

# **Poetry Strikes Back**

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**Abstract:** What if poetry, instead of being the object of the philosophical gaze, returns the gaze and treats the philosophical text as the object of its poetic operations? This is what happens with Steve Mc Caffery's "translation" of the first pages of the *Communist Manifesto* into the dialect of South Yorkshire. The essay analyses the linguistic, literary and ideological operations such translation cum transposition imposes on the original text, with literary categories such as irony, parody and pastiche taking the place of philosophical concepts.

**Keywords:** defamiliarization, intralingual translation, irony, operation, parody/pastiche, poetic thinking, transposition.

1. Philosophers are usually prepared to concede that poetry thinks, provided it is they who formulate that thinking. Holderlin may think on his own, but it takes Heidegger to spell it out. It would appear that all genres of discourse are equal, in that they convey thinking, but some are more equal than others.

How can we capture the specific thinking of poetry? The philosophical tradition offers various accounts, in the opposition of presentation and representation (as in Lyotard), in the tripartition of percept, affect and concept (as in Deleuze and Guattari), in the movement from the singular towards the general (as in Macherey, who borrows from Proust his conception of the *belles généralités* that only literature reaches).<sup>1</sup> In all these cases, poetic thinking is ascribed the highest value, in its capacity to produce truths, but it still needs a little help from a friend, namely philosophy, and poetry remains not so much a subject as an object of knowledge. For there is an obvious hierarchy in the tripartition of percept, affect and concept, knowledge by concept being what poetry, worthy as it is, fails to reach.

What if poetry decides to strike back, and submit conceptual thinking to the operations of poetic thinking?

2. I wonder in which language the following text is written:

Nah sithi, thuzzer booergy-mister mouchin un botherin awl oer place – units booergy-mister uh komunism. Allt gaffers errawl Ewerup's gorrawl churchified t' booititaht: thuzimmint vatty unt king unawl, unner jerry unner frog unt froggy bother-mekkers, unt jerry plain cloouz bobbiz.

Nah then – can thar tell me any oppuhzishun thurrent been calder kommy bithem thuts running show? Urrunopuhzishun thur-

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1 Macherey 2013, p. 251.

rent chuckt middinful on themuzintfrunt un themuzintback unawl?<sup>2</sup>  
SO BUCKLE UP MATES UN SETTO, WIRRIVERYERAHR!<sup>3</sup>

The text seems to be written in a form of English, but one that diverges widely from what is known as standard English in that, although a fairly competent speaker of English, at first reading I understand almost nothing of the text, with the exception of the last line.

But I have cheated: I have suppressed the title of my text, and the name of its authors:

***The Kommunist Manifesto***  
**or**  
***Wot We Workers Want***  
By Charley Marx un Fred Engels<sup>4</sup>

Everything is now clear: this is a translation of the first lines of the *Communist Manifesto*. But since I still have difficulties understanding the text, I need another translation of this essentially translatable and indefinitely translated text. For good measure, I shall offer two. First, the current English translation of the incipit of the *Communist Manifesto*:

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcize this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French radicals and German police spies.

Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where the opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of Communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as its reactionary adversaries?<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, my own attempt at “translating” (I don’t know whether this is the right term) of the initial text into intelligible English, an intralingual exercise:

Now, you see, that bogeyman grumbling (?) and making trouble all over the place is the bogeyman of communism. All the old men of all Europe have gone to church in order to boot it out: those in the Vatican and kings and all and a Jerry and a Frog, and French trouble-makers and German plain clothes bobbies

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2 McCaffery 2002, pp. 157-96., p. 171.

3 Ibid., p. 180.

4 Ibid., p. 171.

5 Marx & Engels 2012, p. 14.

Now, then, can you tell me of any opposition that hasn't been called communist by those that run the show? Or any opposition that hasn't thrown this shit (midden-full) on those in front and those at the back and all.

The time has come to give my initial text an author. I have quoted the first two paragraphs of a translation (which only runs to a few pages) of the *Communist manifesto* into the dialect of South Yorkshire by Steve Mc Caffery, performance artist, L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E poet and literary theorist, who happens to be a native of that county. This is not the only time he has indulged in this form of pastiche: he has "translated" the *Alice* tales into the language of Toronto junkies (*Alice in Plunderland*) and into the language of the 19<sup>th</sup> century British working-class (*Alice in Workerland*).<sup>6</sup> In our text, the authors do seem to be two members of the Yorkshire proletariat.

