on the radio would croon into her microphone, one of those mere nothings that make up the inimitable chic of the Parisian woman (the mere nothings are the toast of our export industry, but, although the Non-French female importer may well carry these trifles; she'll never be able to carry them off like a Parisian woman).

In addition to the mere nothing and the dressmaker's girls, anything may be included in the toasting of the capital: barges and bums, dives and dancehalls, the blare of bands, button squeezeboxes and drone basses, and, not to forget those three masculine graces of the Parisian ballad: the tavern, the tin-lizzie and the tube, as frequently on the lips of songwriters as tick tack toe on the lips of children. Something else is striking in the way the songbirds of the streets are paying homage to Gay Paree: the nostalgica that wrings their hearts — as if they were in constant danger of losing their pub or their riverbank — and a certain method of riling the Non-French. It is not enough to intone the limitless attractions of Paris in any key or register they can; no, they also have to make a point of proving that it is impossible to find its equal anywhere: you can rove here, there and everywhere, but there exists only one, and we've got it! snigger snigger! Let us listen to Go it, Gay Paree! where the title is a story in itself:

It tickles me pink to hear people that gawk on a trip to Rome or Korea... It's crazy the nonsense they think they can talk, as if anywhere's better than here... They cheese me with tiresome chat of New York — such places are really small beer... They can build as much as they like elsewhere, but Seoul hasn't yet got an underground... While Rio has no International Fair, and New York as yet has no bikes around... Paris still has the lion's share — We'll grind them into the ground.

Can't you just picture the Brazilians who are eaten up with envy at our Gingerbread Fair, Americans with complexes because they don't have bicycles, Koreans who are driven to despair because they have to live without a tube... Then it ends on a tragic note: When you're done for, everything will be done for! — which just repeats to a heightened degree Victor Hugo's more modest diagnosis: worldwide migraine.

The songs are legion in which you may encounter this "red-rag-to-the-bull technique" in order to irk the Non-French: suffice it to quote the following one in which Léo Ferré expresses it so beautifully:

Not only in Paris can you get in a snag  
You get hit for six anywhere else in the world  
Yeah, but everywhere else in the World,  
The joys of Paris aren't there — what a drag!

... a drag for the entire world, but not for us who never have to get up and go somewhere else and are envied by everyone in the world who's trying to enjoy himself.

Even our Flea Market — highpoint of Parisian snobbery — is without equal elsewhere: For me the Russians can have every star... and the Yankees can range in rockets afar...  
all I ask is our Flea Market Bazaar.

And our waggish youngsters of course. There is no wag like the Parisian kid. A radio reporter broadcast the expression one Parisian wag coined when faced with a red traffic light that didn't change to green fast enough: "Here's one pale person tired of pink pills!" The reporter followed that up with the comment: "Where else but in Paris would you come across something like that!?" True ... I had heard the same expression fifteen years ago in Rio de Janeiro ... uttered by a Brazilian paperboy in the same situation — but not with the same kind of pill. The little Brazilian may have been the first to have actually said it, but too bad, that didn't coin the phrase ... that was in Rio after all...

You poor countries without wags, street cafés and Fleamarkets — how do you manage to get by? Paris must cause such complexes in others. It sometimes happens ...

"When I'm in London", a young American told me, "I have confidence in my energy, in my dollars, in my power. I beat the English hands down. When I go to Rome I feel that my country is stronger, cleaner and nowhere near as restless. I beat the Italians, too. When I see the Germans I have no trouble whatsoever telling myself that I'm infinitely better than they are: more independent, less inhibited, better dressed. In Paris I feel defenseless. Or worse: annexed. Annexed as a Yank, annexed in a way only you know how to annex Japanese Dances, Pekin silk or macadamized roads (and it's not a Scotsman who lords it there, but Prosper the wide

boy). Even when I'm faced with people who try their hand at playing our music, who copy our ice-creams, who mimic our way of life when their department stores advertise In the "Rhapsody in Blue" Boutique: the very chic campus style — it's always hot jazz à la Française, a drugstore made in France, Parisian Bermuda shorts. By reproducing them they do us great honour: after all they have been raised to the highest level of civilization."

\* \* \* \*

My American friend was good-natured. Our provinces are probably less so.

If our provincials willingly accept the reflected glory of the admiring sigh — Ah! ... Paris! — that so often follows the bare mention of their nationality, once they are back in Montluçon or Poitiers they do not put up with radio and television's raving Parisianism without batting an eye.

Who can help feeling the odd pang of bitterness, when they have to hear over and over again, day in day out that "Only Paris really has the gift of the gab", to hear great things proclaimed about the inimitable chic of the Parisian woman and to hear it sung that "The Parisian guys do it better than the rest ...". To proclaim too vociferously that the whole world is out of sorts when Paris has a bellyache, is to risk the Province's being nauseated by the Capital.

It would be denying any critical talent whatsoever to

those forty million citizens who do not live in the capital, to believe that a people in its entirety would good-humouredly swallow that fake Parisian accent of certain heralds of the airwaves.

It would be depriving eighty-five percent of the country of its sense of the ridiculous to think that they would blissfully bow down before that childish superiority that casual shoulderrubbing with celebrities — great or small, former or present-day — seems to bestow upon the masters of the microphone: I specifically have in mind that chronicler-snob who can never talk painting without throwing out facts concerning the Montparnasse Gang in such detail, that he seems to have spent his life with Kisling and Modigliani<sup>1</sup> in the Café Coupole.

It would be asking too much of the most level-headed and least frivolous segment of the population to expect it to just let itself be inundated by the wave of personal overfamiliarity that streams out daily from the top of the Eiffel Tower. Neither that craze for being on a first-name basis with celebrities and the fashion of celebrities to call each other by their first names, nor that intimacy any petty little reporter assumes in order to "establish rapport" with a star, is fooling anybody. But it is doubtless impossible either to approach a popstar without addressing him as Dear Johnny or

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<sup>1</sup>Although Modigliani died in 1920 and the Cafe' Coupole was not opened until 1927, he is automatically included in the café's terrace set.

to take one's leave of him without wishing him see ya later! in a conspiratorial tone of voice, as if that very evening you were going to have dinner together — such is Gay Paree, like a huge club of celebrities who are all pals together, Gay Paree where you're on a first-name basis with all the notables, the Town that is the source of All Light.

## CHAPTER IV

Discussion of a Variety of  
Problems Encountered in  
the Translation  
of

Pierre Daninos'

Snobissimo

In this final chapter of our thesis we would like to discuss four general groups of problems that presented themselves to us during the course of the translation:

A Key-Words

B Puns and Plays on Words

C Problems of Cultural Context

D Compounds and Neologisms; Colloquialisms

The major headings will frequently be divided into sub-groups for reasons of clearer categorization. In our discussion we shall also demonstrate just what made the translation of this particular text so challenging. Without restating everything that has already been said in our introduction let us therefore begin with our first topic.

#### A Key-Words

It is only natural that a well-written text, such as Snobissimo, should contain a number of key-words which usually recur throughout a specific chapter, since they are inevitably linked to the particular theme of that chapter. But since a book naturally also has a very general overall theme, such words may even reappear in later chapters and should therefore be translated in the same way, as long as they have the same reference and function. As Alan Duff observes in The Third Language:

a patchwork is what we get in translation where the bits and pieces of the original are pasted together and no longer match. Each text is an entity, and its wholeness must be preserved; but it can be preserved only if the translation is itself coherent ...<sup>1</sup>

This, of course, not only holds true for the use of key-words but also for all the other special stylistic features of the original which we shall discuss in the later parts of this chapter. Since key-words work towards the unification of the text, we have to begin with a careful analysis of the importance of a specific word in the text. Consequently we have categorized these expressions into (a) minor key-words, which are vital basically in one or two paragraphs and (b) major key-words which influence the wording of an entire chapter. In both of these categories we shall take two examples for discussion:

(a) Minor Key-Words

Our first example will be 'les gosses' which appear as one of the components of Chapter I (§ p. 19). This, of course, is a common way of referring to children in popular French and is translated as "youngster, kid" in Harrap's Dictionary. We had provisionally endeavoured to render it more British in flavour by translating it as "Young Uns", but one particular expression, amid repeated uses of 'les gosses' on page 25 in the original, made us change our mind: the exclamation 'Gosse

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<sup>1</sup>A. Duff, op. cit., p. 12.

de riche!' had only one possible popularly used English equivalent, namely 'Rich Kid!'. Hence every other instance of 'gosse' (e.g. 'leurs gosses'; 'il n' y a que des gosses'; 'le gosse nous inonde'; 'nous envoyons les gosses à Champlâtreux'; 'les gosses pleuvent'; all on S p. 25) was translated as 'kid' in order to make the ultimate text consistent (pp. 17-8). Switching from one possible rendering to another (frequently done in the interests of "elegant variation" to avoid repetitiousness) would have destroyed the effect Daninos intended, i.e. to ridicule the overuse of the word by overusing it himself.

Another minor key-word is the word 'bien' which appears in several closely linked contexts in the book, mainly in the following passage: 'Entre gens-bien, le simple bien — "il est très bien, vous savez", "c'est quelqu'un de bien" — a balayé les qualificatifs démodés ...' (S p. 20). Originally we attempted to translate this as 'Among the good-old-school-tie-set the simple word good — as in "he's a good man, you know", "that's a good chap" — ...', but decided that those two phrases used to explain 'good' were neither expressive enough, nor really equivalent to the original 'bien'. Daninos is humorously trying to explain the (non-existent) connection between 'gens-bien' and 'il est bien' as though the two senses were interrelated: we failed to find a translation that neatly rendered this and ended up by deciding to translate 'gens-bien' literally as 'gentlefolk' and to add the adjective 'great' for 'bien', because only thus could we echo the expression in the

explanatory phrases: 'Among the great gentlefolk the simple word great — as in "he's a really great guy, you know", "that chap's as great as they come" — ...' (p. 11). This kind of addition by analysis leads to some degree of fragmentation of the original with a consequent prolixity that is not exactly in keeping with the trim niceness of the original. However, another justification for the use of 'great gentlefolk' is that although 'bien' (great) is the key-word, it cannot elegantly be carried over to page 16, where we had to translate 'homme de bien' and 'gens-bien' (§ p. 24) as 'a touch of the gentlemanly' and 'gentlefolk' without the 'great'. This way we at least have a partial carryover from 'great gentlefolk' to 'gentlemanly' and from there again to 'gentlefolk'. The text still hangs together because the basic idea (i.e. repetition) has been sustained in the translation. We might also add that 'gens-bien' reappears in Chapter III (§ p. 154). We felt that, since it was possible here to use 'great gentlefolk' (p. 54) — although 'the right people' might have been slightly more elegant — we should do so in the name of the coherency Duff advocates.

#### (b) Major Key-Words

Where it comes to translating major key-words, i.e. those that unify an entire chapter, our choice of word may not always, in the first instance, be the obvious one, because we have to carefully consider all the situations in which one word is used in French and then, just as carefully, eliminate

all those possibilites in English which do not fit in each and every circumstance.

One such expression (and its derivatives) is 'l'encanaillage (des bourgeois)' (§ p. 19) which implies a sort of 'degradation', and also reappears throughout Chapter I: 'les gens arrivés encanaillent leur vocabulaire' (§ p. 22); 'les bourgeois ont encanaillé ... leurs enfants' (§ p. 25); and once in Chapter III: 'les millionnaires de la chanson ... encanaillent des parterres snobs' (§ p. 164). 'Degradation' and 'to degrade' might work in all of these cases, but somehow it appears rather too tame (by virtue of its Latinity, no doubt) for the context, if we remember that at the root of 'encanaillage' we find the word 'canaille', which is very colloquial and can mean 1.(a) rabble, riff-raff; (b) scoundrel, rascal, blackguard; or 2. low, rascally, vulgar, coarse, smutty (according to Harrap's Dictionary). Obviously something more colloquial and devalued has to be found to replace 'degradation', in order to reflect Daninos' intentions. Some of the possibilities were: to go down the drain, to go nature, to go cheap, to go slumming it (neither of these fit every instance of 'encanailler'), to debase (no more colloquial than 'to degrade'), to corrupt (too many sexual overtones, especially in context with children) and to bastardize. This last one is what we finally chose as fitting in every context, since "bastard" belongs to the same level of language as "canaille" does.

