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Translating Pastiche: The Example of Proust

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Abstract

Literary pastiche is spoof, part banter, part literary criticism. To succeed as both, it presupposes in its reader an appreciation of the style being parodied. In translation, for lack of that appreciation, pastiche may fall flat. I consider some of the pastiches of Proust, as they have been translated, with varying degrees of success, by various translators. My main focus is on the celebrated parody of the Goncourt *Journal* which appears in the last part of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. I suggest that a way of coping with the problems posed by the translation of pastiche is to apply to it, as to other forms of word-play, the principle of compensation.

Can pastiche be translated? Does it pose insoluble problems to the translator? Why would one translate a pastiche? What qualities should a translated pastiche have? First, let us define pastiche, from the *OED*, sense 2a: “A work, esp. of literature, created in the style of someone or something else; a work that humorously exaggerates or parodies a particular style”. This seems little different from sense 1a of ‘parody’ as defined also by the *OED*:

A literary composition modelled on and imitating another work, esp. a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are satirized by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects, or are otherwise exaggerated for comic effect.

In these two definitions, I think four key terms are “satirized”, “exaggerate”, “humorously” and “comic effect”. If a parodic text failed to meet these criteria, its quality as pastiche would be minimal. A more colloquial term applicable to ‘pastiche’ and ‘parody’, which I sometimes use, is ‘spoof’. Other words used by specialists in the genre to define the point of a pastiche are: *raillerie* (“scoffing”, “banter”, “joke”, Milly 45), *âpreté*, *ironie*, *enjouement* (“pungency, irony, playfulness”, Deffoux, quoted by Dyer 53), and “charm” (Dyer).

Many writers of prose have been attracted to the genre of pastiche, from James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922) and Thomas Mann in *Doktor Faustus* (1947) to David Lodge’s *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965). Among French writers, pastiche has been widely practised. Balzac, for instance, in his *Contes drolatiques* (1827), spoofed the early sixteenth-century style of Rabelais. Flaubert, too, another great fancier of Rabelais, did something similar in letters to particular friends of like mind. In the twentieth century, Jean-Louis Curtis, a virtuoso in the parodic manner (his spoofs of André Gide and Jacques Chardonne, for example, out-Gide Gide and out-Chardonne Chardonne), produced two collections of witty and inventive pastiches, *La Chine m’inquiète* (1972) and *La France m’épuise* (1982). Before him, it was the name of Marcel Proust which had been most closely associated with this playful activity. And it is with the pastiches of Proust, most notably his version of a supposedly unpublished extract from the *Journal* of the Goncourt brothers, that I am concerned here. That pastiche figures in *Le temps retrouvé*, the last

part of Proust's great unfinished novel, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927). I say 'the Goncourt brothers', which is how Proust sometimes refers to the pseudo-author of this piece, but since he also uses the singular form and the pseudo-author of the parody itself mentions *je* and *mon frère*, it makes more sense to speak of the author not as both brothers Goncourt but as Edmond, who outlived Jules by twenty-six years.

In 1904, some years before starting to write what became the *Recherche*, Proust had a first pastiche published by the literary supplement of *Le Figaro*. He later composed a series of very accurate, very amusing, very revealing pastiches, nine of which were also published in *Le Figaro*, between February 1908 and March 1909. Each of them was a take-off of the manner of an important writer of the nineteenth century, novelists, critics and historians, including Balzac, Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve, Michelet and the Goncourts. In 1919, he collected them and published them in a much appreciated volume, *Pastiches et mélanges*. A few others, written about the same time as these, were published after his death. This gift for stylistic mimicry is evident too in many of his letters to friends and lovers, especially the musician and composer Reynaldo Hahn.