The text has two striking characteristics. First, it is an intralingual translation, from a form of English, the standard version of the language, into another form, the dialect of South Yorkshire, which involves a mixture of familiarity, or recognition (this is a form of English...) and defamiliarization, to the point of a potential failure of communication (... but I can't understand most of the text). Secondly, it is also the translation of a translation, since Mc Caffery's text is based on the English translation of a text originally written in German (but from the start meant to be translated into as many languages as possible), which may imply semantic divergence and possible deformation.

At first reading, defamiliarization dominates. Even if the text is always-already familiar, especially the first sentence, deciphering is not easy, and this is not so much due to my abysmal ignorance of the dialect of South Yorkshire (this is part of the game, as Mc Caffery is addressing a potential readership whose ignorance of the dialect is equal to mine) as to the deliberate deformations that this "translation" imposes on the original text. All we have to do to understand this is to compare the initial sentences, "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism" versus "Nah sithi, thuzzer booergy-mister mouchin un botherin awl oer place – units booergy-mister uh komunism". There is a certain laconism in the original incipit, which gives the sentence the illocutionary force of a maxim or political slogan: this is precisely what is expected of the first sentence of a political manifesto. Mc Caffery's version, on the other hand, is garrulous, its words increase and multiply: "mouchin un botherin" translates "haunting" (which involves not only over-translation but a shift in meaning), and "thuzzer booergy-mister" translates "a spectre" (six syllables instead of three). The standard translation uses mainly words of Romance origin, like "spectre", whereas Mc Caffery's version uses Saxon words, like "bogeyman": the frightening creature of Romantic or fantas-

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6 Mc Caffery 2015; *Alice in Workerland*, to be published.

tic texts becomes a homely character for folk tales and country customs. The standard translation aims at abstraction and generality, whereas Mc Caffery's version deliberately chooses the concrete and the particular. There is an element of abstraction in "haunting", which makes the metaphorical use of the term easier, whereas "mouchin un botherin" refers to concrete acts in daily life – the concreteness of sensory impressions, as in grunting, making faces, etc., all of which makes metaphorical generalisation much harder. The translation of "Europe" as "awl oer place" (even if "Ewerup" occurs two lines later) is typical of this strategy of systematically choosing the concrete and the particular, at the expense of the universal ("Workers of the world, unite!" – the French has "*Proletaires de tous les pays...*"). The only abstract words still present in Mc Caffery's version are "komunism" and "oppuhzishun", which don't seem to have equivalents in the dialect, but we note that "komunism" has lost its initial capital letter. And we also note that Mc Caffery's text begins with two words, "Nah sithi", that exemplify the phatic function of language and have no equivalent in the standard translation.

The same kind of deformation may be found in the last line of the text, which is far more intelligible. The generalisation involved in the word "workers" (we are close to the concept of the "proletariat", a word used in French translations) gives way to the particularity of the word "mates", which insists on the direct solidarity of people who, day after day, work together in actual life. And the Romance term "unite" is replaced with two Saxon phrasal verbs, "buckle up" and "set to", whereby the abstract concept is replaced with concrete turns of phrase. The same movement occurs at the end of the sentence, where translation gives place to a form of transposition (with due deformation), as I find hard to believe that the dialect of South Yorkshire has no other way to refer to "the world" than the periphrasis "wherever you are". The abstract internationalism of the slogan gives place to parochial solidarity. And we note again the phatic addition of "so" to the sentence, which turns the political slogan into a familiar interjection.

We may draw a provisional conclusion from this systematic defamiliarization. Mc Caffery's text is a real translation, through total immersion in the dialect, which it treats as an independent language, distinct from what we acknowledge as English (we may compare this with the presence of fragments of Northern dialect within a text written in standard English, for instance in the novels of Mrs Gaskell). This total immersion, to the point of exaggeration, is paid for by the unintelligibility of the text, at least at first reading: it took me many painful re-readings to extract "boot it out" from "booititaht". I take this as the product of a series of operations, on and against the original text, whereby poetry strikes back and, in a reversal of the usual *rapport de forces* (power relation), turns a monument of political philosophy into an object for literary manoeuvring.

3. When I say that this “translation” is a product of a series of operations, I am not simply pointing out the complexity of the process (an operation transforms raw material into a finished product by a complex and determinate form of practice), I am insisting on the move from “translation” to “transposition”, that is on the creative intervention of the “translator”, which turns the text into an instance of poetic creation: philosophy has become the raw material for poetic practice.