We were faced with a similar kind of dilemma in Chapter III concerning the term 'Etranger ... avec un E capital autant que global' (S p. 155). 'Etranger' in French can mean 1.(a) foreign, (b) foreigner, alien, (c) foreign parts, (d) outsider and 2. irrelevant, not belonging to (see Harrap's Dictionary). In addition to this there is the feminine 'étrangère' (S p. 164) — a foreign or strange woman. In this particular chapter 'l'Etranger' is anything or anybody who is definitely not French (whence the capital E), and appears no less than fifteen times. We therefore had to find an expression that could stand for foreigner(s) as well as foreign parts, and which might be given a not-too-awkward feminine form. The following possibilities do not work, because they do not answer all our above-stated requirements: Persons Extraneous, Foreign Body, Foreign Person (all a little unwieldy, Foreigner (too plain and everyday), Ultramontane (too arcane), Alien (too many modern associations with sci-fi movies and non-nationals), Extra-Parisian (too specific), etc. One term, "the Outsider" seemed to embody the right meaning of Standing Beyond All Frenchmen, but gave difficulty since it produces echoes suggesting the specific references contained in the very well known (at least once upon a time) work bearing the same name by Colin Wilson (1956). Consequently it was exchanged for Non-French, since that more closely reflects the disdain the French are supposed to feel towards anyone who is not a Frenchman and therefore extrane-

ous to all Frenchness and lodged in opposition to it.

To close this section we might recapitulate that it is important for the coherence of the translation to identify and analyze key-words in the original text, to establish their relative importance to the text and to translate them in such a way (rather freely if necessary) that the final product reads as naturally and has the same implications as the original text.

### B Puns and Plays on Words

Since Snobissimo is a satirical work, it is only natural to find a relatively large number of puns and wordplays in it, because, in the language of Anne Hyde Greet, "the general effect of puns can quite often be mocking."<sup>1</sup> Puns are able to pack a double punch and under the bland and innocent first meaning reveal a second meaning equally as valid: the perfect weapon for the satirist who, mine de rien, can mean by implication anything ranging from the gently suggestive to the diametrically opposed. Puns presuppose a relative richness of vocabulary, awareness of words and alertness of mind that many great writers have shown — not the least being Shakespeare and Rabelais. The same quick wit is often found at the other

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Hyde Greet, Jacques Prévert's Word Games, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968, p. 1.

end of the social scale among the imaginative creators of slang — so aptly termed la langue verte — which automatically exploits the built-in lexical ambiguities of language.

We have already stated that Daninos is a virtuoso with words and that he will do anything to keep the narrative of his books lively and stimulating, since

la littérature est un art du langage  
et ... vise à la perfection et à la  
maîtrise de l'expression linguistique.<sup>2</sup>

What better way therefore of demonstrating his linguistic prowess and of keeping his reader amused and intrigued than by utilizing the time-honoured (and sometimes dishonoured) mechanisms of punning and playing on (or with) words (and sounds), especially as

ces ambiguïtés naturelles et inconscientes  
peuvent ... être voulues et recherchées à  
des fins stylistiques. <sup>3</sup>

Obviously, successful and significant punning, as opposed to a mere playful jingle of words, is only possible if a writer knows his language inside out and is therefore able to judge where a pun will be possible and appropriate. As Greet states, "the humour of a pun depends largely on the quality of surprise generated, and this in turn depends on the contrast

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Guiraud, Les Jeux de Mots, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> ibid, p. 79.

of the words linked together."<sup>4</sup>

Naturally there exist a great variety of puns and plays on words (see Guiraud, Les Jeux de Mots), but in this paper we shall only discuss five ways in which Daninos utilizes their humorous effect: (I) Equivocal Puns, (II) Revitalized Common Expressions, (III) Plays on Fixed Expressions, (IV) Plays on Sounds and (V) Plays with Words.

First of all we have to discuss what exactly a pun is. In French the definitions of "calembour" and "jeu de mots" are restricted to words which sound the same, but have different meanings.<sup>5</sup> If we followed this definition we would be limited to a discussion of homonyms, like steal and steel. Daninos, however, uses relatively few such puns, presumably because his very versatility stimulates him to range freely over the whole scale of wordplay.

The following definition of the pun from the Oxford English Dictionary comes much closer to our use of the term:

The use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect. 6

<sup>4</sup> Anne Hyde Greet, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert, Dictionnaire Alfabétique et analogique, Paris: Société du Nouveau Littré, 1960, pp. 119-20; p. 606.

<sup>6</sup> Sir James Murray, ed., A New English Dictionary of Historical Principles, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909, vii, 1594.

The difference between French and English definitions is therefore, that in our language the pun can be played on different senses of the same word, which is what Daninos — like Jacques Prévert and Georges Brassens — does most of the time. Furthermore, this notion is also supported by Empson, who calls a pun an ambiguity of the third type:

An ambiguity of the third type, considered as a verbal matter, occurs when two ideas, which are connected only by being both relevant in the context, can be given in one word simultaneously. 7

A good example for this kind of pun, which Greet calls an equivocal pun, would be Prévert's line "debout devant son chevalet de torture picturale", where "chevalet" means easel, but "chevalet de torture" is an instrument of torture."<sup>8</sup>

#### (I) Equivocal Puns

This type of pun, where a single word has different meanings, is the one most widely used by Daninos. Guiraud calls it "la source des meilleurs calembours, dans la mesure où les meilleurs seraient les plus cohérents et les plus adéquats."<sup>9</sup> Obviously puns are very difficult to translate effectively because it is only rarely possible to find an equivalent word with the same connotations. We will therefore

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<sup>7</sup>Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, New York: H. Wolff Book Manufacturing Co., 1955, p. 117.

<sup>8</sup>Anne Hyde Greet, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>P. Guiraud, op. cit., p. 10.

discuss three examples where we had differing degrees of success in the translation. In the passage concerning Professor Panofsky's study of Rolls-Royce radiators, Daninos describes that paper as 'une autocritique du m'as-tu-vuisme américain' (§ p. 41). The literal meaning of 'autocritique' of course is "self criticism", but in this discussion of American cars by an American citizen it also means "a criticism of cars ('autos')". Since the French word is based on the Greek element "auto" (self) and the abbreviation for "automobile" — both of which are international — we are able to simply transcribe the expression into English without losing any of the humorous impact of the pun in the translation: 'autocriticism' of the American show-offmanship.' (p. 34).

Only slightly less successful was our translation of 'intéressé au double sens du mot' (§ p. 28). In French, 'intéressé' can mean both 'stimulated' and 'concerned', the English literal equivalent however does not cover exactly the same area. The only word we could find with two similar senses was 'anxious', but unfortunately this double sense is not quite as obvious as in French. Consequently we had to explain them in our translation: 'anxious in the two senses of keen or worried' (p.21). Although we were unable to leave the pun implicit and had to make it explicit, we feel that the effect is still fairly humorous, because even Daninos felt constrained to ensure that his French reader imbued 'intéressé' with both its meanings.

Lastly we shall discuss an example where we were unable to reflect the pun in one word and were forced to weaken the passage slightly by paraphrasing it. On page 38 in Snobissimo, Daninos states that:

'certains conseillers publicitaires suggérèrent à Mr. Henry Royce de frapper trois R au lieu de deux: Royal Rolls Royce. Mais le futur Sir Henry n'était pas homme à commettre ce genre d'impair.'

This passage is absolutely ingenious when we consider that Daninos has been able to endow the already ambiguous 'impair' (which means (a) odd, as opposed to even, numbers — here referring to changing the two R's into three R's; and (b) gaffe — referring to the impropriety of daring to make an alteration to the classic Rolls presentation) with a third meaning, i.e. "not done at the peerage level of Nobility." This is based on a neologistic analysis of 'im-pair' (i.e. non-noble), and refers to Henry Royce's being knighted and thus promoted to the peerage as Sir Henry. Such a subtle and rich combination is not to be rendered by a single-word equivalent to 'impair'. Therefore the result of our endeavours to reflect the passage as closely as possible reads as follows:

'certain advertising consultants made the suggestion that Mr. Henry Royce's stamp should show three instead of two R's: Royal Rolls Royce. But the future Sir Henry knew better than to risk blotting the family scutcheon with such an odd gamble' (p.31).

To "blot the family scutcheon" is to commit a gaffe and thereby dishonour one's (noble) name. The 'odd' — which

in English happens to have two meanings (the secondary one being "strange") — at least includes some sort of pun in the translation. The result, although it renders all the meanings of the original, admittedly is nowhere near as neat as Daninos' version. Once again the sense and repercussions of the pun have been put across, but at the cost of losing the comprehensive encapsulation of meaning in a single term and creating some diffusion of thought.

(II) Revitalized Common Expressions:

Like Prévert, the phrases Daninos likes best to use are common expressions and clichés. These he reendows with colour by revealing their dormant meanings. As Greet says:

A large number of Prévert's verbal plays are based on a literal approach\* toward figurative expressions. The result, however comical, is nearly always a renewal of the evocative powers of language, a reinvestment of old meanings and the assignment of new ones. Although the ambiguity may reside in a single word, commonly it is inseparable from the context (which is usually conversational in tone). 10

Exactly the same thing also holds true for Daninos. We are calling this phenomenon "revitalization", because some word in the context is the spark that sets off the play, whereby the original or literal sense of a common expression is

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\*our underlining.

<sup>10</sup>A.H. Greet, op. cit., p. 32.

revived in one way or another.<sup>11</sup> Daninos uses this mechanism quite frequently in order to point out the grotesqueness of some expressions or in order to make his readers aware of all the facets of the French language. Let us just point out two examples: talking about the obsessive love of some Rolls-owners, he describes them as having 'la Rolls dans la peau' because they refuse to part from the Silver Lady (even 'sous peine de procès-verbal') (S p. 39). Obviously it is physically impossible to have a Rolls-Royce under your skin, but Daninos reendows this figurative expression for being obsessed with something (or someone) with a literal meaning when he sarcastically describes the Rolls-owner's affliction as a 'dermatose noble' (high-class skin-disease) two sentences later (this — because of the allusion to illness — may also be an allusion to the fixed expression "pourriture noble", associated with the fermentation of the grape in the Bordeaux area). It was a stroke of pure luck that the literal equivalent to the French idiomatic expression also exists in English. And since 'dermatose', being a learned word with a Greek stem, is international, we do not lose even the slightest amount of the humoristic impact Daninos intended in our translation: 'you really have to have the Rolls under your skin .... this high-class dermatosis .... ' (p.32 ) is

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<sup>11</sup>William J. Hodgson, Word Play in Georges Brassens, unpublished M.A. Thesis, McMaster University, 1977, p. 11.

just as ridiculous and arresting here as in the original. Our second example in this category can be found in Chapter III, where the word 'grippe' in the expression 'prendre qn en grippe' (to take a dislike to someone) is revitalized. 'Grippe' by itself can mean "dislike" as well as "influenza", but in the idiomatic expression only the former meaning usually makes sense. But not here, where the latter meaning is revitalized by the context:

'A clamer trop haut que le monde entier  
éternue quand Paris est enrhumé, on  
risque de voir la Province prendre la  
capitale en grippe.' (§ p. 168).

This harks back to the saying by Victor Hugo that "quand Paris est souffrant, tout le monde a mal à la tête (§ p. 163). The two spark-words of course are 'éternue' (sneezes) and 'enrhumé' (has a cold), since they reawaken the sense of 'influenza' in 'grippe', which would otherwise be non-existent in that idiom. This time, as opposed to the preceding example, we cannot however translate this literally, since the idiom does not exist in English. But we can at least try to keep it in the context of illness, where we have the expression 'to be nauseated by something (or someone)' when we speak of extreme dislike. Hence, if you have influenza, you also have a cold and sneeze; then, if you are nauseated, you have a stomach-ache and feel out of sorts. Which brings us to our translation:

'... that the whole world is out of sorts  
when Paris has a bellyache, is to risk the  
Province's being nauseated by the capital'  
(p. 69).

where the original meaning of 'nauseated' (i.e. sick to the stomach) is reawakened in addition to the figurative sense.

(III) Plays on Fixed Expressions:

In this category we shall discuss only one instance where Daninos has taken a well-known expression of two components and replaced one of the components with a different word. Thus he is giving it a humorous dimension, because the reader, who knows the original phrase, is surprised at this new turn of events. Such a play occurs in 'mécaniquement faible' (S p. 46) which turns on the sociological term 'économiquement faible' (lower income/reduced circumstances) which is actually mentioned earlier in the text (S p. 36). In addition to keeping one element of the idiom intact, Daninos replaces the other component with a word which resembles the original quite closely where sounds are concerned:

é c o n (o m) i q u e m e n t	
(m) é c a n i q u e m e n t	faible

In the translation we obtain the same sort of surprise effect by simply adding (instead of substituting) a word to our equivalent for 'économiquement faible': 'reduced power circumstances' (p. 39). Whereas the French has a rather tantalizing echoing effect, the English, unable to reproduce the same result by the same means, has to fall back on another type of wordplay: that of two telescoped expressions:

	reduced power	(as for cars)
welded to:	reduced	circumstances (as for people)

results in "reduced power circumstances".

