

## **Nothing's Been Changed, Except the Words: Some Faithful Attempts at Covering Bob Dylan Songs in French**

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*As a professor, I would like to, one day, manage a course the way Dylan organizes a song, as a stunning producer rather than an author. And it would start just like he does, all at once, with his clown mask, with a mastery of each concerted detail, and yet improvised. The opposite of a plagiarist, but also the opposite of a master or a model. A very lengthy preparation, but no methods, no rules, no recipes. (Deleuze 1977:14-15)*

The above quotation, written by one of France's foremost twentieth-century philosophers reflects a typical French approach to Bob Dylan's works in that it makes room for everything but the lyrics. Even for those native French-speakers who value his works to the point of obsession, such a barrier is always present; it is not the words, but the way they are sung, that truly matters.

So what happens when someone tries to put those songs that are so much more than words into another language, for someone to sing them? As in other countries, attempts to interpret Dylan's songs in a foreign language have been made on many occasions over the years, including three full-length albums: two by Hugues Aufray (1965b and 1995) and a more obscure one by Serge Kerval (1971).<sup>1</sup>

Most of the more scattered recordings are unavailable today. A few, on the other hand, now belong to the French musical landscape. All have had to face the dilemma of using a form that is foreign, both in language and in culture, and striving to transplant meaning while paying dues to the original (the name Dylan is always mentioned in these recordings, if only as a commercial argument).<sup>2</sup> Criticism being easier than art, accusations have been numerous. Often the interpreter may be mocked for being too literal,

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<sup>1</sup> See discography for more details.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these albums' titles are *Aufray chante Dylan* (Aufray 1965b), *Serge Kerval chante Bob Dylan* (Kerval 1971), and *Aufray trans Dylan* (Aufray 1995).

like Richard Anthony, who saw it fit to sing the line from “Blowin’ in the Wind,” “*Combien d’oreilles faut-il aux malheureux*” (“How many ears must one man have?”). On the other hand, the artist may be blamed for showing utter disrespect for the original lyrics<sup>3</sup> or for paring down the artistic potential of the original, mostly in regard to the images and metaphors. The following comes from the first French book on folksong (Vassal 1972:283):

As a whole, *Aufray chante Dylan* remains a highly questionable record. Whereas the French lyrics by Pierre Delanoë<sup>4</sup> are, formally speaking, about right, they have lost half the power contained in the originals . . . . Besides, Hugues Aufray’s voice, husky as it is, is unable to convey the suffering, the pain or the wit of the author. It only offers an insubstantial echo of the initial version . . . [my translation]

Thus, the question remains: how are we to adapt performed art? According to which criteria will the adaptation be evaluated? It is my contention that one cannot simultaneously be faithful to the original and produce a genuine work of art. As evidence for this, I will refer to the lengthy discussions I have had on these matters with three individuals directly involved in those cover efforts: singers Graeme Allwright (2004), Hugues Aufray (2005), and lyricist Boris Bergmann (2005). Since the songs in question involve much more than lyrics, I will focus on the performed versions, rather than on the adapters themselves. Though my examples deal mainly with Bob Dylan songs, the rules I infer are meant to be more general.

### **Adapting Is Not Translating**

What does “faithfulness” mean in this context? In the realm of translation, a faithful target text strives to reproduce the sense and form of the original. It is not necessarily a literal translation where form would take precedence over meaning, but instead a balanced effort in respect to those two aspects. In adapting songs, however, respecting those two constraints

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, the 1971 Kerval effort at interpreting Dylan received this comment: “folksong purists considered the adaptations by Luc Aulivier, Boris Bergman, and Pierre Delanoë unforgivable betrayals” (Troubadours de France, s.d. [translation mine], online at <http://troubadoursdefrance.iframe.com/>).

<sup>4</sup> Actually, Hugues Aufray co-wrote the adaptations, but got much less recognition and credit for them, leading to some bitterness.

verges on the impossible. One may therefore limit one's efforts, simultaneously respecting those two constraints and still claim faithfulness.