It all begins, then, with a series of linguistic operations. We have already noted the first of such operations, the move from standard English to a specific dialect, treated like a foreign tongue, which raises questions about the unity of the English language. Can we still maintain that there is such a thing as “the English language”, as opposed to a host of divergent dialects, in a fuzzy relation of mutual intelligibility? Mc Caffery’s text increases the divergence to its extreme point, the contradictory result of the operation being that its product is, and yet isn’t, an English text.

The second linguistic operation turns a written into an oral text. Mc Caffery’s text is full of graphic marks of orality (one of the sources of its unintelligibility). It is offered as the transcription of an oral discourse, hence my difficulty in extracting “boot it out” from “booititah”. Charlie Marx and Fred Engels are addressing a real audience of local workers, with all the pragmatic marks of such discourse, for instance what I have called the “phatic additions” to the original text.

The third linguistic operation involves a change of register. The original text, even if it means to address the widest audience, naturally aims at a literate register. The register of Mc Caffery’s text, on the other hand is not only vernacular but popular, not to say deliberately vulgar. This appears not only in the privileging of Saxon over Romance words, of short words over long, of concrete words over abstract, etc., but in the very choice of such words, as the word “worker”, is already a short, concrete and Saxon word: its rendering as “mates” deliberately trivialises the situation it refers to. This is no longer a political meeting, where universal emancipation is devoutly wished for, the working-class being the agent of such emancipation, but a party between friends, in a distinctly local environment.

We have already passed on to the fourth linguistic operation, which takes us from the universal to the particular, from English as the world language, the language of globalisation, to a local dialect, not merely the dialect of Yorkshire but the dialect of *South* Yorkshire, a particularity increased by the fact that Mc Caffery’s phonetic transcription has nothing conventional about it - it is his own version of the phonetic singularities of the accent of South Yorkshire. The curse of Babel takes on its extreme form: a text whose ambition was to reach out to workers all over the world is rendered in a kind of idiolect.

The result of those linguistic operations is the uncanny feeling generated by McCaffery’s text, a defamiliarization that is paradoxical as

a text of scarce intelligibility (the idiosyncratic transcription of the dialect means that potentially only its author is able to understand it) nevertheless appears to conform to what passes for common sense rules of “good writing”, to the guidelines for transparent expression, where language ceases to obtrude and conveys thought as simply and clearly as possible. Here I am referring to textbooks of style, for instance the Fowler brothers’ famous textbook, first published at the beginning of the twentieth century, with its five injunctions:

1. Prefer the familiar word to the far-fetched
2. Prefer the concrete word to the abstract
3. Prefer the single word to the circumlocution
4. Prefer the short word to the long
5. Prefer the Saxon word to the Romance.<sup>7</sup>

This appears to be an accurate description of the style of Mc Caffery’s “translation”. We have already noted that rule n°5 was systematically followed in Mc Caffery’s text, a direct effect of the translation into dialect, as the dialect has few Romance words, mostly through borrowing from standard English. And we have already encountered instances of conformity to rule n°2. Here is another such instance: “them thats runnint show” translates “its opponents in power” – a sharp fall from the abstraction of the political concepts to the concrete phrases of everyday language, with consequent vagueness. The same occurs with rule n°1, for instance when “plain cloouz bobbiz” translates “police spies”: rather than the treacherous figure of the *agent provocateur*, we have a homely character, the “bobby”, whom we might well meet doing his rounds on the next street corner. As for rule n°4, it obviously applies in the phrase “themuonzintfrunt”, in which we recognize “those that are in front”, a sequence of monosyllabic words thinly disguised as a single unit, as a translation of “more advanced opposition parties” (and here it is obvious that transposition has replaced translation, as if the dialect was unable to grasp what are for us elementary political concepts, expressed through polysyllabic words).