A variant of my initial question (can one translate a pastiche?) was answered by Scott Moncrieff, Proust's first translator, whose publisher had suggested he might translate some of the novelist's lesser works. Moncrieff's tongue-in-cheek reply was that *Pastiches et mélanges* consists of "a series of parodies of French stylists which it would be utterly impossible to render even into Belgian" (letter to Joseph Conrad [?], quoted in Findlay 219). So the project went no further. However, that has not stopped other translators from attempting the task: many amateurs have published their versions on the Internet, and an American translator, Charlotte Mandell, has even won a prize for her translations of Proust's pastiches (*The Lemoine Affair*, Melville House, Brooklyn, 2008). So, in a sense, my question is superfluous: it has been done. But that raises at least two further questions. How well has it been done? How well can it be done? Generally speaking, I must say that the voices which Mandell gives to her pseudo-Balzac, her false Flaubert and the others, pass muster. But in the detail, they raise more questions than they answer. They strike me by their occasional mistranslations, a tone which jars at times and by their literalism. In a genre that is playful and creative by definition, might not literalism appear to be a hindrance rather than a help? I revert to my key terms 'satirized', 'exaggerate', 'humorously', 'comic effect', 'charm', 'joke', 'banter', 'scoffing', to ask whether there is, in Mandell's versions, comic effect, humour, exaggeration or satire? For readers to appreciate satire or exaggeration, do they not need to know something of what is being exaggerated and satirized? How many of Mandell's readers have that appreciation of the styles of Balzac, Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve, Henri de Régnier and the others? On reading her versions, one may even wonder whether Mandell herself has such an appreciation. All jokes that work are by definition in-jokes. Is not pastiche the in-joke *par excellence*? As Dyer says, about pastiche, "For it to work, it needs to be 'got' as a pastiche. [. . .] Every pastiche has its particular group that gets it" (Dyer 3). Without that complicity between writer and reader, the joke falls flat; without it between translator and reader, there is no joke. The pasticheur is an impersonator, a mimic of text. If a reader has little or no knowledge of what is being impersonated or mimicked, one of the most important aims of pastiche is misserved. In a related context (the impersonations that the duchesse de Guermantes is so good at), Proust compares such people to rabbits: "parce qu'ils n'avaient jamais su remarquer le défaut ou l'accent que la duchesse cherchait à contrefaire" (*Recherche* II, 752).

There is, of course, another aim of pastiche which might be seen as more important than amusement. For a serious pastiche is also an exercise in literary criticism, what Proust calls "de la critique littéraire « en action »" (*Correspondance* VIII, 61). In order

to imitate a style and to amuse by exaggerating its features, its felicities and infelicities, a parodist must be a very familiar judge of them, able to draw them to the attention of other readers who may thereby have a more acute appreciation of the author being impersonated.

In the translation of a literary pastiche, what may be missing may be pastiche itself. The risk of this is, of course, high. Perhaps so high as to cast doubt upon the whole enterprise of translating pastiche. How can one parody in English, say, a style which does not exist in English? Every translator of Proust meets a mode of this daunting difficulty when attempting to translate not pastiche but the speech that he gives to his characters. For Proust is a caricaturist of genius, and caricature is one of his main modes of characterization. A caricaturist proceeds by isolating two or three features of his model and exaggerating them. In Proust, one of those features is always mannerisms of speech. All his main characters, Swann, Odette, Françoise, Bloch, Charlus, Albertine, etc., have individual spoken styles, an idiolect, which enables Proust to lampoon a voice, a vocabulary, a pronunciation. As the narrator says,

...ce que racontaient les gens m'échappait, car ce qui m'intéressait, c'était non ce qu'ils voulaient dire, mais la manière dont ils le disaient, en tant qu'elle était révélatrice de leur caractère ou de leurs ridicules.

(IV 296)

With Françoise, it is her uneducated speech forms, her below-stairs malapropisms, her ungrammatical peasantries, which constitute the character and make her comic. As has been said, “De manière assez évidente, Françoise ne doit son existence et sa forte caractérisation qu'à sa parole” (Pierron 47). Without them, Françoise is devoid of character and Proust loses much of his claim to be seen as a comic writer. Take some familiar English comic character endowed with broad accent, vulgar attitudes and absurd speech forms, Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly for example, Fielding's Mrs Slipslop, Sheridan's Mrs Malaprop, Dickens's Mrs Gamp, Meredith's Mrs Berry, and imagine their speech shorn of broad accent and absurdities. There would be little character left, and no comedy. Sad to say, readers of most of the existing translations of Proust into English encounter a Françoise without this flavour of character, a Françoise with little comic content.