The three abovementioned categories are all strictly concerned with the meanings of words and how they could be amplified or distorted in order to make the text funnier and more stimulating for the educated reader. Now let us look at some other ways in which Daninos plays with linguistic elements.

#### (IV) Plays on Sound:

As we have already discovered, Daninos' techniques often resemble those of Jacques Prévert, who often combines puns with other verbal techniques. "A sound seems to remind (him) not only of other sounds but of whole groups and families of sounds (e.g. "le monde mental ment monumentalement")<sup>12</sup> Daninos does not carry this to quite such extremes (after all, Prévert is more concerned with poetic patterns of sound), but he also often uses what we might call half-repeats, where parts of one word will be echoed in another in the same sentence. At first, this might appear incidental and accidental, as this kind of situation must occasionally occur in the nature of things, as we have just shown ourselves. However, there is a sufficient number of examples to suggest that Daninos simply rejoiced in this reduced sonorous echo and felt that it enhanced the effect. Sometimes it is relatively simple to reflect this phenomenon in the translation, either in literal translation )e.g. 'deux petits chasseurs en livrée ...

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<sup>12</sup>A.H. Greet, op. cit., p. 6.

venaient de prendre livraison ...' (§ p. 21) translated into 'two small liveried attendants discussed a ... lady who had just delivered herself into their hands' (p. 12) or through a slight change in the context — since it is the play on sound that is important, not the words per se (e.g. 'cette ronce de noyer veiné qui n'a pas de veine (§ p. 50) rendered as 'this well-grained burr-walnut with its ingrained infection' (p. 44)). But quite frequently it is not possible to retain the play on the repetition of sounds in the translation, because the context does demand that they retain semantic cohesion. Since it is important to reproduce a certain degree of play in such a passage (since Daninos is trying to create a certain effect) we decided to translate such problematic half-repeats by plays with words, in which two or more of the expressions belong to the same word family pertaining to the terms in question. This ought to be a reasonable procedure, since Daninos himself uses the same technique repeatedly (as we shall see in section (V)). For instance, in translating 'l'intonation distinguée ... est ... de mauvais ton, voire douteuse' (§ p. 20) literally as 'intonation' and 'bad form', we would lose the link between "pronunciation" and "musicality" inherent in the two expressions in the original. We consequently decided on 'a refined intonation is regarded as being off-key, nay flatly suspicious' (p. 11), where both of the new expressions have strong ties to musicality, but also retain the original meaning of dubiousness.

The same type of mechanism works in our translation of 'eussent classé leur homme — ... lorsqu'il s'agit de déclassement' (S p. 22) as 'to size a man up — as you'd say in the case of diminished social stature' (p. 14). Here the juxtaposition of 'classer' and 'déclasser' is reflected in our juxtaposition of 'to size up' and diminished ... stature' — which is rather a paradox. Added to which we have the interplay between 'size' and 'stature' which repeat the same sememe (i.e. unit of meaning) class — of the French, if not the same morpheme. In this way, Daninos' determined but playful manner of pulling a text together is echoed in the translation with a minimum loss of impact.

(V) Plays with Words:

In this section we are faced with similar problems to those in the above category. Daninos uses plays with words, i.e. the use of different words from the same semantic field, in order to subtly draw attention to a passage and to make the text more coherent. If the imagery used derives from a widespread notion (e.g. war) it is fairly easy to translate such a passage almost literally. This happens, for instance in the paragraph about native regional snobbery in Chapter III, where newcomers '(Montent) à l'assaut des citadelles des boulevards Watteau ... et Carpeaux' (S p. 149) and where we find the "native" who 'fuyant' les vacanciers, loue chèrement sa maison à l'ennemi ... et abandonne la Côte Basque pour trois mois.' This extended metaphor involving war imagery

of course reinforces for the reader the feeling of jealousy and dislike between the two opposed groups, and, since war seems endemic to most civilizations, similar expressions are easily found in English: 'mounting an attack on the strongholds of ...', 'retreating from the advancing vacationers, rents his house at a steep price to the enemy ... and surrenders the Basque Coast for three months' (pp. 48-9): We therefore keep exactly the same connotations with which Daninos invested the original, and the passage remains just as amusing, because the pettiness of the struggle is lifted to such an important niveau as warfare.

However, in cases where the imagery is less universal in character, it is sometimes impossible to keep all the wordplays exactly as they were in the original, because they might lose their impact in mere literal translation. In these instances a slight semantic shift in the semantic field may be necessary. Nevertheless the translator should endeavour to remain as close as possible to the associations of the original. In the paragraph on page 20 in Snobissimo where Daninos mocks the extravagant language of advertisements, he mentions 'mots saupoudrés de strass', 'annonceuses qui ... plongent leur vocabulaire dans un bain de contre-plaqué', and a 'conversation en ruolz'. 'Strass' (rhinestones), 'contre-plaqué' (plywood; veneer) and 'en ruolz' (electroplated wares) all represent glitter, brashness, phoneyiness and pretense. Everything is only on the surface. But none of the English equi-

valents are very commonly known to signify the same values (or rather, non-values). For every one of those terms we therefore made a list of words containing any paraphrases or related expressions that might fit the context:

saupoudré: to sprinkle, powder, dust, stud, encrust, soak,  
paint, varnish

"strass": fake jewellery, glitter, tinsel, icing, costume jewellery, imitation jewellery, mock jewellery, paste jewels

"contre-plaqué": overlay, electroplating, encrusted, gilt

"ruolz": silverplated, fake, phoney, imitation.

As a final step we chose an assortment of words from the list, that seemed to fit together relatively well, and ordered them into '... seem to encrust their vocabulary with paste jewels and gild their words'; 'this phoney manner of speaking ...' (p. 12). This translation keeps the words all more or less in the same semantic field and therefore stays quite close to the original meaning of the passage, although some of the impact of foreignness inherent in the words "strass" and "ruolz" (both the names of their inventors) is probably lost.

In conclusion to this section we might say that Daninos proves his linguistic alertness by constantly making use of different types of puns and plays on words. Whereas it is not always possible to translate an expression from one of our categories into an equivalent English term belonging to that same category, it is usually possible to reflect it

either through a slight shift in content or by shifting to another category entirely (usually number V). Such a translation will still retain the impact intended by Daninos and stay within the general scope of his linguistic techniques.

### C Problems of Cultural Context

One type of problem that naturally runs through the entire text like a red thread is that of cultural context. Frequently, expressions in the original would be so typically French that they could not be rendered effectively by transcription or simple one-on-one translation in the English version. Peter Newmark states that:

linguistic translation procedures must be contextually supported and sometimes supplemented by the 'encyclopedia'. In the case of missing information — the supplying of this information. <sup>1</sup>

He also suggests (our underlining)

that alternative or supplementary information can be supplied by the translator in three ways: (a) within the text, (b) as a footnote to the page, the chapter or the book, or (c) as a glossary. The first method is the best provided it can be supplied briefly and unobtrusively without holding up the flow of the narrative: as an alternative term, in brackets, as a one-word definition..., as a paraphrase, participial phrase, defining adjectival clause, etc. <sup>2</sup>

It is generally accepted translation procedure to make additions

<sup>1</sup> P. Newmark, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> ibid., p. 77.

to the translation whenever the text cannot be understood without an explanation. In this paper we have, wherever possible, attempted to make any necessary additions or changes in the text itself because footnotes would disrupt the flow of the text as well as get into conflict with those supplied by Daninos in the original. The glossary Newmark suggests is not feasible in this type of text, because anything the reader has to look up at the end of the book loses its immediate impact — and impact built into the text as an integral part of it, is after all one of Daninos' major concerns.

We have therefore classified the complementary information in the English version under (I) additions, and (II) changes (either an exact or approximate equivalent, or a paraphrase). Furthermore these headings are subdivided into different categories according to (i) proper names, (ii) institutions (social and other), (iii) historical context, (iv) geography, (v) art and literature, and (vi) measurements. Further subgroups deal with (vii) snob-words that depend on (a) anglicisms in the French version, and (b) the snobbish distortion of pronunciation, (viii) idiolect, (ix) poetry and (x) others. Not all of these appear in (I) as well as (II), since (vi) measurements and (ix) poetry can only be dealt with through changes.

We shall now proceed to deal with headings (I) and (II) separately.

## I Additions to the English Version

Only very rarely have we found it necessary to make any additions in the English version, in order to convey as accurately as possible the connotative value of the source language. For instance: 'des attardés au bas de l'échelle' (S p. 21) was translated as 'those poor backward creatures at the bottom of the social ladder' (p. 13). 'Poor' was inserted in order to reflect the faintly derisive, condescending tone of the original more clearly; the word 'social' was a natural addition because of its association with "social climbing" in the mind of the reader. On page 16 'par des maîtres d'hôtel en gants blancs' (S p. 24) is translated as 'by white-gloved, tuxedo-ed maître d's'. The reasoning for this is as follows: the French form "maître d'hôtel" is rather dignified and has a certain amount of standing. "Maître d'" in English has a similar character, especially since it is a French loan word (i.e. foreign snobbery). But it is common to find that a word which has become reduced to being an ordinary word through widespread usage, also reduces its length (e.g. "taxi-meter", which became "taxi"). Our "maître d'" is more generalized in English and less resplendent than the French original. Consequently it has become somewhat debased. To reinstate it to its former glory we inserted the neologism 'tuxedo-ed' (echoing 'white-gloved') which fits the context well since it, too, suggests the impeccable majesty of a 'maître d'hôtel', and furthermore ties in nicely with Daninos' penchant for

neologisms (see the section devoted to neologisms for more detailed information).

(i) Proper Nouns:

Since proper names in general have neither specific meanings nor connotations, they are basically untranslatable, because one can only translate meaning. The exception may be some international names, mainly geographical, which have "translations" (e.g. London/Londres; Rhein/Rhine/Rhin; etc.). It is also true that some names may be used more as common nouns, for their associations (e.g. any Tom Dick or Harry; mon Jules; etc.). In the passage 'tantes Agathe aquisextaines, amoureuses de Mérimée (S p. 33), 'Mérimée' is used as a metonymy that is difficult to understand without an explanation. The entire passage is concerned with orthography, and Mérimée is renowned for his use of difficult language. Therefore the final translation reads 'Aix-domiciled Aunt Agathas who are enamoured of Mérimée (well-known for his orthographically tricky prose)' (p.27). On page 50 Daninons mentions a 'M. Achille Glorieux-Toulemonde' (S p. 149). He specifically points out the humour of this name by preceding it with the interjection '— je n'invente rien —'. As we know, most names of persons now appear as semantic voids (e.g. Mallarmé, Condillac, Voltaire, etc.) even despite their meaningful origins. Some however still retain vestiges of potential meaning behind the opaque surface of the name: Leboucher, Lemuet and other such names are open to word play (let us remember Racine

who, for his coat of arms, used the figures of 'rat' and 'cygne'!). Such is the case here, too. Since the joke might be lost completely on the English reader if we leave the name untranslated according to rule, we decided to translate it in a footnote as "Mr. A. Glorious Everyman", because the name "means" as well as "names".<sup>3</sup>

(ii) Institutions (Social and Other):

This may appear to be a rather catch-all category, but we had to try to make the headings as concise as possible.

Some good examples for social institutions requiring elucidation may be the following:

In the headline to Chapter I we come across the expression 'Saucisson-Vin Rouge' (S p. 19). To simply translate the words would not make any sense in English, where they would appear to be plain factual references to foodstuffs. First of all, there exists a hidden incongruity in the French version (the combination is rather ridiculous because 'Saucisson' — a cold sausage — is low-class, wide-spread and everyday) that does not leap to the English mind, where the combination is without significance. Secondly we are faced with a syntactic problem here: according to Le Petit Robert 1, for example "un cocktail" can be (1) "un mélange de boissons dans la composition duquel entre l'alcool", or (2) "une

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<sup>3</sup>ibid., pp. 70-71.

réunion où l'on boit des cocktails."<sup>4</sup> The same sort of situation prevails in "être invité à un vernissage" (opening ceremony of an exhibition of paintings) as well as to our case. But since we cannot do the same thing in English, we have to add 'party' to the headline, to bring the expression up to English standard. A different example can be found on page 70 : 'la Coupole' (S p. 168). This is a typical allusion based on in-knowledge, where the local reference need not be stated in full, since any Parisian would know that this refers to a well-known Montparnasse café-restaurant. Since it is a common usage in most languages to omit referents when one is speaking of restaurants, cafés and most other commercial establishments, 'la Coupole' has a ring of popular familiarity to it — just as a Londoner referring to "the tower" would obviously be talking about "The Tower of London". To simply translate 'la Coupole' into English might mystify the English reader unfamiliar with the Parisian restaurant scene, which is why we have to add the word 'café'. All at once, we, too, can picture the bohemian atmosphere of Montparnasse, its painters and street-café. Other institutions like schools, licence numbers and newspapers are entirely cultural. On page 25 of Snobissimo we get tripped by a reference to 'produits du secondaire'. The translation reads

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Robert, Le Petit Robert 1. Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française, Paris: Le Robert, 1985.

