

LITERARY SELF-TRANSLATION

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

The Minefield that is Self-Translation

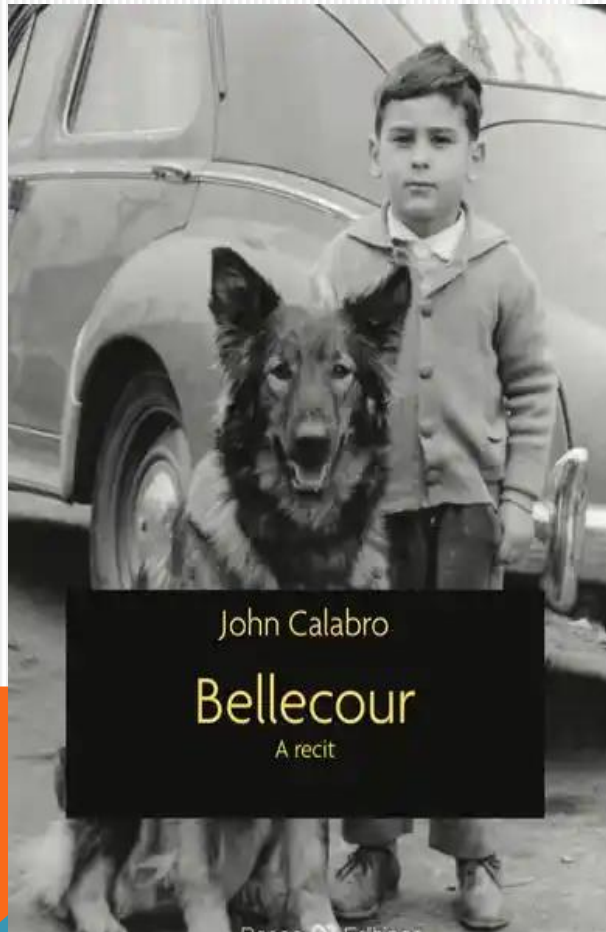


JOHN CALABRÒ

Why did I engage in an exercise
of literary self-translation?

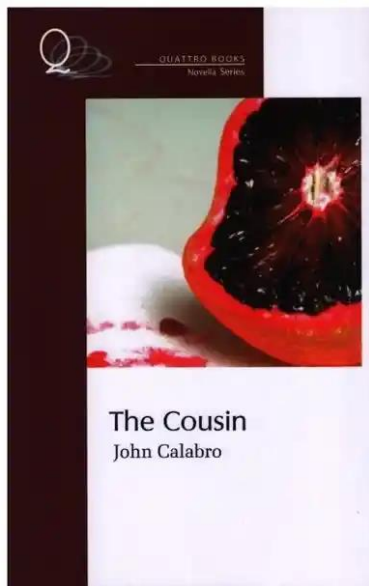
Because
I am...
crazy

SELF-TRANSLATION



from
ENGLISH
to
FRENCH





DISTU

27-30.05 /26

**Complesso San Carlo
Via San Carlo, 32
VITERBO**



20th Biennial AICW Conference

Università degli Studi della Tuscia
Association of Italian-Canadian Writers

COMMON GROUND, DISTANT SHORES: PROSPETTIVE INTERDISCIPLINARI TRA ITALIA E CANADA

28 MAGGIO 2026

AULA MAGNA ORE 9.00

Apertura dei lavori e saluti istituzionali

Alla presenza della Magnifica Rettore, prof.ssa Tiziana Laureti

Relazioni Plenarie Aula Magna

Sessioni Parallele Aule 3-4-6

Comitato scientifico internazionale:

Salvatore Bancheri – University of Toronto

Simone Casini – Università della Tuscia

Francesca De Caprio – Università della Tuscia

Christine Sansalone – Laurentian University

Maria Pia Spadafora – AICW

Per info e contatti: simone.casini@unitus.it
Convegno promosso nell'ambito del corso di
Laurea in Lettere Moderne L10



John Calabro

Un homme imparfait

roman



L'évesque
éditeur
REGENERATION



THE CONCEPT, THEORIES AND IDEAS AROUND LITERARY SELF-TRANSLATION



DEFINITION

Self-translation is ‘the translation of one’s own works into another language by the author himself/herself.’

Anton Popovič (1933–1984)

FIDELITY

‘To be absolutely faithful in translation has long been the ultimate goal for many translators.’



Changyong Zou,
University of South China

ALLOWING FOR EQUIVALENCE...