Applying the tools and criteria of translation to adaptation leads to one more caveat: adaptation is not merely translation. Let us look at a Dylan-related example. Marguerite Yourcenar, famous not only as a writer but also as a translator (notably of Virginia Woolf), once put six lines of "Blowin' in the Wind" into French, mixing the first and third verses along the way. The result is as follows:

**Bob Dylan**

How many roads must a man walk  
down?  
Before you call him a man  
How many years can a mountain  
exist  
Before it is washed to the sea  
The answer my friend is blowing in  
the wind  
The answer is blowing in the wind

**Marguerite Yourcenar**

*Sur combien de chemins faut-il  
qu'un homme marche  
Avant de mériter le nom d'homme?  
Combien de temps tiendra bon la  
montagne  
Avant de s'affaisser dans la mer?  
La réponse, ami, appartient aux  
vents  
La réponse appartient aux vents*  
(Yourcenar 1991:1-102)<sup>5</sup>

As a translation, the result is brilliant: it is simultaneously accurate, imaginative, and poetic. "*Mériter le nom d'homme*," for instance, blends the meaning of the generic English "you" and of "call" into a general "*mériter*"; and "*la réponse appartient aux vents*" is an intelligent way to redistribute the elements of meaning, while using the plural to emphasize the diversity and elusiveness of the answers to those various questions. As regards poetic craft, the elision of the possessive in "*la réponse, ami*" has quite a strong effect: far better than Richard Anthony's (1965) or Graeme Allwright's "*mon ami*" (Allwright 1991) or Hugues Aufray's "*Mon enfant*" (1995).

When I showed these lines to Graeme Allwright, however, he smiled and made only one comment: "impossible to sing. . . ."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the tools of an adapter may be the same as those of a translator, but the rules and quality criteria are quite different. A translator puts words on paper; for an adapter, the lyrics must also be performable. Orality is first and foremost. As obvious as it is, that distinction is often overlooked.

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<sup>5</sup> We owe this information to Jérôme Pintoux/Zimmerman's *Furniture and Voice: Abécédaire Bob Dylan, Un Extrait*, available online at [http://www.remue.net/revue/TXT0404\\_JPintouxDylan.html](http://www.remue.net/revue/TXT0404_JPintouxDylan.html).

<sup>6</sup> See Allwright 2004.

If you are looking for translations, good or bad, you have to open your eyes and look at the packaging (what used to be the inner sleeve, before CDs): on the internet,<sup>7</sup> in the press (journalists, notably those of highly literate *Rock'n'Folk* monthly in its heyday, were very gifted), or on bookshelves (the publisher Seghers released a French version of Dylan's *Writings and Drawings* in 1975 . . . it has never been reprinted, though when you look at those translations you quickly understand why). More often than not, the result will not look at all like the lyrics to a song. A striking example is to be found on the first Tracy Chapman record:

| <b>Tracy Chapman</b> <sup>8</sup>  | <b>Liner notes translation</b>      |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| "Talking about a revolution"       |                                     |
| Don't you know                     | <i>Sais-tu</i>                      |
| They're talkin' about a revolution | <i>Qu'ils parlent de révolution</i> |
| It sounds like a whisper           | <i>Sur le ton du murmure?</i>       |

The problem here is not so much one of approximation ("ils" should be "on," and "de révolution" should be "d'une révolution" or "de revolution," for instance), but mood; the French words look like a sentence delicately uttered while sipping tea in a fashionable high society salon. The effect is ludicrous. Why the translator did not write "*Tu vois pas qu'on parle de révolution, dans un murmure?*" I can only guess. Yet, as un-poetic as it is, the meaning is mostly there, and that is what one requires of a translation. However, to adapt for the human voice requires the same tools but a different set of rules. That is why we will try to examine those adaptations in French using our knowledge of translation. Here, poetic choices will not be constrained by the rendering of metaphors and other images, but by meter and phrasing.