The translation of “reactionary” as “themuzintback” brings together rules n°1, 2, 4 and 5, as it chooses Saxon words that are short, concrete and familiar to translate a single, polysyllabic, abstract Romance word which belongs to a specialised lexicon. The only rule that seems to be broken by Mc Caffery’s text is rule n°3 since, in contrast with the laconism of the translated text, it is garrulous, or rather, to avoid a negative value judgment, playful and full of verve. So that we remain within the general paradox, in that conformity to rules that define clarity of style produces a text that is hardly intelligible. In truth, simplicity and clarity rather belong

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7 Fowler 1924, pp. 4-7.

to the laconic translated text, and the use of dialect, in spite of its aim at concreteness, produces a text that is neither simple nor clear. Thus, even when the text has been painfully deciphered, we have difficulty in recovering the political message that the *Communist Manifesto* directly conveys: “advanced parties” and “reactionaries” are immediately meaningful in the language game to which the words belong, whereas “those in front” and “those at the back”, if we don’t know precisely which words they translate, remain vague and indeterminate. The only conclusion we can draw from this is that those linguistic operations are, at the same time, literary and ideological operations.

4. This is the main point of the literary operation practised by Mc Caffery: this translation is not so much inter- or intra-lingual as inter-generic. Mc Caffery’s “translation” in fact produces a literary text out of an original text which belongs to another genre. Even if we may wonder whether any text calling itself a “manifesto” doesn’t by definition belong to literature, an extension that might even apply to any text that lays claim to a form of style. We may therefore describe a series of literary operations, parallel to the linguistic operations just described.

The first literary operation involves a move from a serious to a comic mode. This begins as early as the paratext, which ascribes the authorship of the text to Charlie Marx and Fred Engels, thus turning the old revolutionary into the fifth of the Marx brothers, more eloquent than Harpo but less funny than Groucho. And there is no need to remind you of the fact that if there is one element of a text that doesn’t need translation, it is the name of the author (what about a French translation of *Hamlet* attributed to one *Guillaume Shakespeare*?). By translating the authors’ first names, Mc Caffery moves the source text into a new genre: he turns it into a *literary* text. The irony here is that such a move might conform to the Marxian conception of historical repetition, whereby a historical event first occurs in the tragic mode, but repeats as farce. Translating the *Communist Manifesto* into the dialect of South Yorkshire amounts to giving free rein to the comic potential it contained without being aware of it.

The second literary operation involves a move from the abstract to the concrete, the consequence of which is a change in register. The linguistic operation that imposes the constraints of the Fowlers’ rule n°2 on the text produces a literary effect: it is an instrument of comedy. Hence the fact that the title, at first translated straightforwardly by Mc Caffery, undergoes a second translation (a rather unusual occurrence) into the trivial language of daily life. A call for the advent of communism becomes “what we workers want” (complete with poetic alliteration), that is a list of concrete demands for a local strike. Not to mention the ironic use of an inclusive “we” that suggests that Marx and Engels are working class characters – but as we saw they are no longer the Marx and Engels we know but Charlie Marx and Fred Engels, two members of the South

Yorkshire proletariat. The literary operation that imposes the comic mode on the text aims at deflating the source text in its claim of serious, not to say portentous meaning. This literary operation is the original operation of irony, the operation of the *eiron* of Greek comedy. Mc Caffery is the trickster servant who, like Molière's Sganarelle, mocks Marx and Engels, those bourgeois intellectuals who would pass for members of the working class. And Sganarelle's linguistic verve is deployed at the expense of his masters. Thus, "entered into a holy alliance" is translated as "gorrawl churchified", while "to exorcise the spectre" becomes "to boot it out" ("t'bootitaht"); And we may note that both examples of ironic deflation conform to almost all of the Fowlers' rules: the dialect version prefers its words short concrete, familiar, and of Saxon origin.

The third literary operation is a move from an idiom that is, if not scholarly, at the very least literate, an idiom pervaded with political and historical culture, to the most trivial form of the vernacular. The example just mentioned transposes a historically and culturally situated process (the allusion to exorcism convokes the religious ideological apparatus, a vision of the world rationally expressed within a theology – the metaphor is culturally sedimented, all the more so as it occurs in connection with another culturally sedimented metaphor, the metaphor of the spectre, whose philosophical posterity is well-known) into a concrete daily process, which makes what was merely an abstraction concrete and actual, in other words makes the metaphor literal. This is a typically literary operation, that moves from the portentous seriousness of abstraction to the verve of the common people, the verve of Dickens's Sam Weller. Typical of this is the refusal to translate the historical allusions to Metternich and Guizot, who become simply respectively a "jerry" and a "frog".