In the spoken style of the young Bloch, the translator faces a mode of the same difficulty: Bloch is given to spouting long periods, pedantic, bookish and affected, flavoured by the style of Leconte de Lisle, a poet of the Parnassian school who also translated Homer. It is especially with a character such as Bloch that one can see Proust's characterization by caricature as a mode of pastiche. The spoken style of each of the major characters is akin to a pastiche. As Jean Milly says: “Le langage des personnages du roman [...] est une sorte de pastiche du langage de personnages réels et parfois de modèles littéraires” (Milly 43). With some features of Bloch's voice, the translator faces exactly the problem posed by a pastiche: how to parody, in English, a style, Leconte de Lisle's version of Homer, which does not exist in English? In translating *Du côté de chez Swann* forty years ago, one of my solutions to this dilemma was to replace the Homeric echoes by Shakespearean, especially in using vocative expressions such as “good my lord” (for *cher maître*) and the archaisms “thy”, “hath” et “doth”, instead of “your”, “has” and “does”, etc. I was criticized for this choice; but it still seems not an uninspired solution to the problem of lampooning a literary style perceptible to the readers of the original but not available to readers of the text in translation. Such Shakespearisms at least let the

reader savour something of the literary, archaic and exotic mannerisms making up so much of the character of Bloch. That they should also amuse, one assumes, was among my aims: since Bloch's speech is amusing, by definition pastiche of it should also amuse. In this respect, the exaggerated voice given to Goncourt makes him one of the characters of the *Recherche*.

It is especially in translating idiosyncrasies of speech that the translators' principle of compensation is very useful. Compensation has been defined as follows:

[...] procédé qui vise à garder la tonalité de l'ensemble en introduisant, par un détour stylistique, la note qui n'a pu être rendue par les mêmes moyens et au même endroit.

(Vinay and Darbelnet 189)

In dealing with speech that is racy, colourful, colloquial, non-standard, as every translator knows, you cannot restrict yourself to a point-for-point reproduction of each and every feature or flavour of the original voice. It is here that one relies on compensation, building into the new voice features which belong to an apt register, which feel right, which are part and parcel of the spoken style one has adopted for this or that character, even though they may have no identifiable equivalent in the wording of the clause or sentence that one is translating. Here more than anywhere else the translator becomes a creative writer. I shall return to this principle, which I believe applies also to the translation of pastiche, that other mode of idiosyncratic speech.

Other similar traces of pastiche appear in the *Recherche*, such as the letter written by the young footman, with its faulty spelling and punctuation, its semi-educated respect for cumbrous formalities of speech (III 854-855) well translated by Mark Treharne (Penguin, III 566). Then there are the *charges* of Oriane, her liking for doing imitations of others (III 752-757), showing again what one sees in Bloch: that at times the voices that Proust gives to his characters are inseparable from pastiche. According to Milly, pastiche, for Proust, was:

[une] activité permanente [...] une tendance permanente de son esprit. Tous ses amis parlent de son habileté à imiter la voix et le geste de ses contemporains, notamment du plus original d'entre eux, Robert de Montesquiou.

(Milly 13)

With the pastiche of the unpublished Goncourt *Journal*, which plays such an ironic role in reinforcing the narrator's belief that he will never become a writer, the language of Shakespeare being of no avail, we may have to turn to the language of Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall and Rosa Nouchette Carey. I shall come back to these and other minor authors of the late nineteenth century and to their taste in what Robert Louis Stevenson called 'tushery'.

The Goncourt pastiche occupies some eight pages in Pléiade (IV 287-295). It is twice as long as most of those in the set published as *Pastiches et mélanges*. It purports to be an extract from an unpublished part of the famous *Journal, Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, the lengthy diary kept between 1851 and 1896, first by both brothers, then after the death of Jules in 1870, by the surviving Edmond. To appreciate the virtuosity of the pasticheur, one must have a familiarity with the Goncourt manner. They themselves defined their way of writing French prose, narrative and descriptive, which they developed in their novels and other works, of art criticism, cultural history and biography,