'products of the secondary school system', the reference following immediately upon a mention of the 'Second Empire', may not be understandable. In the passage on license numbers, '1 PR 75 réservé en principe au président de la République' (S. p. 42) is translated literally as 'the 1 PR 75 which is reserved in principle for the President of the Republic', but a footnote is added, because otherwise the sentence cannot be fully understood:\* 1 for being first in the country as head of the State; 75 for Paris, the 75th administrative district. (p. 35). In translation "the names of newspapers, magazines and periodicals are always transcribed".<sup>5</sup> But since they have an immediate impact on a Frenchman — who knows their political orientation —, we have to give that information to the English reader so that their being mentioned fits the context. Therefore 'La Vie Parisienne' and 'Le Progrès' (S. p. 153) are annotated as being 'ultra-conservative' and a 'socialist paper' (pp. 53-4) respectively. Elsewhere, as with 'Elle', 'Marie-Claire' and 'Marie France' (S. p. 151) an explanation is unnecessary, because it is evident from the context that they are women's magazines — not to speak of the fact that 'Elle' is quite well-known throughout the Western World, especially among the public likely to read the kind of books Daninos produces. In the passage where Daninos describes how Parisians will accept foreign things and make them their own, he says

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<sup>5</sup>P. Newmark, op. cit., p. 73.

that only they really know how to 'annexer java, pékin ou macadam (dont le roi n'est pas écossais mais Prosper)' (S. p. 167). Because of the small initial letters of 'java', 'pékin' and 'macadam', we know that he does not really refer to those things in particular, but that they are metonymies. Any Frenchman will know that they stand for a popular dance, fashions (i.e. fabric) and the roadway respectively. (Which are also some of the topics discussed in that chapter of the book). Since the connotations do not spring to the English mind immediately, we have to compensate in the translation. The same goes for 'Prosper' who is naturally recognizable to the French, because he is the character from the well-known popular song "Prosper youp-lâ boum" about life in the streets. Our translation therefore reads as follows: 'annex Javanese dances, Pekin silk or macadamized roads (and) it's not a Scotsman who lords it there, but Prosper the wide boy' (pp. 68-9).

(iii) Historical Context:

In the first chapter we come across a reference to 'l'occupation' (S. p. 23) which would not be specific enough by itself in English, since England has never suffered from occupation since 1066 (if one excepts the now rare and jocular reference to the massive presence of American troops in Great Britain in the years 1943-46). By adding 'German' to 'occupation', the reference to World War II and the German preoccupation with race becomes clear at once. French sensitivity to the event makes the reference abundantly clear to

them. The same reasoning applies to the following example: talking about the teaching of History in schools and the appalling ignorance of children, Daninos wonders about 'ce qui a bien pu se passer le 14 juillet 1789' (§ p. 157). To a Frenchman this allusion to (one of) the most important day(s) in French history (celebrated as a national holiday every year) — the start of the French Revolution — is crystal-clear (it is like July 4 to an American). The English reader however may need a little help to remember what he has learnt in History class at school, which is why we translated the above sentence as 'what might really have happened on July 14th 1789 at the storming of the Bastille'.

(iv) Geography:

Let us quote Newmark once again:

Where the connotations of a geographical name are implied in ... a literary text ... the translator will have to bring them out in his version, if his readers are unlikely to know them. Where the denotation of the name is not known or obscure to the reader the translator often adds the appropriate generic name: 'the river Rehe' ... <sup>6</sup>

Sometimes the addition of a generic name is quite sufficient to clear up any confusion on the part of the English reader, as on page 53 where 'Perrache' (§ p. 153) becomes 'Perrache Station' or 'aux Brotteaux' (§ p. 152) which becomes 'in the Brotteaux quarter' (p. 52 ). Nevertheless, quite frequently,

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<sup>6</sup> ibid, p. 72.

this system does not suffice. This is particularly so where streetnames or parts of a town are mentioned. To a Frenchman the implied connotations of those places are evident, but an Englishman will need some help from the translator. Therefore 'pas le quai Conti mais le quai de Bercy' (S p. 164) are explained as 'not the posh Quay Conti but the down-and-out Quay de Bercy' (p. 65 ); 'la route de Windsor' (S p. 39) is 'the Windsor castle road' (p. 32 ), because it adds more of the classy, royal atmosphere that is already alluded to elsewhere in the passage.

(v) Art and Literature

It is only natural that the English reader might need some help from the translator where nationally (but not necessarily internationally) well-known pieces of art and literature are concerned. Any educated Frenchman would know that 'les chevaux de Marly' (S p. 164) do not refer to live horses but to the famous sculptures of prancing horses originally at Marly (just outside of Paris) and now at the entrance to the Champs Elysées. We therefore translated the phrase as 'sculpted horses of Marly' (p. 65 ) in order to clarify their juxtaposition to the poor hackney horses of Paris.

(vii (a)) Snob Words depending on anglicisms in the French version:

This is a rather important feature in the text because a modern loan word (unlike an older loan that has been assimilated into the language to the point of appearing indigenous,

e.g. paquebot — from packetboat, 1634; redingote — from riding coat, 1725; absentéisme — from absenteeism, 1834) retains not only a degree of foreignness, but is suggestive of one-upmanship and knowledgeability; the more the loan word is neologistic, the greater this impression of snobbishness. This is backed by peculiarities of pronunciation and spelling conformation. Thus a word like 'smart' (S p. 19), very banal and ordinary in English, produces a totally different impression in French — apart from the fact that the semantic areas in the two languages do not coincide. The resonance of 'smart' in French cannot be rendered properly by any English word — like sophisticated, classy or distinguished — but only by a similar neologism or foreignism in English, like 'chic' or 'soigné' (which we used on page 11). 'Très fashionable' (S p. 21) was therefore not translated as 'very fashionable'/in/classy/stylish' etc., but as 'very chic' (p. 12 ); 'parties' (S p. 24) were rendered as 'soirées' (p. 26 ), not 'parties/revels/fêtes (although this would also have been possible, but not quite as snobbish!)/bashes/balls/etc.'. Sometimes it was impossible to find a French word to replace an anglicism efficiently. In these cases we tried to find another foreignism, e.g. 'braggadocio' (p. 38 ) for 'show-off' (S p. 44) and 'tennis-aficionados' (p. 60 ) for 'sportsmen' (S p. 159). True — these are NOT additions in the sense of added (explanatory) words as in 'l'occupation' and 'la Coupole' (where the original contained a basic sense PLUS an implicit feature known to

Frenchmen) and the translations 'German Occupation' and 'Café Coupole' (where we have the basic sense PLUS an explicit feature unknown to Englishmen).

Now let us compare the English 'smart' (basic sense) and the French 'smart' (basic sense PLUS feature of neologism PLUS feature of foreignness PLUS feature of snobbery), and we find that there is indeed an addition (of meaning) in the latter. However, replace the French 'smart' by the English 'soigné', and the English usage acquires all the features of the French 'smart', and we have "added" the right tone.

Where it was impossible to translate an anglicism directly by a French or other foreign word, we attempted to insert French expressions into the same passage, wherever they could be usefully fitted in. One rather extensive example for this procedure is the following:

d'échanges de vues sur le dernier lifting  
de Marie-Anne de Chabrulon, ou le dernier  
check-up de Pablito chez Bircher à Zurich.

C'est sans doute au cours de ces parties  
que le dosage dont je parlais tout à l'heure  
... est le plus savant.

...

... un mot tant soit peu recherché ... (S p. 24).

We managed to translate 'parties' by 'soirées', but since it was impossible to find a French (or even other foreign) expression for 'face-lift' or 'check-up', we translated 'savant' with 'savoir-faire' and retained recherché as recherché in English. Thus the whole passage retains a general impression

of foreign snobbishness — if not specifically centered in the identically same words. Because the anglicisms 'lifting' and 'check-up' imply a certain amount of snobbishly ironical cattiness, we added some word-play to put this aspect of the passage into relief, resulting in:

lively discussions on Marie-Anne de Chabrulon's latest face-saving face-lift and Pablito's latest health-saving check-up at Bircher's in Zurich.

I'm sure that it is the people at these soirées who show the most savoir-faire when it comes to those things I just mentioned.

...

... faced with a term that is a shade recherché (p. 16).

Note that the added words 'face-saving' and 'health-saving' appear a little less gratuitous than they might at first appear by the fact that they acquire some degree of inevitability or motivation through their common element '-saving', while at the same time generating some humour (inherent in the passage), since the metaphorical and abstract 'face-saving' also has a literal sense.

(vii(b)) snob words depending on a snobbish distortion of pronunciation:

Where the humour of a passage depends purely on the mispronunciation of an English or French word in the original, we first of all have to determine what exactly constitutes the "joke", and then decide how to render it properly in English. The expression 'un type trai distingué' (§ p. 20) implies a slightly affected, very condescendingly superior

pronunciation. We experimented with 'werry', 'reeeally' and 'weally', but none of these by themselves seemed to express quite the same thing to the same degree of the original. The final result was 'would be to lisp: "That's a weally distinguished guy!" ' (p. 11 ), because the insertion of 'to lisp' underlines the affected pronunciation of the snobbish upper-class 'weally', which might not otherwise be obvious. A similar problem appears when Daninos makes fun of the different ways French people pronounce the word 'Johnston': either British or Frenchified. Our dilemma of course is, that only the French nasalize their n's and that it is therefore impossible to transcribe into an English equivalent. We finally decided to resolve the problem as follows: 'The great gentlefolk pronounce it Jea(n)sto(n) to rhyme with their nasalized pronunciation of le bel enfon, while the general public correctly pronounces it John-ston<sup>nn</sup> compared to the original 'Les gens-bien prononcent Johnston comme on dit le bel enfon" alors que le populaire prononcera correctement Johnston<sup>nn</sup> ...' (S p. 154).

(viii) Idiolect:

It is generally accepted that a very small percentage of the words in any given text are likely to be used in a faulty or idiosyncratic sense, and that the translator should generally normalize such a word. On page 37 of the book, Daninos calls the Rolls-Royce radiator statue 'la Victoire' which we translated as 'the figure of Winged Victory' because

that is the English name for the statue Daninos probably has in mind. In reality however the Rolls figure-head is called "Spirit of Ecstasy". Since the sense of the passage was not endangered by Daninos' faulty use of the name, we left it in the text and only added a footnote in order to point out his mistake (p. 29).

## II Changes in the English Version

As we already discovered in the second statement by Newmark, quoted in the introduction to this passage on cultural context and the problems it entails, an expression which has specific cultural connotations to a Frenchman cannot always be resolved by simple (or even complex) additions to the translation. Sometimes an addition would be too awkward (because of its length); sometimes an exact or approximate English equivalent exists already; sometimes it would be more efficiently resolved in a paraphrase. Let us look at some examples to clarify this:

### (i) Proper Nouns

One of the more basic changes here is concerned with forms of address: the French 'M', 'Mme' or 'Mlle' become 'Mr.', 'Mrs.' or 'Miss.' (or 'Ms.' in these days when an indication of a woman's marital status is looked upon askance) in English as in the case of 'Mme Boucicaut-qui-faisait-elle-même-son-ménage' (S p. 44) who is 'Mrs. Do-your-own-housework Boucicaut' (p. 38) in the translation. It is much more difficult indeed

to find a proper English equivalent where the French name in the original has some very definite connotations to a Frenchman: we translated 'notre Jourdain de Friedland' (S p. 31) with 'our Would-be-Gentleman from the Avenue de Friedland' (p. 25 ), since Jourdain is the principal character in Molière's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme<sup>7</sup>, and The Would-be-Gentleman is the standard title of the translation. At first we had attempted to paraphrase 'Jourdain' by describing his character: 'our naively pretentious friend...', but found the final solution to be much neater. The same neatly fitting translation appears, when we explain 'Bayard' (S p. 36) by the English expression 'Knight in Shining Armour' (p. 28 ), since, again according to Le Robert <sup>8</sup>, the Chevalier de Bayard was the original for the metaphor. 'Fangio', who is mentioned in the same sentence, again seemed to be rather a metaphor than a specific person. Fangio was an Argentinian racing driver of the 1940's, and seemed too far removed from the present-day scene to have much meaning if simply transcribed into English. We therefore decided to use the name of a slightly more up-to-date racing driver: having first lighted on Jackie Stewart, we then decided on Jackie Ickx, who would more naturally be found in the environment mentioned in the passage.