According to Popovič, equivalence is not a simple "sameness"
but can be categorized into four types:

1. Linguistic Equivalence: **Word-for-word correspondence.**
2. Paradigmatic Equivalence: **Correspondence of grammatical categories.**
3. Textual (Syntagmatic) Equivalence: **Correspondence of the structure and pattern of the text.**
4. Stylistic Equivalence: **Functional equivalence aimed at achieving a similar expressive effect.**

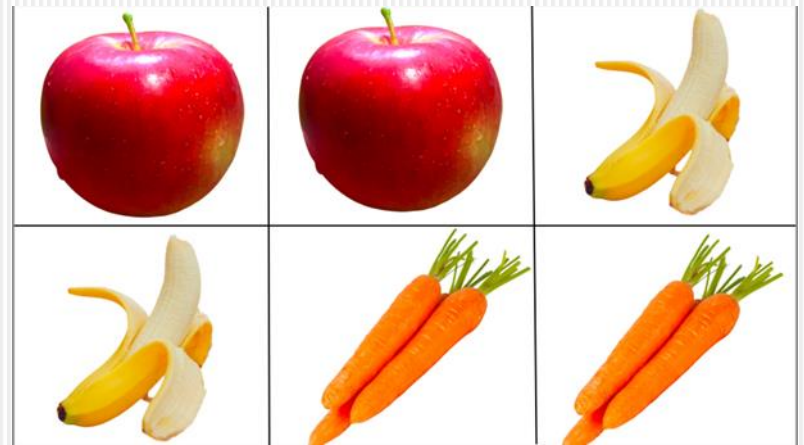
Anton Popovič
La scienza della
traduzione



Aspetti metodologici
La comunicazione
traduttiva

***‘self-translation may be
the only possible answer
toward faithfulness in
translation’***

‘to get that sameness’



But that may not be the case...

*‘Though self-translation is supposed to be most faithful, it turns out to be **the contrary**...*

Compared with other translators, self-translators often put their creative genius into translation as well. They often add, delete, adapt when translating.’



Changyong Zou, University of South China

‘Presumably, there is the pleasure inherent to the act of translation itself, and the pleasure (or pain) in revisiting certain characters, scenes, and dialogue, with the opportunity to imbue them with new life.’



Jemma Dunnill

Umberto Eco said:

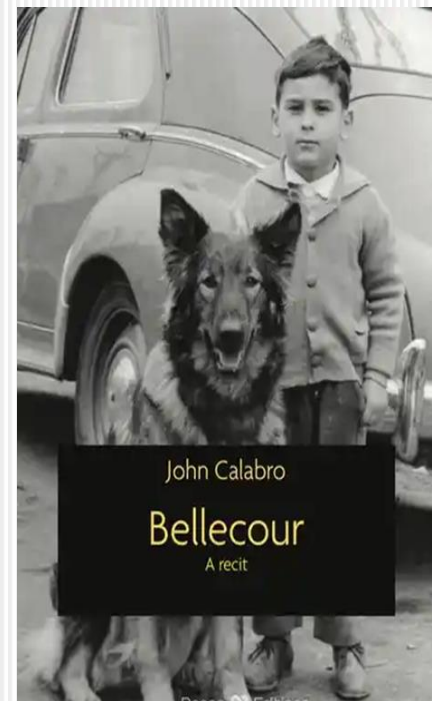
***‘Translating one’s own work in
another language is more a matter
of rewriting a different book,***