as well as in the *Journal*, as *écriture artiste*. If, as Hemingway says, “Prose is architecture, not interior decoration”, then the Goncourt style is not prose. For *l’écriture artiste* is little other than interior decoration. It is precious, it is twee, it is affected, as though the writers’ purpose were to cram into each sentence as many archaisms, mannerisms, personalized devices, neologisms and *recherché* turns of speech as possible. Many of its features are as difficult to define for an English-speaking readership, since they have no analogues in our language, as they can be to translate, for the same reason. Take the Goncourts’ *syntaxe nominale*, noun syntax, one of the most salient aspects of this way of writing, in which the brothers often use adjectives and verb infinitives as nouns, and replace common adjectives and verbs by abstract nouns formed from them. Concomitants of this syntax are that many sentences take the form of lists of noun structures and that the verbs which it requires are often expressively weak, among the commonest being *il y a* and *c’est, faire* and *mettre*. One is often struck by the disparity between the highfalutin manner and the ordinariness, even the sordidness, of the matter. In small doses, some of these usages can have dramatic and descriptive effect; taken as a whole, which is how the reader of a Goncourt text takes them, they smack of the indigestible. If late-Victorianism means ornate and finicky ugliness, which to some it does, then this is it writ large. As for the problems this poses the translator, here is one minute example of noun syntax, a simple sentence from the novel *La fille Élisa* (1877) about a black cat crawling on a carpet: “Une chatte pleine mettait un rampement noir sur un tapis usé” (literally “A pregnant cat put a black crawling on a worn carpet” Goncourt 35). The noun *rampement* joined with the verb *mettre* replaces the more straightforward verb *ramper* (“to crawl”). A feature of such sentence structuring is that *noir*, an adjective of colour, qualifies an abstract noun, thereby lending it a concrete quality. For all its expressiveness, how one translates such a sentence, attempting not only to convey the basic meaning but to retain some flavour of style must be an acute difficulty. It was a difficulty not faced by translators in the late Victorian years, as what the Goncourts wrote was deemed too sordid, too associated with Realism and Naturalism, dirty words in the English-speaking world, for publishers to risk being prosecuted under the repression of obscenity laws.¹

Before inspecting how Proust’s pastiche of this style in *Le temps retrouvé* has been variously translated, I give here a minute example of the immense problems with which it confronts the translator, some of them crammed into just a few lines of syntax which risk becoming too tortuous for English to cope with:

[...] des assiettes des Yung-Tsching à la couleur capucine de leurs rebords, au bleuâtre, à l’effeuillé turgide de leurs iris d’eau, à la traversée, vraiment décoratoire, par l’aurore d’un vol de martins-pêcheurs et de grues, aurore ayant tout à fait ces tons matutinaux qu’entre-regarde quotidiennement, boulevard Montmorency, mon réveil [...]

(IV 289)

This pastiche of the Goncourt style has been translated four times. Scott Moncrieff having died without being able to complete his version of the whole *Recherche*, the final part of the novel, which did not appear in French until 1927, five years after the death of Proust himself, was first translated, in England, as *Time Regained* (1931) by Sidney Schiff (under the pen name of Stephen Hudson) and in America as *The Past Recaptured* (1932) by Frederick Blossom. The text of *Le temps retrouvé* from which both these translators

¹ Classe, containing no entry under Goncourt, makes a single allusion to their not being translated, ambiguous at that (I 475).

worked was so defective that this final part of the novel, not properly edited till 1954, was eventually retranslated, by Andreas Mayor in 1970. The fourth version was done as part of the wholly new Penguin translation (2002) by Ian Patterson (under a title disliked by many, *Finding Time Again*). I propose to review each of these four versions.