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<sup>7</sup>P. Robert, Le Petit Robert 2. Dictionnaire encyclopédique, Paris: Le Robert, 1985.

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

The most problematic of all proper names mentioned in the text turned out to be 'Cambronne' in "le mot de Cambronne" on page 5. Since that very word is "merde" and nobody's trademark work in English seemed to be the equivalent "shit", we had to find a famous person or character with a trademark swear word. Rhett Butler (from "Gone with the Wind") and his "damn" did not fit, because "damn" has no prefixes or suffixes that would be viable in the context of the passage. We finally decided on Eliza Doolittle's "bloody" (from "Pygmalion") since "hell" could be used as a 'suffix' and would work in the entire passage (p. 15).

(ii) Institutions (Social and Other):

Here again we are faced with expressions that have uniquely French cultural connotations. In Chapter I we find 'Tir aux Pigeons' and 'L'Etrier' (§ p. 26), which literally mean 'pigeon shooting' and 'stirrup' respectively and have no snob-value whatsoever in English if left like that. Since these expressions refer to two very exclusive clubs in the Bois de Boulogne, we finally decided to use 'the Bois de Boulogne Tennis-Skating Club' and 'the Riding Stables of the Bois' (p. 19) which both have a suitably upper-class air. Whereas we stayed fairly close to the original meaning in the above examples, the following proves that it is sometimes impossible to do so. Whenever an expression is so exclusively French, that it loses any connotation, even after paraphrasing or additions, in English, it has to be carefully adapted to the

English culture. It is very important in these cases to have the English version express as closely as possible what the French original is implying.

One good example is the word 'saucisson' which appears in the headline of Chapter I and throughout the passage concerned with parties. On page 1767 of the Petit Robert 1 we find that this is a sausage, but more specifically the 'Saucisson (sec) de Lyon' or the 'Rosette'. And indeed on page 24 of the original we find the engraving of a 'bout de rosette' mentioned. The word 'sausage' or even 'Lyonese sausage' would not trigger any reaction whatsoever in most English persons, since it is not a typical regional dish in England as it is in France. In order to translate the term freely, we had to find a more generally known dish that would also lend itself to being stylized into an engraving. We tried 'Bangers and Mash', 'Fish and Chips' (too British and never to be found in the Rue de Varenne) and 'Hamburger and Fries' (too North-American) before we decided on 'Salami', a generally well-known kind of rather "low-class" sausage that can also be rendered in an engraving (p. 16). A similar problem surfaced with the second part of the engraving: 'un litron', which is a popular word for a litre of wine, but which is also an archaic word for an ancient measurement of distinctive shape.<sup>9</sup> Since there does not appear to be an equivalent for this in popular English, we will have to try to find a word that is archaic,

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<sup>9</sup>P. Robert, Le Petit Robert 1, p. 1103.

as well as a measurement and also associated with wine: 'wine bottle' was discarded immediately because it is much too neutral and prosaic; 'cask' and 'barrel' are both neither particularly archaic, nor a measurement, nor the right size or shape; 'tankard' and 'pitcher' are more associated with beer or rum, are no measurements and again have the wrong shape; 'flagon' was discarded because of its French background and shape; finally we lighted upon 'noggin', which is quite archaic and also a "small measure for wine"<sup>10</sup>. Another change had to be made on p. 14. The original reads 'le peuple...le plus fin de la terre en paraît truffé'. According to Le Petit Robert, 'truffé' can mean "garnished with truffles" as well as 'full of...' (page 2034). To translate it with either of those expressions would firstly make little sense in English because truffles are so very French, and secondly lose the entire allusion to restaurants, fine dining and elegance. We therefore opted for 'this nation — the 'crème de la crème' — is quite liberally peppered with these piquant little morsels', since truffles are "piquant little morsels" and a conversation can be "peppered" with something. The expression 'crème de la crème' also reflects the possible implication of 'le plus fin' which has certain associations with "fine cuisine" or

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Annandale, The Concise Imperial Dictionary of the English Language, Toronto: J.E. Bryant & Co., p. 457.

"ragoût fin". A similar culinary problem arises where Daninos quotes the outrageous saying of a Parisian youngster who was sick and tired of having to wait for the traffic light to change from red to green: "Alors, tu la craches, ta Valda?" (S p. 166). Since 'Valda' is a particular kind of green French coughdrop, and because England does not seem to possess a well-known brand-name equivalent of the same colour, we had to look for some other way to resolve this problem. Since green was 'out', the only other possibility in this context was red — but even there we drew a blank. The only popular saying containing a colour and a remedy in pastille form was "Pink pills for pale people". We decided that pink was as close as we could get to red, and our translation therefore reads: "Here's one pale person tired of pink pills!" (p. 68 ) — as suitably unusual as the original.

### (iii) Historical Context

Here again we may have to make changes because the reference in question is too specifically French and has no connotations for an Englishman. Let us take 'sa Marne du dimanche: ils ne passeront pas.' (S p. 49). This refers to a nationally known French war-cry during the Battle of the Marne, which means little or nothing to the British. But the latter do have a battle cherished as being similarly won against great odds, namely Waterloo (commonly known as "a near run thing"), and do have a nationally known expression, like 'ils ne passeront pas' for the 1914 poilu, typifying

British resistance; therefore the translation reads: 'his Sunday-Waterloo: the thin red line will hold!' (p. 43).

(iv) Geography:

Changes in this category generally constitute only an equivalent or a paraphrase. For instance, since "a building or a street ... may also denote (an) institution or its director(s)"<sup>11</sup>, 'le plus pur style Quai d'Orsay' (§ p. 30) is translated as 'pukka F.O.-style' since the Foreign Ministry's offices are on the Quai d'Orsay, and 'F.O.' implies just as much general background knowledge to make sense, as 'Quai d'Orsay' does. A simple case of paraphrase can be found on page 28, where 'la nationale 7' (§ p. 36) is translated by 'the trunkroad between Paris and Lyons'. Any Frenchman will recognize this rather offhand expression as referring to the 'Route Nationale 7' between Paris and Lyons — one of the most important highways in France — but it will mean nothing to the average Englishman unless it is explained. 'Trunkroad' instead of a simple 'highway' also implies more importance and modernity, which is fitting for this major artery.

In the introduction of this paper we have already alluded to the difficulty in translating 'Paname' (§ p. 164), the loving nickname given to the French capital by its inhabitants. We have to be careful to render all its popular resonance of

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<sup>11</sup>P. Newmark, op. cit., p. 77.

Parisian gaiety and joie de vivre in the English version. Neither the word Paris, which has connotations of culture, elegance, architecture etc., nor the original term Paname, which has absolutely no meaning at all to an Englishman, will be of any use to us. We finally decided on the popular term "Gay Paree" (p. 65 ), which is internationally known through the tourist trade, and seems to reflect fairly closely the flavour of exuberance and affection that is contained in the French original.

#### (v) Art and Literature

Universally well-known famous works of art are generally referred to by their accepted translated titles or by their commonly accepted names, which is why 'la naissance de Vénus' (S p. 24) is translated as 'Botticelli's Venus' (p. 16). 'Le Petit Chose' (S p. 26) is the slightly pejorative name of a character in a book by Daudet, which is very well-known to the French — having been read by almost every French child (at least until this generation) — but virtually unknown, not unnaturally, in Great Britain. We translated the name into 'every Tom, Dick or Harry' which, although not book characters, nicely reflect the implied commonness of 'Chose' for a human being. (p. 19).

#### (vi) Measurements:

It is only natural that we should convert Continental metric measurements like 'kilomètres' into miles (for instance

on page 30 , etc.) and 'mètres' into 'feet' (page 20) . Now, we do of course possess conversion tables for reaching accurate equivalents between the French and British systems; and if the individual does not, then adequate dictionaries will inform him that one metre equals 3.281 feet and one kilometre equals 0.624 miles. However, specific figures are commonly used with measurements, not to suggest scientific accuracy, but to suggest approximate quantities, in which case the numbers are rounded off. No one who says "I was doing 100" actually means this, but rather "I was doing 95 to 105 more or less". Thus the numbers, which in French are round figures (e.g. '2000 mètres', S p. 28; '600 000 kilomètres', S p. 37; '800 kilomètres', S p. 38; 'cent à l'heure', S p. 49; 'conduit ... à 140'; S p. 46; etc.) must also be rounded off in English in order to make the same impression. We will therefore have '6500 feet' (p. 20 ), '400 000 miles' (p. 30 ), '500 miles' (p. 31 ), '60 mph' (p. 43 )', 'drive at ... 90 mph' (p. 40 ), etc. respectively.

(vii) Snob words:

(a) depending on anglicisms in the French Version:

As we have already seen above, it is sometimes impossible to render an anglicism as a French word in the English translation. This happens with 'un Bougnats Club des plus selects où l'on vous sert un whiskey gratis' (S p. 22), which contains no less than three anglicisms. To translate 'Club' with 'Côteerie' felt too contrived and was discarded. 'Select'

also was not changed, but rather qualified with 'très' (therefore we have here a case of addition), which has a very "snob" flavour. 'Whiskey' was changed to 'cognac' because it is much more typically French and has a certain snob-value in English (as opposed to 'Brandy'), and finally 'gratis', which basically means 'free' but has a Latin origin and therefore possesses a certain elegance, was translated as 'complimentary' since that also is more in keeping with an elegant restaurant, hotel or club. In this way we are certain to reflect all the elitist snobbery implied in the original.

(b) Snob Words depending on distortions in pronunciation

We have already partly discussed the difficulties inherent in this phenomenon. On page 20 of Snobbissimo we find 'Madhême ... ou les a ne sortent des bouches bien faites que chapeautés d'un accent circonflexe'. Naturally, it is impossible to translate this literally into meaningful English, since (apart from the fact that the pronunciation is snob French and not English) our language does not possess accents. An affected English usage is "Madam", and we therefore first considered 'Mad-dâme ... when wellshaped lips would never dream of uttering the a's other than becomingly frenchified in reverence' — but discarded it because an affected English pronunciation (which is what we really need here) is 'Modom', where the difference between (æ) and (ɔ) is one of rounded lips (referring to articulatory processes) whereas the French refers to the phonetic difference between (â) and (ɑ) in

Madame by orthographical devices. Consequently we chose 'Modom' for the final version, replacing 'frenchified' with 'rounded', since that gives us a play on words between 'rounded' and 'wellshaped', as well as reflecting the phonetic impact of the "accent circonflexe" in French. Later on we come across an instance where Daninos makes fun of an English accent in French, in a place where it is not even justified because the mispronounced expression is Latin: 'sine die' is pronounced 'sain dai' (S p. 154) in the original, but although that makes for an English pronunciation in French, it is more efficacious here to use proper English words in the translation. Therefore the result is 'sign dye' (page 54), which, although perfect nonsense, makes 'sense' here.

(ix) Poetry:

In Chapter III we come across two different types of "poetry": firstly "true" poetry, as in the poem by Léo Ferré and in the snatches of popular songs, and secondly Daninos' attempt at euphony on page 164 and 165 in Snobissimo, where he tries to keep up the popular rhymes of the "true poetry" in the surrounding paragraphs.

Since it is almost impossible to translate poetry, we have only tried to render the impression of hackneyed popular songs, in those cases where it applies, by putting them into very approximate English equivalents according to English rules. We have tried to retain the original imagery as far as possible (otherwise the translations would not fit into

the French context) but, since poetry does mainly deal in metaphors (which, as we will see later on in this discussion, often have to be changed to make sense in translation) some of the original words had to be drastically changed. Suffice it here to say that the main aspect — the popular tone and general meaning — have been retained in the translation.

Let us however discuss Daninos' own attempt at rhyme. According to Alan Duff, where French frequently tends to rhyme (e.g. "qui s'excuse, s'accuse"), English more often tends to use alliteration (e.g. "methinks milady doth protest too much"(sic)).<sup>12</sup> In the section 'chalands et truands, quinguettes et musettes, flonflon, accordéon, bourdon ... bistrot, tacot, métro' (S pp. 164-5) we are faced with two problems: the rhyme (underlined) and the almost hypnotic effect of the rhythmic pattern (apart from 'accordéon' all the words have two syllables; all of them have a very dark sound to them which often is rather onomatopoeic: eg. flonflon, bourdon etc.). Added to this — in the same vein — is the children's rhyme 'caillou-chou-genou.' If we translated all those words literally, we would lose each and every aspect of the French rhyme. We therefore decided to keep the general allusions to things, but to try to find words that would at least give us alliteration in English, although we lose the rhythm completely. The result is 'barges and and bums, dives and dancehalls,

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<sup>12</sup>A. Duff, op. cit., p. 96.

button squeezeboxes and drone basses ... the tavern, the tin-lizzie and the tube' plus 'tick tack toe' for the children's rhyme (p. 66).