***È DUBBIO SE ESISTA
L’AUTOTRADUZIONE ALLO
STATO PURO...’***



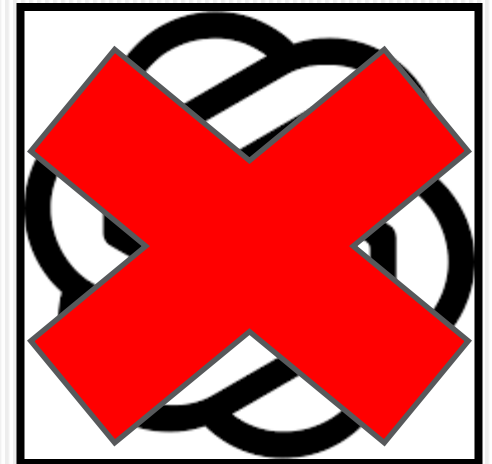
THE PROCESS

from
ENGLISH
to
FRENCH





Machine Translation



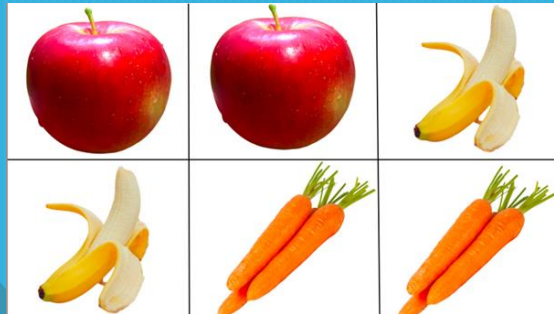
The use of online tools to guide self-translation (Not ChatGPT)



THE RESULTS:



Machine Translation was pretty good
at ... **Linguistic Equivalence**
Word-for-word correspondence.



THE SMALL PROBLEMS:

Machine translation had problems with some masculine/feminine agreements, with singular/plural agreements, as well as with complicated verb agreements.



OTHER ISSUES:



There were also awkward translations, for example: ‘*un lavage de vêtement*’ instead of *la lessive*, or, *atelier de réparation d’automobile* instead of *un garage*.’

THE MAJOR ISSUES:

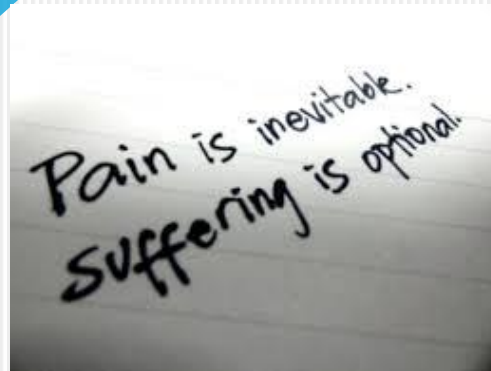
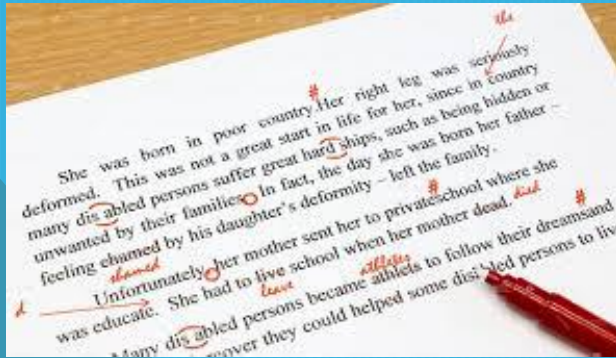


Machine translation had sucked the creativity out of the manuscript. There was something missing...

Stylistic Equivalence

The functional equivalence aimed at achieving a similar expressive effect.

THE LITERARY EDITS





I relocated the whole
narrative from Paris to the
city of **LYON**

*...Translating one's own work in another language is
more a matter of rewriting a different book...*

Encountering a new paradigm...

I was not bound to text **fidelity**. I could modify the text at will...

I re-wrote and re-created.





It stretched my ability to work in the French language while developing a consistent style, create nuances and the right tones and imagery.



Intuitive Creativity

...WAS NOT AS SHARP OR AS QUICK
AS WHEN WRITING IN ENGLISH

A SAMPLE PARAGRAPH

MACHINE TRANSLATION VERSUS HUMAN TRANSLATION



Original text

Two steps into the paved road, his head fully turned, mocking his pursuers, **I watch** in stolid horror the slow motion of an inevitable impact, **of screaming tires**, of a muted thump and of a body in the air, sent there by **the front bumper** of a grey Citroen... And when the body of Abdullah finally **hits the stone**; a weak yelp. Something cracks and he stops **whimpering**.

Machine translation

À deux pas de la route pavée, la tête complètement tournée, se moquant de ses poursuivants, **je regarde** avec une horreur impassible le ralenti d'un impact inévitable, **de pneus hurlants**, d'un bruit sourd et d'un corps en l'air, envoyé là par **le pare-chocs avant** d'une Citroën grise... Et quand le corps d'Abdullah **frappe enfin la pierre – un cri faible**. Quelque **chose se fissure** et il arrête de **pleurnicher**.