The fourth literary operation is a move from the political, with philosophical leanings, to the poetic. No one will deny that the object of the *Communist Manifesto*, even if it takes a popular form (a form that Mc Caffery pushes to its extreme limit) is the formulation of a political philosophy. Even if it is addressed to the masses, the *Manifesto* adopts a strategy of the concept: beneath "workers of the world" we must indeed understand the Marxist concept of the proletariat. By moving from the concept, and its translation on to the common term "workers" (used as a common-sense notion rather than a concept), Mc Caffery operates not only a change in register, but a change of genre. The change is made manifest by the fact that his text compels the reader to become aware of its materiality. Even if the famous formulae of the *Manifesto* are memorable and forceful, their aim is to convey political and philosophical content, witness the fact that their force is not lost in translation: the metaphor of the ghost is as memorable and forceful in English and French, and potentially in all the languages in which the *Manifesto* is translated, as it is in the original German. In fact, the metaphor also works in the dialect of South Yorkshire, but in Mc Caffery's text it is caught in a strategy of *écriture*.

ure that uses all the resources of style to produce an idiom which we shall eventually call poetic, as it is based on an extensive recourse to rhythm, rhyme and repetition. In order to understand this, all we have to do is again quote the opening paragraph of Mc Caffery's text: "thuzzimint vatty unt king unawl, unner jerry unner frog unt froggy bother-mekkers, unt jerry plain cloouz bobbiz". The obsessively regular return of the coordinator "and" (it inscribes the move from a literate, hypotactic style to a vernacular, paratactic style), combined with the lexical repetition of "frog" and "jerry" gives rhythm to the text and turns it into a kind of chant – oral poetry rather than political and historical analysis. Such transformation is the typical result of a literary operation. Language loses its transparency, it obtrudes and compels the reader to focus her attention on its materiality, at the expense of its intellectual contents.

We could summarize the effect of the four literary operations thus: a canonical text of our modernity (we remember that in the American Marxist Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, the subtitle of which is "The Experience of Modernity", there is a chapter devoted to the *Communist Manifesto*),<sup>8</sup> has been translated into the language of post-modernity, in spite of the apparent historical regression from the idiom of globalisation, standard English, to an archaic dialect. What allows me to make this claim is that the literary operation is inextricably mixed with an ideological operation, the deconstruction of what Lyotard calls a "grand narrative", the Marxist grand narrative.

5. The literary operation just described works through irony. It turns the serious import of the source text into comedy, it makes the abstraction of the concept concrete and deliberately trivial, its moves register from the literate to the vulgar. This work of irony fulfils not only a literary, but also an ideological and political function. We must therefore describe an ideological operation, which works in two stages.

The first stage takes the claims made by the *Manifesto* to their limit, by taking the slogan "workers of the world...", together with the promise of general translation made on the second page of the text, literally. There is no reason why South Yorkshire, an industrial county with a strong working-class tradition (the miners, the Sheffield metal workers) should not be concerned by that universal claim, why it should not get a translation of the *Manifesto* in its own dialect. And such literal interpretation of the source text also implies a change of addressees: not the generic and abstract workers, in other words the actual or potential intellectuals that the standard dialect convokes, but the concrete workers, in their determinate social, geographical and linguistic environment. As a consequence, the translation must speak, at last, the real language of the real proletariat, a refutation in act of the thesis, ascribed to the joint efforts of Lenin and Kautsky, that used to prevail in communist organisations,

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8 Berman 1983.

whereby socialism is not a spontaneous product of working-class masses (left to themselves they hardly go beyond corporative trade-unionism) but is brought to them from the outside by intellectuals, like Marx and Engels, converted to the cause. Or, to use a contemporary theoretical language, it must let the subalterns speak, in their own language.

This leads us to the second stage of the ideological operation, which deconstructs the text of the *Manifesto* by showing, in the approved manner, that it critiques itself, that it is the site of paradoxes, that its chosen language prevents it from really addressing its intended addressees. The aim, at this stage, is to deflate the myth of the liberation of the proletariat (who have nothing to lose but their chains) through the work of the concept, that is through the work of science and culture, as these only serve to turn it into a bourgeois middle-class fully integrated into the capitalist system. Shades of the political pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer can be heard here, but we also remember the positions of New Labour and the famous declaration by John Prescott, the worker turned minister: “we are all middle-class now”. Which we may translate thus: we have all given up our dialect, which carried with it our history and our working-class traditions, in order to speak the standard language that is not only the dominant dialect but the dialect of domination.