(x) Others

In this last section we would like to discuss problems that arise in places where the text turned (a) on spelling, (b) on pronunciation, (c) on grammar, and (d) on implied meaning. Although all of these depend on cultural context, none of them have fit into any of the other categories. Let us see why:

(a) Spelling:

On page 22 in Snobissimo we came across the following example: 'C'est un c... Ces trois lettres — la dernière pouvant être une l ou une n ...'. First of all we realize that this refers to swear-words (then unprintable ones to boot!). Secondly the number of letters may give us problems, and lastly the ending(s) of the word(s) might be a little tricky. Our first attempt 'He's such an a..! Those three letters — the last being an s and more often than not followed by "-hole"' was discarded because it is not British, but American — and the British equivalent does not work. We finally opted for 'He's such a b.....! These four-letter-plus words — all beginning with b and ending in -er or ard', since 'bugger' and 'bastard' are both quite frequently used in Britain, and the 'four-letter-plus word' gave us the opportunity for a play on "four-letter word". (p. 14).

## (b) Pronunciation

In this passage about orthographically difficult words we came across 'cuisseaux de veau and cuissots de chevreuil', (S p. 33) where the identical pronunciation would be completely lost in literal translation. That identical pronunciation however is the only reason why Daninos chose those two dishes, and we therefore decided to look for two English dishes that had the same characteristic. After seemingly endless endeavours we finally hit upon 'Welsh rarebit' (pronounced "rabbit") and 'wild rabbit' — the change is here absolutely justified because we are reflecting the same pronunciation and spelling problem that appears in the original. (p. 27).

## (c) Grammar:

In the same passage as above we stumbled over 'malvoisie au masculin' (S p. 33). Here the masculine gender is exceptional, because the '-ie' ending on the noun in French is typically feminine, but our main problem was of course that all English nouns are grammatically neutral. But we happened to have a stroke of pure luck: looking up 'malvoisie' in the dictionary we found that it meant 'Madeira' (wine) — also called 'Malmsey' in which the l is not pronounced. Our translation of 'Malmsey with a silent l' — although no longer reflecting a grammar problem — fits in perfectly with the context of exceptional orthography.

## (d) Implied Meaning:

In this category we would like to discuss two words

in which the ending implies a pejorative meaning. This is fairly apparent in the popular term of 'Groupe de Montparnos' (S p. 168) where the change from the normal 'Montparnasse' implies a slight cheapening as well as a lame attempt to appear in-the-know, to suggest a breezy familiarity (which for Daninos smacks of pretentiousness). Since it is impossible to get the same down-to-earth resonance to work in a transcription in English (since the British reader may not even know the normal form), we decided to change 'Montparnos' back to 'Montparnasse' and to imply the cheapening in the first part of phrase: therefore 'groupe' becomes 'gang' which has the same slightly sleazy connotations as 'Montparnos' has in French. Lastly a slightly different case appears in the word 'montagnard' (S p. 28), which is a perfectly normal, neutral word meaning "highlander/mountain dweller". In the context however, Daninos seems to be despising this rather uneducated ski-instructor, and all of a sudden we see the term in a different light: "-aud", like "-o" (cf. the pejorative "-aud" form echoed in "Montparnos"), is a typical slang ending in French. To translate the word with its normal meaning will therefore not be sufficient, since that would lose the vaguely implied pejorative meaning. We experimented with 'highland laddie' (too friendly and too Scots), 'ski-bum' (not right, because ski-bums are usually the tourists, not the natives) and 'mountaineer' (too positive; does not imply skiing), but finally seized upon 'yokel of the slopes' (p. 20),

because 'yokel' is only mildly and amusingly pejorative, which is all that is needed in this instance.

Bringing this section to a close, we might sum up that there exists a wide variety of areas in which cultural context may force the translator to add things to the original, or to change certain terms, in order to make the text accessible for the English reader.

#### D COMPOUNDS AND NEOLOGISMS; COLLOQUIALISMS

As we have already observed in the introduction to this paper, Daninos is a writer who is constantly endeavouring to make his language sparkle by showing off all the linguistic facets French possesses. Although he does not pretend to be a poet (he leaves the "real" poetry in Chapter III to the experts: Léo Ferré and popular songwriters) we have seen in the preceding section that he does attempt to play with some rhyme (S pp. 164-5) and therefore proves to have at least some of the poet's spark: like him he is always on the lookout for new images to keep his language lively, stimulating and creative (which is certainly borne out by his extensive use of punning and plays on words). Often we discover that he does not appear to have found the "mot juste" he is looking for in the already existing vocabulary. This is the moment for linguistic creativity.

One frequent solution in such cases is to make up a more or less complex compound, which, although not a usual

feature in the French language, gets the point across succinctly without long and possibly convoluted explanations that might otherwise detract from the natural flow of the passage. Since compounds (with the exception of the type "Verb plus Direct Object" as in 'porte-avions') are not a widely-used tool in French, they also have a certain humorously shocking aspect, which is exactly Daninos' intention. For instance, in making fun of the almost religious zealotry of some Rolls-Royce owners he irreverently speaks of 'des pèlerinages à l'usine-sanctuaire de la Divinité (S p. 37). This is the only instance of compounding we have encountered where we felt it to be impossible to translate the French compound into an English one. We experimented with 'pilgrimages to the Goddess' sanctuary-works' but discarded it for being phonetically clumsy and for not conveying the same degree of (ir)reverence. The final result is 'pilgrimages to that Holy of Holies where the Goddess is assembled' (p. 30), which of course is not as short and sweet as the original, since two nouns are translated as noun(s) plus verb-phrase. The slick brevity of the compound, which suppresses syntactic relationships, without loss of meaning, disappears in the English version since precisely these relationships have been reestablished.

In all the other instances of compounding by Daninos it was possible for us to make up corresponding compounds that fit into the translation as neatly as they do into the original.

For instance, in 'm'as-tu-vuisme américain' (§ p. 41) where Daninos has added a standard noun-ending to a popular expression in order to coin a new hyphenated substantive, we copied that same mechanism to arrive at the English compound 'American show-offmanship' (p. 35 ). Such compounds, based on hyphenated syntactic groups, are also effective for their suggestion of popular pithiness, for they encapsulate descriptions with peppy everyday effectiveness, often in the monosyllabic language of the people or the very characters they are supposed to describe. Thus to translate 'm'as-tu-vuisme' by 'vanity' would be to lose a great deal of the effect sought after by Daninos; we must remember that he specifically seeks effects over and above the bare message he has to impart. He is as much a committed stylistician as was La Bruyère in his time with his Caractères.

The following two examples are compounds constructed in order to characterize a certain type of person with the utmost clarity but without spreading into lengthy syntactically complicated explanations. In our opinion this is a very effective manner for putting these people into their place: they are crucial to the story, but so petty that they do not deserve having too much time lost over them. In consequence Daninos brings out all the leading characteristics of the 'type gros-soyeux-de-Lyon' (§ p. 42) — his pompousness, his occupation, his residence etc. — in four short words, and does the same (in a few more words) for 'Mme Boucicaud-qui-

faisait-elle-même-son-ménage' (S p. 44) — who is rich enough to be able to afford a maid, but will not hear of such a waste of money. We think that our translation of 'big-wig-silk-merchant-from-Lyons (p. 35) and 'Mrs. Do-your-own-housework-Boucicaut, (p. 38 ) reflect Daninos' version rather neatly and imply the same sort of half-pitying contempt. Our last example demonstrates that there can be a certain amount of cultural overlap even in constructing new compounds: 'le qu'en-dira-t-on' (S p. 146) utilizes a well-known everyday saying and turns it into a noun. It finds its exact English equivalent in our 'the what-will-people-say' (p. 45 ), which needs no further comment.

Compounds are however not the only way in which Daninos demonstrates his efficaciousness and linguistic creativity. He is also quite deft at making up new words to suit his purpose. These neologisms can be divided into two groups: (a) a new French word which cannot be translated into an equivalent neologism and therefore has to be paraphrased, and (b) a French neologism for which an equivalent English neologism can be found. We must keep in mind that all of these new words are original neologisms coined by Daninos. According to Alan Duff there is a strong case for translating this sort of expression semantically<sup>1</sup>, that is, extracting the meaning and dropping the form, but this unfortunately sometimes tends to

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<sup>1</sup>A. Duff, op. cit., p. 92.

weaken the translated version slightly. The only efficient way we have found to compensate for this loss, is to insert a few extra neologisms into the English version — as a sort of compensatory counterweight — where we deemed it feasible to do so. Thus the general impression of the original is maintained. We will discuss this in due course.

First of all we were gratified to discover only one neologism which fits into category (a), and this turns on a Proper Noun. In Chapter I Daninos mentions an expression 'qui ... fleurit sur les lèvres les plus saint-honorées' (S p. 23), when he is speaking about the people living in the Faubourg St.-Honoré. This, of course, has immediate associations for any Frenchman, since he grows up with the knowledge that this is one of the most exclusive of Parisian districts. Daninos is therefore making a pun on 'gens honorés' and 'St.-Honoré' which is quite transparent to the French reader. Because of the cultural context however, the English version needs to paraphrase the expression, because unfortunately there is no fitting equivalent which lends itself to being manipulated the same way. In our translation '... thrives even among the most honoured nobility of the Faubourg St.-Honoré' (p. 15 ) we give the reader all the information so subtly contained in 'saint-honorées' but, lamentably, have to give up all the original's humorous impact.

In category (b) we would first of all like to discuss those French neologisms we were able to transpose into an

English neologism without losing any of their attention-getting impact. In Chapter I we came across 'des cabinets chinois Louis-Quinzés' (S p. 30) where it seems rather apt that Daninos should invent a new word for such an outlandish mixture of components. We first experimented with 'Chinese cabinets à la Louis Quinze' but decided that the neologism 'Louis-quinzified Chinese cabinets' (p. 24 ) would be much more *à propos* than a paraphrase which would lose some of the immediacy and disdainful humour implied in the original version. The new word, like the furniture in question, seems rather more dubious and slightly more risqué. Whereas in the above case Daninos has taken a noun and turned it into an apparently simple participial adjective ("apparently", because there is naturally no such verb as "quinzer" as in the normal group "dessin (n) — dessiner (v.) — dessiné (adj.)"), in the phrase 'teinté d'anglo-saxonades' (S p. 154) he has given one noun another noun as derivative. Fortunately we can also do this in English and end up with the (just as astonishing and absurd) 'anglo-saxonities' on page 54. It should be noted that we avoided 'anglo-saxonisms' for very good reasons: although a probable neologism, it does not appear as neologistic as it might (like the French) since "-ism" added to words indicating the language of ethnic groups is common: e.g. germanism, anglicism, gallicism, hellenism, etc. Daninos uses the ending "-ade" which is more native and less learned than "-isme". The former suffix, being borrowed from southern French dialects, may occur in loan words borrowed 'in

toto' (Provençal: ballade, pétarade; Italian: barricade, brigade); used as a creative and independent French ending since the 16th Century, it has produced words like oeillade and limonade, but is particularly used as a suffix on verb stems indicating activity and remains active today in this capacity (e.g. bousculade, glissade, promenade, rigolade, etc.) and thus has some affinity with the English ending "-ing".<sup>2</sup> However, if bousculade and glissade happily yield shoving and sliding in some context, anglo-saxoning is a non-starter indicative of general activity. Likewise anglo-saxony refers to the quality, state or condition (cf. nicety, suavity, chastity etc.) and hardly fits the more dynamic, more verbal "-ade". The solution is to use the plural form, as in French, reducing the overgeneral "-ing" and abstract "-ity" to the more physical and concrete examples, cases, products of ... 'anglo-saxonities'. The last example in our first group stands slightly apart from the other two. When Daninos describes English ladies as being 'school-fashioned' (S p. 40), he is making up a neologism in English. We have already discussed above the value of this expression as a play on words. In translating this passage we opted for not transposing the anglicism into a French word, as we had attempted in most other such cases. One reason for this was that we could find no

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<sup>2</sup>See: K. Nyrop, Grammaire de la langue française, Copenhagen, 1908, Tome III, §364-368.

"foreignism" that would fit as neatly into the translation. But the deciding factor was that the word is also a neologism in English and loses absolutely none of its impact by being merely transcribed, since the language play is apparent here as well as in the original.