The first thing to strike the reader of the Hudson version is the generalized weirdness of the language. Is it, one wonders, unintentional, a sign of ignorance, incompetence or understandable inability to see the wood for the trees of the textual defects? Mind you, even if unintentional, it is conceivable that the strangeness of the language could convey to a reader something of the bizarre French of the pseudo-Goncourt. Whether it would amuse, be taken as stylistic satire, work a comic effect, is another matter. I suspect that it would, instead, perplex, confuse and mislead. There are certainly two literary allusions that Hudson fails to see as such: the reference to the *Madeleine* of Fromentin (287) and to the *Fables* of La Fontaine (288). To translate *le faire* (roughly, the manner of a painter, 709) as “the doings” suggests that Hudson was unfamiliar not only with basic tics of style of the Goncourts but with the incongruous associations of this word. A common idiom, *de fil en aiguille* (meaning roughly ‘bit by bit’, ‘gradually’), he translates literally “from thread to needle”. The state of the text he was working on can be gauged by two details: what he makes of the name of a Russian princess *au nom en of* (“a golden name”), either having misread *of* as *or* or because the text was misprinted; and the definite misprint in *portrait de la famille Collard*, a clear reference to Dr Cottard and his wife, which he fails to notice. Admittedly, at times he uses an old-fashioned word or two, “verily” or “matutinal”. However, such a tone is so close to that of Scott Moncrieff’s own prose that few readers would notice a difference between the bulk of his *Remembrance of Things Past*, liberally sprinkled as it was with archaisms (“I fain would”, “the ague”, “lo and behold”, “purpureate”, “bedizened”, “twain”, “’twas”), and this spoof, supposedly in a very different voice. This Hudson version of the Goncourt pastiche must have bamboozled readers of Proust over the forty years between its appearance and the newer version by Mayor. The perplexity of the translator became that of the readers. That they were reading a text *au second degré* must have been unapparent to them, as the translator floundered among obscurities which prevented both him and them from seeing what Proust was jocularly implying about the Goncourt manner. So he tried to transmit to his reader the basic sense of the words, in itself something of an achievement, though this he did almost without heeding the convolutions of syntax and the affectations of style which are the sole point of the words. There is no comic effect, no satire, none of the hilarious send-up of the original. The whole effect is close to unintelligibility.

As for Blossom, he managed to produce a clearer, more intelligible text than Hudson, though he makes some of the same mistakes. He does this by simplifying the complicated syntax of the pseudo-Goncourt and writing more fluent English. However, it is difficult to detect much difference between the prose of the pastiche and the prose of Proust’s narrator amid which it is set. This homogeneity of the two styles, Proust’s own and the one he gives to the Goncourt *Journal*, robs the pastiche of its key ingredient, hilarity. For one can say of a pastiche what has been said of a work by Stravinsky: “its style is its subject” (Thomson 107). Without that consubstantiation, a pastiche without a style is a pastiche without a subject; and a pastiche without that subject is a pastiche without a point.

In 1970, Andreas Mayor could benefit from much that was unavailable to his two predecessors, especially the three-volume Clarac-Ferré edition of the *Recherche* (1954), and solid scholarship on Proust which had shed light on many obscurities. Also, knowing something of his predecessors’ difficulties, he was able to avoid them. In general, at the

semantic level, his is an excellent translation; and in detail, too, he occasionally manages to pull off a small success with single words which match words of the pseudo-Goncourt: “the *prettinesses*” (728) < “les *joliesses*” (IV 287) or the verb “to *re-love*” (729) < *raimer* (IV, 288). That said, Mayor’s version of this pastiche, like those of his two predecessors though in a different degree, lacks one of the features which most strike the reader of the original, the virtuosity in ventriloquism that is the mark of the gifted parodist. So we have once again a pseudo-Goncourt almost without personality that is without particular characteristics, without mannerisms or bizarreries of style, without the qualities stressed among others by Deffoux, *ironie* and *enjouement*, in a word a Goncourt who is rather colourless, close to insipid. In a text which is by definition ironic, what one most senses the absence of is irony.

In Ian Patterson’s version of the pseudo-Goncourt, one can see, as in Mayor’s, occasional direct reflections of the French text, such as the verb “to *re-love*” < *raimer*; individual words that are rare or *recherchés*, “matutinal”, “laciniation”, “verticillated”, “porcelained”, “effulgence”; a vulgarism, “nosh”, consistent with one of the mannerisms of the Goncourts; and other small features of English usage of the time, “By Jove”, “dashed if it had ever occurred to me”. All of which gives evidence of a serious effort to transmit to an Anglophone readership something of an echo, albeit a weak one, of the tone of the original. But at the same time, one encounters many more passages where the Goncourt style becomes by comparison a rather colourless English, for example “arousing in me an irascible despondency” < *et c’est en moi un découragement colère*, “sadly” < *mélancolieusement*, “trinkets” < *jolités*, and many others. With all four of these versions, one can have the impression that their authors have translated the pseudo-Goncourt in two stages: first, by mentally transposing the French text into a more standard French, and then by translating that version. Obviously, just as with the idiosyncrasies of the speech of this or that character, such as Françoise or Bloch, which are impossible to reproduce word for word in the immediate context where Proust has placed them, the stylistic characteristics with which he lampoons the Goncourt manner have no direct equivalent in English. The analogy with the speech of these characters is striking. One might also object that what is of greatest importance in this passage of parody is the thematic role of the narrator’s reading of the extract from the Goncourt *Journal*, namely that, by its idiosyncratic description of the very characters among whom he has spent much of his social life, showing him aspects of their personalities that he has never seen, it confirms him in his notion that, by not being a gifted observer, he can never become a writer, and that this lesson is what is of greatest importance in the scene, not the manner in which he learns it. As has been pointed out:

Proust could have had Marcel tell us what the diary entry says without actually giving us the passage itself [. . .]. The point could have been made by referring to the Goncourts, without recourse to pastiche.

(Dyer 60)

No doubt. But that is not what Proust does. So we must suppose that it was not just the thematic function that mattered, but the way in which the narrator comes to learn his dispiriting lesson. And that way and that lesson are inseparable from the Goncourt style. And if the Goncourt style, parodied, is full of fun, full of literary delights for fanciers both of the writer parodied and of pastiches, to accept that the ventriloquist must forgo making his doll speak is to deprive the text of too much, to amputate the parodist of one of his richest comic resources.

But is the comedy of the impersonation untranslatable? I decline to accept that. After all, pastiche is a word game. Defined as such, it differs only in degree from other word games (punning, malapropisms, spoonerisms, lipograms, general drollery, wit, etc.); and with such word play, there are often resources of inventiveness that a translator can draw upon. On the translating of word play, Bellos says this:

Humorous remarks, shaggy-dog tales, witty anecdotes and silly jokes are only untranslatable if you insist on understanding ‘translation’ as a low-level matching of the signifiers themselves.

(Bellos 290)

To Bellos’s list, I suggest we add pastiche. Any literary translator may have to be at any moment, if not a genius, at least ingenious, no great imposition for a translator worth his or her salt. In such cases, one does what one can to exploit the inventive resources inherent in one’s own language, resources which are as like as not unrelated to those of the other language. One of these resources available to the pasticheur, is, I maintain, a mode, perhaps an extreme one, of compensation. After all, another extreme mode of it can be seen in the various translations of Perec’s lipogram, *La disparition*, the Spanish one, for instance, in which, instead of the vowel *e* being omitted as in the French original, it is *a*, or the Japanese one, which omits the vowel *i*.

I hold to my idea that the translator’s task is first and foremost to convey to the reader, in active mode, a lesson in style. If the style of the French passage is such that this lesson cannot be conveyed through conventional translation, if conventional translation results in a pastiche which is a non-pastiche, then it follows that something less conventional must be attempted. Hence the value of compensation, the basic purpose of which is to enable the translator to place dynamic equivalences not in those parts of the text where there is no immediate possibility of using them, but in other parts which are not those of the original. If, as Proust says, “Le devoir et la tâche d’un écrivain sont ceux d’un traducteur” (IV 469, “The duty and the job of a writer are to be a translator”), I take the view that the duty, the job of the translator of a pasticheur is to be a pasticheur. But a pasticheur not of a French style, an exercise barren in amusement, but of an English style.

That being so, I wonder whether a future writer of a pseudo-Goncourt in English might not find a fruitful source of comedic wordage in a curious style which, in the later years of the nineteenth century, roughly contemporary with the Goncourts in French, was much practised by many an author, mostly minor and nowadays unread, such as the two I mentioned above, Marmaduke Pickthall and Rosa Nouchette Carey. Aspects of this style, often derided by Oscar Wilde, can be detected even in writers as major as Walter Pater, Carlyle, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, Robert Louis Stevenson and George Meredith. But it was used by authors who, in their day, were more widely read than these major authors, on both sides of the Atlantic, though more in Britain than in America. I name but a few of them: Rhoda Broughton, Marie Corelli, John Strange Winter, Mrs Humphry Ward, Mrs Henry Wood, Henry Seton Merriman, Edgar Evertson Saltus, Thymol Monk, Fortuné Du Boisgobey, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Charlotte M. Yonge, George Augustus Sala, S. Squire Sprigge, Tinsley Pratt, James Runciman and many more. Among these authors, there was a tendency to write not novels, but ‘romances’. It was with such authors in mind that Wilde ridiculed “poetical prose”, saying: “the lack of good prose is one of the chief blots on our culture” (*Queen* 8.12.1888); for they “crowd their page with gorgeous epithets and resplendent phrase, [. . .] pile Pelions of adjectives upon Ossas of description [. . .] abandon themselves to highly coloured diction and rich luxuriance of imagery” (*Pall Mall Gazette* 11.12.1888); “in these latter days [. . .] violent rhetoric does