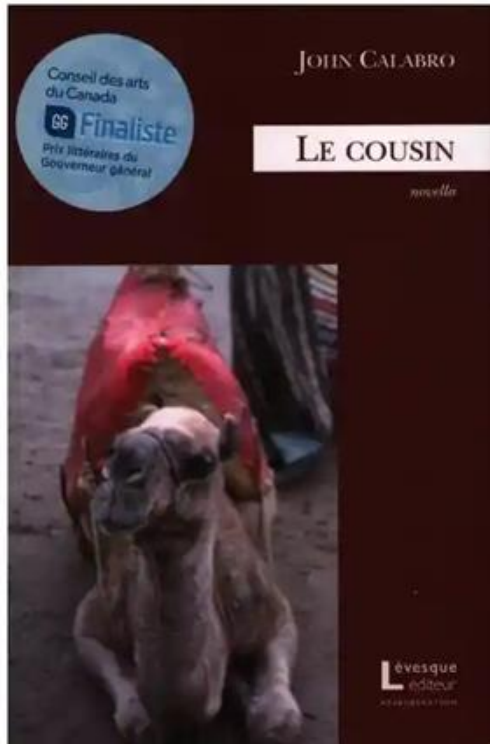
Final translation

Deux pas dans la rue pavée, la tête complètement tournée, se moquant de ses poursuivants, **je vois** avec horreur **l'inconcevable**. **J'entends la Citroën qui freine, un crissement de pneus, un coup** sourd, et puis un corps **dans l'air**, envoyé là par **le pare-choc de la voiture**... Et quand le corps d'Abdullah **frappe enfin la rue, un faible cri**. Quelque chose **craque et il cesse de gémir**.



Hélène Rioux

Multiple Governor General Award winner
for translation



Original text

Two steps into the paved road, his head fully turned, mocking his pursuers, I watch in stolid horror the slow motion of an inevitable impact, of screaming tires, of a muted thump and of a body in the air, sent there by the front bumper of a grey Citroen...And when the body of Abdullah finally hits the stone; a weak yelp. Something cracks and he stops whimpering.

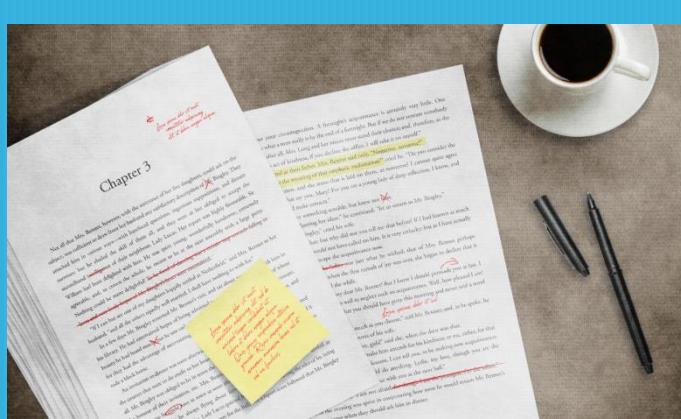
Final translation

Deux pas dans la rue pavée, la tête complètement tournée, **se moquant de** ses poursuivants, **je vois** avec horreur l'inconcevable. J'entends la Citroën qui freine, un crissement de pneus, un coup sourd, et puis un corps dans l'air, envoyé là par le pare-choc de la voiture... Et quand le corps d'Abdullah **frappe enfin la rue**, un faible **cri**. Quelque chose craque et il cesse de gémir.

Hélène Rioux

Deux pas sur la route pavée, sa tête complètement retournée, **il nargue** ses poursuivants. Moi, à la fois impassible et horrifié, **je perçois**, comme au ralenti, l'horreur de l'impact inévitable, le crissement des pneus, le bruit sourd et un corps projeté dans les airs par le pare-chocs avant d'une Citroën grise...Et quand le corps d'Abdullah **touche enfin le sol**, un faible **couinement**. Quelque chose craque et il cesse de gémir.





FINAL COPYEDITS

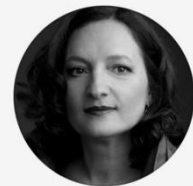




For the final copyedits I turned to a human editor, Isabelle Campanella, a Lyon native, and French teacher...



**AND A FINAL LOOK
WITH A FRESH PAIR OF EYES**
Karine Boucquillon



Isabelle Campanella



CONCLUSION

*‘Translating one’s own work
in another language is more
a matter of rewriting a
different book,’
Umberto Eco*



**LITERARY
SELF-TRANSLATION**

**The
is Se**

The Minefield that is Self-Translation

Thank You!



JOHN CALABRÒ