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<sup>7</sup> Some French-speaking internet users set up sites French translations of Bob Dylan songs. Those highly unprofessional endeavors have a lot to tell us, naïve as they look. For instance, that of "All Along the Watchtower" gets the English lyrics completely wrong, and then gives an (obviously) inaccurate French translation. These efforts are an attempt to reach out, however, and to make converts. Countless critics have written about the religious background of Dylan's work. But it seems to me that this religious attitude is no less obvious in his audience's reaction, and maybe especially so in France, the country of *laïcité*. (*Laïcité refers to an institutional system wherein there is a clear separation between all religions and the State, and in which all matters of creed have to remain strictly personal.*)

<sup>8</sup> From Tracy Chapman's self-titled album *Tracy Chapman* (1998).

### Meter and phrasing

As Pierre Delanoë writes in his liner notes to *Aufray chante Dylan*, “Some difficulties had to be overcome, starting with the transition from English, a language of few words, to much more prolix French” (Delanoë 1965 [translation mine]). Indeed, to say the same thing in French takes longer than in English.

An example of this problem can be found in the chorus to Graeme Allwright’s cover of “Who Killed Davey Moore?”:

**Who killed Davey Moore?**

**(Bob Dylan)**

Who killed Davey Moore? [5 feet]

Why an’ what’s the reason for?

[7 feet]

**Qui a tué Davey Moore?**

**(Lyrics by Graeme Allwright)**

*Qui a tué Davey Moore?* [7 feet]

*Qui est responsable et pourquoi est-*

*il mort?* [11 feet]<sup>9</sup>

Changing the meter of the chorus has a major consequence. Since the singer now has to sing the same melody with a greater number of feet, his singing will obviously be more hurried than Dylan’s. And, in this particular instance, it dramatically changes the atmosphere of the performance. Indeed, when hearing Dylan’s version, the overall feeling is one of weariness. One has the impression that the song is being sung the morning after the boxer’s death, as the singer and characters of the song return home and try to come to terms with the guilt pertaining to their respective parts in the boxer’s end. As sung by Dylan, “Who Killed Davey Moore” is a mourning song, which turns into strident protest only momentarily during the very short—and thus very striking—chorus.

In the French version, however, we are right in the middle of the ring, the boxer dead before us, and the singer is describing some kind of on-the-scene trial. Therefore, every accused party has to defend itself in front of the crowd. Thus the highest intensity is reached at the conclusion of each plea, at the end of each verse, for example (“*Ce n’est pas moi qui l’ai tué / Vous ne pouvez pas m’accuser*”). In the original, the same character appears to be

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, when I discussed this with Graeme Allwright, he was actually surprised, because he remembered the lyrics as “Who killed Davey Moore? / How come he died and what’s the reason for it?” (the same number of feet as his own version, if you downplay the final “it”). This is quite characteristic of his approach to adapting songs in general, and it is one of the features that make him an endearing artist: he considers himself as much less important than the song itself. His main purpose is to serve the song, a display of modesty that is not altogether frequent in his trade.

repeating his plea before closing his door and going to sleep (“It wasn’t me that made him fall / No you can’t blame me at all”).

Preoccupation with meter is, of course, universal. Dylan himself has informed his listeners: “I’m not thinking about what I want to say, I’m just thinking ‘Is this OK for the meter?’” (Hilburn 2004). This essential criterion explains some interesting shifts in numbers: in the French versions, Hattie Carroll is younger by one year (her name also loses one “L” in the process, while William Zanzinger becomes William Huntzinger<sup>10</sup>), and Hollis Brown has six children instead of five, because of the number of bullets at the end of the song. Likewise, on Nana Mouskouri’s rendition of “Farewell Angelina,” we have “*Deux cent bohémiennes sont entrées à la cour*” instead of “Fifty-two Gypsies now file past the guards,” which turns it into a perfect alexandrine, a much criticized option in general, as we shall see.