duty for eloquence and vulgarity usurps the name of nature” (*Pall Mall Gazette* 11.6.1887); in such writers he dislikes “unnecessary archaism” (*Pall Mall Gazette* 15.1.1886), “ostentatious ornament [. . .] ineffective surplusage” (*Speaker* 22.3.1890).² It is a style which derives in part from Meredith who, rather than say in three monosyllables “He kissed her”, prefers “The rosy gate from which the word had issued was closed with a seal”, and who, instead of “he hung his head” speaks of “arresting his head in a melancholy pendulosity” (Meredith 265, 354). Wilde may never have used the word I quoted before, “tushery”, invented in 1883 by Stevenson and defined as follows by the *OED*:

a conventional style of romance characterized by excessive use of affected archaisms such as ‘tush!’; *gen.*, sentimental or romanticizing writing.

It is a style which, with some care and much creativity, could be adapted to the so-called *style artiste* of the Goncourt brothers. Not that it is, in all things, the same style. There is no same style, which is the nub of the problem. But to give a reader an analogous impression, to provoke if not laughter at least a smile, to lard the text with *joliesses*, nay, with *jolités*, there is, in my view, only one solution to that problem: to pastiche through abundant compensation. And the style to be pastiched must be a French style, not an English one, a style of which Hazlitt could have said that it was “fustian in expression and bathos in sentiment” (Hazlitt 336). The ideal English pastiche of the pseudo-Goncourt, still virtual and imaginary, could be put together by using the finicky mannerisms of late-Victorianism tushery, the pseudo-poetic, the over-ornate, the overblown, the over-rich, the magniloquent, the archaic, the precious, in such a way as to bring out its inherent ridiculousness.

I offer the following as a small tongue-in-cheek illustration of how such a pastiche might be achieved. It is, indeed, a pastiche, most of it cobbled together from sentences or bits of sentences taken from some of the forgotten authors named above; and every sentence, whether borrowed or imitated, contains at least one feature indicative of their outdated manner, some less evident than others, but, I trust, perceptible to the aware literary eye. These features do not correspond to those of the Goncourt style; they compensate for the absence of these in English. Whether it amuses is for its reader to say. Its subject matter is not that of the pseudo-Goncourt; but perhaps a better pasticheur than I am may be able to adapt its manner to that matter.

O fatal obscurity of the deepening twilight! O proximity of the imperfumed shade of the conservatory! Is there not a something in the very name of a conservatory that suggests flirtation? Save in a yellow-back of De Mâleplaisant, in every novel that Miss Humphry had ever read, it was at this hour, in this place, that heroes were accustomed to kiss heroines, specially those of the former who had just become affianced to the latter. She, who had been once kissed by her mother, often by her father, and ever and again by nurses and aunts, wondered in which particular the kiss of a hero might be deemed to differ from those of these others, of which none would have seemed worthy, had she been the writer describing them, of the metaphors whereby fictional young ladies were endowed, as other lips pressed theirs, with revelations of queenship, with precocious admittance to paradise, with

² Wilde, 63, 174, 142, 179, 146.

metamorphosis, from the drab stasis that is the caterpillardom of the unloved, into that glorious soaring figment of polychromous filaments, fluttering free amid perfumes and envies. She, breathless she, and Dr Wilkes, the Master of Lazarus, the best-dressed philosopher in the history of thought, had now reached the tennis-lawn. She, ever more breathless she, counted the seconds and paces that yet separated her and that gentleman from the conservatory, and from the corresponding likelihoods of today's being the twilight which should transform the tepid, torpid quotidian of her existence into the ineffable frenzy, the transfiguring furor of the loved.

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Note: James Grieve's translation of *Du côté de chez Swann* (*Swann's Way*, Canberra, 1982), long out of print, can now be read, with Afterthoughts, at <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/143006>.