Now we come to those French neologisms which lose a small amount of their impact in our translation. While talking about snobs and antisnobs among car drivers, Daninos neatly coins the phrases 'peugeotiste', 'bentleyien' and 'jaguareux' (S pp. 43-4). These are quite stunning (similar to 'Louis-quinzés'), because, in the case of 'peugeotiste' and 'jaguareux', he takes proper nouns and, by tacking a standard French adjective ending onto them, turns them into adjectives. In English we cannot do this so easily, but we do have the possibility of doing something the French in their turn cannot do with impunity: joining nouns and gerunds together to make up a new adjective. The result: 'Peugeot-owning antisnob' and 'Jag-driving snob' (p. 37 ) respectively ("Jag" instead of "Jaguar" because it adds a bit of extra pep and a rather snobbish dimension that seems to be missing in the full English version). Where Daninos simply adds a noun-ending to "Bentley" to make up a new noun, we again have to construct a new compound: but this time out of two nouns, resulting in 'Bentley-champion' (p. 37 ).

We already stated that these last three do not seem to contain quite the same novelty value in translation as they

possessed in the original. The reason for this is probably that free suffixation, especially on Proper Nouns, is much more of a rarity in French, while derivative techniques and compounding are standard procedure in English. Consequently we attempted to compensate for this loss elsewhere, if possible. We have already discussed the addition of 'tuxedo-ed' (p. 16 ) in depth on page 95 . The only other opportunity offered itself on page 27, where the 'tantes Agathe aquisextaines' (§ p. 33) were translated as 'Aix-domiciled Aunt Agathas'. 'Aix-domiciled' is of course a neologism made up of the following components: 'Aix' (-en-Provence, since that is where 'aquisextains' live) and 'ex-domiciled'. The reason for this additional neologism being that it seemed to fit perfectly into a passage about difficult orthography and appeared to be quite in the spirit of Daninos' writing.

We can therefore see that Daninos does not shy away from inventing his own vocabulary, if existing lexical resources do not appear to be sufficient for the demands he makes on expressivity. He achieves this feat either by pulling together existing words or phrases into very suggestive and concise compounds, or by taking an existing word, giving it a new prefix or suffix which is a standard component of the French language rules and thereby constructing a neologism.

In the introduction to this paper we also mentioned that Daninos ranges high and low through all the registers of the language for diverse reasons (to achieve realism by imi-

tating perceived speech patterns; for natural effect etc.), in the process making use of a wide variety of colloquialisms, popular language and, since the baser levels of language are full of figurative expressions, idioms and metaphors. Since popular and slang language change constantly and are extremely rich and creative, it is only natural that we should be faced with a great assortment of such expressions in Daninos' work. It is also a matter of course that most of the expressions we will be discussing should appear in Chapter I, which deals with the deliberate "bastardization" of the middleclasses and their language. Daninos is trying to get our attention by shocking us into awareness — and shocks us he does. So much so, that we once fell into the trap inherent in being carried away by trying to reflect the "(im)proper tone" in the translation: we overshot the mark and did not at first realize that the register had changed from being extremely colloquial in the conversation between the two liveried attendants (S p. 21/p. 13 ) to being quite genteel when the manager admonishes them. We were in such full swing that we originally translated " un peu moins fort s'il vous plaît oui?" As "Pipe down a bit, will you!" and only later realized that that was much too colloquial. "I say, not so loud, if you don't mind!" was much more in keeping with the situation.

The greatest problem in translating colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions is, that they hardly ever make sense if translated literally. This is not unnatural since a great

deal of popular and colloquial language, not to mention slang, rejoices in deviation of usage, mainly metaphorical (but not always). For instance, on page 33 in Snobissimo a young man is praising a particular ski-run with the words 'Elle est terrible!' To translate 'terrible' by its primary meaning of 'terrible', 'awful', 'horrendous' etc. would be a mistake, because it is its secondary sense of "formidable" which is to be applied here. We have to interpret the meaning of the word in the original, and only then can we come up with something more suitable, which still keeps the same very colloquial tone: 'It's bloody marvellous!' (p. 27 ). Newmark declares that

the translator may replace the image in the source language with a standard target language image which does not clash with the target language culture (e.g. 'other fish to fry' equals 'd'autres chats à fouetter' in French). 3

Alan Duff adds to this that, where an idiom is peculiar to only one of the languages,

the translator should not feel constrained to render idiom for idiom: it is primarily the context of the passage — and of course the idiomatic potential of the target language — that should determine his choice.<sup>4</sup>

Daninos uses popular language and slang predominantly in passages containing direct speech, mainly in order to reproduce

<sup>3</sup>P. Newmark, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>4</sup>A. Duff, op. cit., pp. 90-1.

the effect of popular speech, but also for their humour and shock value, since he is attempting to impress upon the reader the basic silliness of many colloquialisms. What, for example, could be more natural than putting the words 'Ils m'ont coûté cinq briques' (S p. 31) into the mouth of the Would-be-Gentleman from the Avenue de Friedland? By using 'briques', a slang word for 'une liasse de billets faisant un million d'anciens francs'<sup>5</sup>, he shows his true colours and justifies Daninos' calling him 'notre Jourdain de Friedland'. In the translation we first considered 'I paid five thou for those!' but rejected this, because it sounded much too tame ("thou" being only light and relaxed language). The closest we could come to an English equivalent for 'briques' was 'grand'. 'Brique' implies a very large amount of money, and 'grand', simply by association between 'grand' and 'great', was much more impressive than 'thou'. Nonetheless, it still felt rather too genteel, and we therefore decided to substitute the much slangier 'forked out' (or, as a possible alternative 'coughed up') for 'paid' in order to compensate for the deficiency. The resulting 'I forked out five grand for those!' (p. 24 ) very closely reflects the impression of coarseness Daninos was trying to give in the original.

Let us now take a closer look at some of the various ways in which Daninos incorporates popular language into the

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<sup>5</sup>Le Petit Robert 1, p. 218.

text. Firstly we find that he simply imitates popular ways of speaking (a) by reflecting a relaxed pronunciation and (b) by using incorrect morphology. Secondly he frequently uses popular words in describing everyday situations, mainly (a) to express feelings (affectivity) or (b) in affective references to persons. Some other words from the popular lexis will be discussed under (c). And thirdly Daninos incorporates a large amount of (a) idioms (also called "dead metaphors" because they cannot be resolved into separate units of meaning, i.e. the words do not make sense by themselves<sup>6</sup>) in direct speech and (b) popular metaphors in the narrative. That is, there are questions of language form, of lexical and metaphorical usage.

## I Popular ways of speaking

### (a) relaxed pronunciation

Under this heading we would like to show only one example from the end of Chapter III (§ p. 169) where a journalist nonchalantly and in a rather intimate way wishes a popstar 'ô' 'r' voi!' — the lack of final r indicating relaxed pronunciation. Looking at the context it would never do to translate this bit of colloquial pronunciation by a simple "Good-bye!". 'See you later!' more closely reflects the

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<sup>6</sup>Mildred L. Larson, Meaning-based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence, New York: University Press of America, 1984, p. 252.

sentiment, but by changing this to 'See ya later!' (p. 71 ) where the 'ya' suggests a relaxed form of 'you' we, too, can get across to the reader the exact atmosphere Daninos was describing.

(b) incorrect morphology

Examples of this phenomenon abound throughout the text, wherever someone opens his mouth, be he rich or poor. We will only discuss a few of these. For instance, the pedestrian who has successfully confronted speeding luxury cars at a pedestrian crossing, triumphantly proclaims to his wife "T'as vu s'y se sont arrêtés, hein?" (S p. 49). French often notes popular laxity of pronunciation by missing out mute e's, by reducing tu to t' (in hiatus) and ils to i' or y, because this relaxed speech is not held to be the norm and is merely recorded in writing. English, by contrast, accepts specifically certain contractions between words (e.g. I'm, didn't, he's, etc.) but fails as a rule to distinguish relaxed or atonic pronunciation, using one form for both (e.g. it's my dog (mai) and where's my pen (mi)). Thus we work a 'didn't they' into the translation to show colloquial tone, and the insistence of the relaxed and inarticulate 'hein' is shown by the colloquial expression 'jolly well'. Also, the emphasis of the triumphant voice is shown by our use of 'did stop' instead of just 'stopped'. The final result therefore reads "Well, they jolly well did stop, didn't they?" (p. 43 ). Another good example of the popular morphology being incorrect

would be "Ça a une gueule folle!" (S p. 23). Here the 'ça' really replaces 'elle' which is normally impossible in French. In the same way popular French drops certain letters, it is possible in English to drop entire words in colloquial speech (as we will also see in the following example). Our translation, suitably common, therefore is "... looks smashing!" (p. 15 ) where we have left out the word 'she', reflecting the same sort of de-humnaisation" we found in the original. The abovementioned dropping of words — elision — also works to translate the phrase 't'as vu l'gars' (S p. 33), missing the u of tu and an e, into 'See that guy?' (p. 27 ) where we dropped the question words 'did you' without losing any of the meaning or popular tone.

It is obvious that it is rather tricky to translate these idiosyncratic popular or slang speech patterns into English and to keep the style of the source language intact. Compared to these problems it is much easier to simply translate popular lexical units where we do not have to be concerned with form quite as much.

## II Popular words in everyday situations:

### (a) affectivity

Since it is a well-known fact that popular language is extremely emotive, it is only natural that a large number of the colloquialisms in this text appear in situations where feelings are being expressed. We have already mentioned

'terrible' ('bloody marvelous'). 'Marrant quoi' (S p. 24) (popular for 'amusant, drôle') belongs in the same category. Naturally English has a large number of adjectives describing (extreme) amusement: laughable, droll, funny, priceless, ludicrous, sidesplitting and screamingly funny, which is the translation given by Harrap's Dictionary. Unfortunately, this expression does not easily fit into an exclamation in this form, and thus the affectivity would be lost. Hence we changed it to 'a real scream, don't you think', which is actually used in English. Another way people often vent their feelings is by using swearwords. In the passage where Daninos discusses their use (or abuse), he lists several mild swearwords which are not too frequently used any more: 'flûte', 'sapristi' and 'crotte' (S p. 23). We therefore have to find a fitting collection of equivalents among the legions that exist in English — and we naturally have to keep the right tone. Among 'bother', 'dash it', 'darnation', 'blast', 'drat', 'rats', 'damn' and 'sh...ucks' we chose the last three respectively (p. 15). Since 'crotte' is a mild form of 'merde', we decided on 'sh...ucks' because that is a mild version of 'shit', which is the translation for 'merde'.

(b) affective reference to persons

In addition to expressing feelings about things, we also often use popular language to refer to people — either affectionately or pejoratively. Such emotivity towards our own kind is not surprising and is indeed common, starting

at a very early age with hypocoristics for children (e.g. Jimmy instead of "James"; "Riri" for "Henri"). In our discussion we will range from one end of the scale to the other. Again it is important to express exactly the right tone in the translation, otherwise the entire effect intended by Daninos may be lost or at least spoiled.

The voice on the telephone, addressing a well-bred man as 'peau de fesse' (S p. 21) certainly does not mean to insult him, but rather uses this fairly ludicrous and nonsensical expression as a term of endearment. To literally translate it with 'calfskin' would hardly make any sense in English, since it is not an English idiom. But a similarly ludicrous (and not very flattering English expression — which also nicely ties in with the expression 'putting on the dog' which appears in the same context — is our choice of 'dog-face' (p. 13 ). Our next example, 'mon gars' (S p. 22) is a half-affectionate, half-disdainful description given by some women to their husbands. Our first choice 'my hubby' was too tame and sweetly affectionate (since it is only a familiar expression). "My old man" (p. 14) had a much cheaper, slightly more catty effect and seemed to fit our requirements perfectly. The next step down on the scale are the two expressions 'lardon' and 'marmot' (S p. 25). Looking them up in the dictionary we find "pop.: baby, kid" for 'lardon' and "child, brat, urchin" for 'marmot'. The problem is, that in the context 'lardon' is a step down from the key-word 'gosse' which we translated

as 'kid'. 'Baby' is too sweet, and therefore we chose 'brat' as the next worst thing. Now however, we cannot use the same for 'marmot', and, since 'child' is much too neutral, have to make that 'urchin' (p. 18 ). In this case our choices depended purely on a process of elimination, until we had the right assortment of expressions that reflected the right gradation intended by Daninos. By now we have already reached the pejorative side of the scale. In 'une de ces pépées' (S p. 24) which is popular for 'jeune femme' and derives from 'poupée' (doll) we had the choice between several possibilities: 'dame', and 'broad' were deemed to be much too American (and had a certain flavour of the Mafia and underworld); 'chick' and 'doll' are used in America as well as England and we decided on 'doll' (p. 16 ) because it comes the closest to the original. Just like 'pépée', the expression 'salaud' (S p. 24) is rather derogatory, but might just barely be used to address somebody to their face (jocosely). The dictionary gives us "dirty fellow, dirty dog, skunk", but none of these quite seemed to fit the bill. We therefore experimented with 'dirty old man', 'bastard' (too virulent), 'rotter' (extremely British, but since it was to go with the name 'Rubi', we discarded it because of the alliteration, which does not appear in the original, and finally chose 'stinker' because it seemed to impart just the right flavour of jocoseness and complacency to the phrase 'that stinker of a Rubi' (p. 16). Lastly at the very bottom of the scale, we find a series of words reserved to describe

total strangers (or friends if you are really mad at them!), which are quite easy to translate because those kinds of words abound in any language. Therefore 'un béotien' is 'a numskull', 'un manche' is 'a crackbrain' and 'une cloche' is 'a blockhead'. Since all of the above expressions were used in a certain context, it was not overly problematic to translate them on a one-on-one basis. The situation changes slightly when we are simply faced with a series of unconnected expressions.