This is indeed an ideological operation, with political consequences (a form of working-class nostalgia which the French political idiom calls *ouvriérisme*). But since, in Mc Caffery’s text, the ideological operation is also and inextricably a literary operation, its content is immediately inverted. A typical example of this is the translation, at the end of the first paragraph, of “French radicals” as “froggy bothermekkers”. The accurate, historically situated naming of a fraction of the French petty-bourgeoisie, whose leader was Ledru-Rollin, becomes an emotional shaming that carries with it affects neither political nor historical. Which means that the real language of real workers is not the language of reality, of the accurate analysis of the historical conjuncture, being caught up in what Gramsci called common sense, which he contrasted with both good sense (accurate ideas that come out of practice, especially the practices of work) and philosophy, that is the system of concepts into which both common sense and good sense must be reformulated so that the subaltern classes may emerge out of dominant ideology and engage in the struggle for emancipation through the development of their own hegemony. This *a contrario* comforts the position of Lenin, shared by Gramsci, on the pedagogic function of the revolutionary party (and incidentally this explains the apparent contradictions of Gramsci’s position on dialects, his hesitation between recognising the importance of the multiplicity of regional dialects that have survived Italian unity and his insistence on the limitations of the conception of the world carried by such dialects).<sup>9</sup>

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9 Gramsci 2007, vol. III, p 2235 and vol. II, p. 1377.

Here lies the specificity of the literary operation. The two stages of the ideological operation (passage to the limit and deconstruction) are examples of self-critique in that the literary text applies the ideological operation to itself. And it is the privilege of such text not to have to choose between the deconstruction of its object and self-deconstruction, which means that Mc Caffery's "translation" is both entirely faithful to the manifest meaning of the *Manifesto* and radically critical of such intended meaning, that is of the political positions inscribed in the text. This is how poetry strikes back.

5. But such "striking back" does not mean the mere inversion of the *rapport de forces*, it does not mean that literature makes theory the object of its theoretical gaze, that it grasps it (as, etymologically, the concept does) in order to take it to pieces. We must change metaphors, and turn to the metaphor of contamination, of the literary operation as the inoculation of a virus or the attack of a parasite that works not from the outside in but from the inside out. And what we need, in order to describe such contamination, are not the concepts of philosophy but literary categories. We have already described the operation of irony, with Mc Caffery as the trickster servant of his masters, Marx and Engels. But we may also refer to the twin categories of pastiche and parody. The relation between these categories may be described in the following manner. Pastiche, by a process of reduction and concentration identifies the characteristic elements of a style, its essence (in the sense one speaks of essential oils as basis for a perfume). It operates through imitation and simplification, one might say sublimation. But what happens if pastiche is itself the object of pastiche? The result is parody, the pastiche of a pastiche: the second-degree sublimation turns the concentration on the essential elements of a style, by taking it to its limit, into mockery. The original style is not only imitated and thus celebrated, but mocked, as its pretensions are deflated.

Mc Caffery's translation *cum* transposition of the *Manifesto* is both pastiche and parody. It is a pastiche in that, as we saw, it is in a sense the most faithful of translations, faithful to the intention of the authors of the *Manifesto* to address real workers all over the world, "wherever they are". Calling such workers "mates", as Mc Caffery's translation does, focuses on the real relation, at work and after work, in those real working-class communities, such as the mining villages of South Yorkshire. But it is also a parody, in that the elevated language of the source text is entirely inadequate to address the real concerns of real workers in their specific social and geographical environment, precisely because it does not speak their language. The translation as parody deflates, as we saw, the claims to universality of the source text, but it also deflates its own claims by reducing such universal claims, with their own grandeur, to trivial local concerns. In other words, parody is always-also a parody of itself.

And this may help us understand what it is literature thinks, what is the kind of truths, or of knowledge, it produces. Not, or not merely, not mainly, a knowledge of “life”, as in Deleuze’s famous reading of a page in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*,<sup>10</sup> that is not a knowledge of particularities moving towards *belles généralités*, not a knowledge that takes the form of affect and percepts, but a knowledge of the workings of language as the instrument of the constitution of the social by means of the interpellation of subjectivities within various pragmatic structures, language games and universes of discourse. It would seem that the motto of Mc Caffery’s translation of the *Manifesto* is not so much “Workers of the world, unite!” as “The limits of my world are the limits of my language”.

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<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, 2003, p. 361 ; C. Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, London : Penguin, 1971, p. 503.

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