(c) other words from the popular lexis (which stand by themselves)

On page 22 in Snobissimo we are faced with just such a situation: Daninos mentions a series of words used in familiar, everyday language. The word 'toubib' (familiar for 'doctor'; from the Algerian for "sorcerer, healer") still makes for one-on-one translation: we only have to choose the right term. 'Doc' is more common in direct address and 'saw-bones' is too specialized, but 'quack' comes very close to the slightly irreverent but not entirely negative (after all, sorcerers and healers are probably looked up to in Africa) tone of the original. A little more difficult is the translation of 'fric' which means a) money and b) stew. In English there are of course dozens of popular words for money, but we tried to find one that had some association to foodstuffs: 'lettuce' is not used widely enough; 'chicken feed' describes small change; 'bread' and 'dough' both fit the bill, but if they stand

by themselves they would — unlike 'fric' — more likely be identified by their primary meaning. Therefore we need to put them into context, and our final result is 'to earn some dough' (p. 14 ) which is very popular and also unmistakeable. The same problem faces us with 'casse-pieds' (familiar for "tiresome, tedious person"). 'Nuisance', 'pest' and 'crashing bore' do not reflect the right degree of tediousness and tiresomeness on a familiar level. 'A pain in the neck' felt just right, but since things or events can also be 'a pain' we added 'he's' in order to imply "person": "he's a pain in the neck" (p. 14 ).

As we have seen, it is sometimes necessary to paraphrase or explain popular language. This of course holds true even more for idioms, which, since the elements that compose them no longer retain their literal meaning, can never be translated word for word. Here it is especially important to analyse all the components (i) meaning, (ii) tone (iii) register etc. and to render the expression as faithfully as possible in the target language.

### III (a) idioms:

For instance the idiom 'faire gaffe à qch' (S p. 21) is popular language for 'faire attention'. To translate this by 'just look at ...' or 'take a gander at ...' would be the wrong tone, because those English expressions are only familiar. Our choice of 'get a load of ...' (p. 13 ) reflects the same degree

of irreverent and half-incredulous, half-envying admiration as the original does. The following two examples come from the same passage the preceding one was found in. The attendant describes the lady-cum-chihuahua as 'snob comme un pot de chambre' (S p. 21). This again cannot be translated literally because English possesses no idiom saying 'snobbish as a chamberpot'. Other possible expressions concerned with arrogance are 'high and mighty (as a lord)', 'hoity-toity' and 'la-di-da' but none of these is expressive enough to capture the absurdity of a snobbish chamberpot. We finally opted for 'as stuck up as a hat pin' which is an English idiom that also incorporates an incongruous piece of hardware and fits quite naturally into the setting of the scene in question. The popular idiom 'à faire dégueuler un escargot' (which expresses extreme annoyance and envy) is of course extremely inventive, picturesque and gross at the same time. The English 'it makes you want to puke (or 'throw up')' certainly gives us the gist of the sentiment, but we lose some of the picturesqueness. Whereas snails are not very popular in England, other animals are, and we therefore decided to translate the original as 'it's enough to make a pig sick' — which, we dare say, is just as picturesque and inventive.

These of course are only a few examples out of the many we came across in this translation. The idioms we have just discussed were all used in direct speech in the text, but Daninos also (as we have already discovered in the section on

punning) uses a wide variety of popular metaphors in his narrative.

(b) popular metaphors

Popular metaphors, as opposed to idioms (or "dead" metaphors) are expressions that can still be divided into separate units of meaning, but which, as one unit, have a different connotation from its components. In these cases "the translator may have to attempt to replace the object with another with corresponding connotations in the target language"<sup>6</sup>, because a word in one culture may have different or no connotations in another. For instance, in the metaphor 'cigales du macadam' (S p. 165) we have an expression meaning 'streetsingers'. The two lexical units 'cigale' (cicada) and 'macadam' (macadamized road/street) join together to give a special meaning. However, 'Cicada' in English has no particularly pleasant connotations, and 'macadamized road' is very awkward in a metaphor. Our equivalent for 'cigale' would be 'songbird' (pleasant and carefree), and 'street' for 'macadam'. What we might lose in the metaphor 'songbirds of the streets' (because there is only one "image" plus the normal, neutral word 'street') is made up for by some degree of alliteration in 'song-' and 'street'.

The second and last example we wish to discuss in this

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<sup>6</sup>P. Newmark, op. cit., p. 64.

section is the euphemism 'ébène à deux pattes' (S p. 153) used to describe the slave trade. Since the slave trade used to be a fairly universal evil in the old days of colonies and plantations it is only natural that English should have an equivalent for this metaphor. The only difference is that English uses 'black ivory' instead of the French 'ebony'. Both ebony and ivory are valuable exotic substances, but since ivory is naturally off-white it had to be changed to 'black ivory' to describe Negroes. The result: 'two-legged Black Ivory' (p. 53 ), which is just as disgusting a euphemism as the original Daninos despises so much.

We have therefore seen that Daninos is indeed an innovative and very knowledgeable writer who uses his language to its full extent by using rare words and existing imaginative and picturesque expressions and who also makes up new ones where he deems it necessary in order to give the narrative a naturally popular tone as well as to keep it lively and stimulating.

In conclusion to this section, we may note once again that where there exist difficult items to translate (i.e. neologisms, colloquialisms etc.) the technique consists of the following:

- a) assessing the essential meaning and ensuring that this is conveyed;
- b) assessing the side effects or values involved as an "écart" from the standard language norm and reproducing this in some way;

- c) if the side effect or value is by some chance not immediately reproduceable, then it should be introduced at some other point in the immediate context so that the general tone is not lost.

Translator's Note concerning poetry:

In attempting to give a poetic rendering of the poetic passages in the original, the constraints of the poetic meaning become so numerous (being a question of style, verse, vocabulary and rhythm) that some of the literal content may be lost in translation. Here we will therefore supply a more literal meaning of the passages in question.

I S p. 150/p. 50:

You are a jewel on the map of France  
 Nord and Pas-de-Calais, comb on the cock of Gaul  
 ...  
 All children of Jean Bart or foremen of the mines  
 ...  
 Under different skies people live and let live happily,  
 Comfortably idling the day away with crossed arms  
 But you, my country, live by frenetic effort  
 ...  
 The belfry,  
 That great edifice of nobly hewn granite  
 dreams ...

II S p. 165/p. 66-7:

"I could laugh my head off when I listen to people coming back from Rome or Tahiti... What asses they make of themselves! ... To listen to them things 'ld be better there than here. They kill me with their New York! ... They can build as much as they like elsewhere ... They don't have a Métro in Saigon ... They'll never have a Great Fair in Mexico ... They don't have any bikes in New York ... Nothing could replace you ... And tough luck for them!"

III S p. 166/p. 67:

Paris is not the only town with troubles  
 They exist in the whole world  
 Yes, but the whole world  
 Doesn't have Paris for comforting — that's trouble!

IV S p. 166/p. :

"I leave the stars to the Russians  
and the sun to the Yanks ...  
But I keep the Fleamarket for myself!"

### Conclusion

As we come to the close of this paper we should like to affirm that what makes Daninos' Snobissimo such a rewarding study in translation, is the writer's extreme linguistic versatility and his absolute grasp of his native idiom in all its facets. In a word, he is imbued with a sense of what the French call "le génie de la langue", and it is this that constitutes the real challenge to the would-be translator. Such mastery forces us necessarily into an attempt to be just as remarkably creative and imaginative as he is. Obviously we do not always succeed to perfection (as we have demonstrated in our discussion), for a translation can but rarely be a second original; it should however be an impressive near-miss. Abiding by the established principles of translation we have endeavoured to mirror all of Daninos' creative twists and turns as closely as possible.

It is only natural that, while remaining as faithful as possible to the original, we frequently had to make slight adjustments (in the form of those additions and changes we discussed in depth throughout Chapter IV) in the translated version for reasons of comprehension and style in the target language. This obviously was only possible after an exhaustive analysis of all the aspects of the text. Only thus could we expect the resulting translation to be faithful to the original in tone, style and satirical effect.

We might here attempt a summary review of the kind of problem we came across in dealing with the Daninos-style of writing. Our author is essentially a littérateur, or rather a belles-lettriste, that is, someone dealing with refined writing. At the very least, this implies generally a broad vocabulary (at least in modern terms) and a mastery of sentence structure. It also most certainly implies a sense of the interplay of words in context, which is heightened by the fact that Daninos is obsessed with wit. And a witticism is essentially playing with words, as expressed by the French expressions un bon mot, un mot d'esprit. There is a world of difference between words in isolation, which usually convey a simple referential core meaning and which tend to be inert and neutral, and words in context, which interact, creating lines of force. Daninos exploits the context to its maximum, that is, he is rather less concerned with the referential meaning of words (i.e. the "real" things of the world about which we talk or what they denote, than with what they connote (i.e. the accretions that words acquire over time while being used within a particular society). Since these accretions will differ with different societies and different languages, it is clear that on the whole they are not translatable "literally" or "vertically" as a primary function of the basic word. Thus connotations are rather problematic in translation. True, some of these connotations have become regularized in usage and consequently may sometimes be found in dictionaries (the bigger,

the better). Thus mon chat is purely referential, but not so mon petit chat of a human, which is purely affective. If we take the sentence: the cat is on the mat literally, as found by a child in his first reader, it is construed, albeit uninterestingly, referentially. But for an adult it may well have a cultural connotation and refer to "childish language" which will not be glossed by any dictionary. The creative writer goes one step further and composes with hints, or as the French put it so aptly, à demi-mot: thus we have to know the already "idiomatic" expression la nuit tous les chats sont gris (where in any case chat will not translate literally) before we can understand la nuit tous les shahs sont gris (newspaper headline of the 1930's). To retain the amusing complexity of this represents a major hurdle for the translator.

On the whole, the major difficulty of rendering Daninos lay precisely in an area not dealt with by bilingual dictionaries at all, and called upon the translation performing as many gymnastic feats in English as had been executed in the French. As has been said, the brilliant individual style is often a matter not of the norm, but of the écarts away from the norm. This was the challenge presented to us.

Due to the constraints of length, since we are not here engaged on a definitive work on the translation of literary wit, we naturally could not make our Chapter IV an all encompassing study but had to be content with discussing only a few representative examples from a seemingly endless list

of possibilities. Having chosen the three chapters we have translated almost at random — although we did select chapters with differing content from a translator's point of view — we hope to have encountered and discussed an average sampling of problems that would necessarily arise throughout the book. Nevertheless we are certain that, had we translated different (or more) chapters we might also have come across a few more areas for discussion. Even in those three chapters we did comment on, we were not able to examine each and every type of problem that cropped up. For instance, we might have gone into the question of different types of puns much more exhaustively (since, according to Empson, there are at least seven types of ambiguity). We could have discussed the difficulty of translating poetry more completely; but since the poetry in Chapter III was not written by Pierre Daninos himself, but borrowed from other sources, we felt that this was not absolutely necessary in a paper of this type. Thirdly we might also have discussed Daninos' occasional use of archaic or rare words, which also indicates how well-versed he is in his native language and illustrates how selfconsciously he tries to incorporate every conceivable aspect of language into his works. Daninos' writing is like an intricate spider's web where each section of thread is subtly linked to all the others. It is a great challenge to the translator to attempt to find all the sections and to make them intertwine as smoothly as in the original (see the section on key-words). We hope that, were Daninos

to read our translation, he would approve of it as being faithful to his intentions and writing style.

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