A further difficulty lies in the dynamic differences in the way French and English are pronounced, and, of course, sung. As Edward Sapir (1921:4) says,

The dynamic basis of English is not quantity, but stress, the alternation of accented and unaccented syllables. This fact gives English verse an entirely different slant and has determined the development of its poetic forms, and is still responsible for the development of new forms. Neither stress nor syllabic weight is a very keen psychologic [*sic*] factor in the dynamics of French. The syllable has great inherent sonority and does not fluctuate significantly as to quantity and stress. Quantitative or accentual metrics would be as artificial in French as stress metrics in classical Greek or quantitative or purely syllabic metrics in English.

Those dynamic differences were one of the main problems encountered by those who adapted Dylan in French. On *Aufray chante Dylan*, adapter Pierre Delanoë—who, according to singer Hugues Aufray, “saw things in a much more Cartesian way”<sup>11</sup>—apparently wanted to carry Dylan’s words over into a classic French frame using a ternary scansion,

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<sup>10</sup> Because the adapters did not have the printed words, they had to write them down themselves with the help of American writer Mason Hoffenberg (Hugues Aufray’s cousin). The choice of the name Huntzinger makes a connection with General Huntzinger, one of the villains in the Dreyfus affair. In 1995, William Zanzinger will get his true name back. (Hugues Aufray, *op. cit.*)

<sup>11</sup> See Aufray 2005.

whereas Hugues Aufray considered that the asymmetrical nature of the original verses was to be respected.<sup>12</sup>

The result is a compromise. In the first option, the lines are much closer to French alexandrines than to the original, and the record was harshly criticized for “making the lyrics straighter than they originally were, with a ternary, waltzy phrasing, whereas Bob Dylan’s lyrics have predominantly a binary scansion.”<sup>13</sup> In the second option, the singing carries the stress and syllabic weight of the original over into French. Hugues Aufray thus claims to be the first to have used the English tonal accent in French. It is especially evident in “*Cauchemar psychomoteur*” (“*Comme j’avais beaucoup marché*”). Six years later, Serge Kerval would do the same thing on his own record. The following is taken from the liner notes to his record (Jouffa 1971 [translation mine]): “In [the album] *Va ton chemin j’irai le mien* (*Most Likely You Go Your Way*), Boris [Bergmann] showed him how to groove in French the way Dylan does in English.” This manner of peppering French words with English tonic accents would later become a trademark of singer Francis Cabrel.<sup>14</sup> On Cabrel’s records, what an uninformed audience mistakes for a French southwestern county accent is actually of American origin, via Hugues Aufray and Serge Kerval. Its most extreme illustration in French, though, is to be found on Jean-Michel Caradec’s song “*Pas en France*,” a tribute to Bob Dylan’s way of singing.

So, the problem of adaptation is first a structural one: what to keep out and what to change in the dynamic structure of the language itself. One first and foremost has to deal with the musical form, which conditions one’s choices and tends to reduce the wealth of possibilities offered by the original. The words will only come later, but those very words confront us with a difficult dilemma. Assuming yet again that we want to remain faithful to the original, are we going to stick to the original meaning or to the original sound?

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<sup>12</sup> See Aufray 2005. On adapting the lyrics for that record, see *Je Chante—La revue de la chanson française* (Aufray 2003:56).

<sup>13</sup> See Bergmann 2005.

<sup>14</sup> A hard-core Dylan fan, Cabrel incidentally made an extremely surprising cover of *Shelter from the Storm* in 2004, due to the fact that the melody, chord structure, rhythm, arrangements, number of verses, and lyrics are quite different, yet there is a distinct Dylan feel about it.

## Sonic Equivalence

Apparently, the easier solution is to drop the initial words and let the original sound guide you, especially in regard to the rhyming scheme. In French pop music, the most extreme example may be one of Ringo's (formerly of the duet Sheila et Ringo) versions of the Buggles song, "Video Killed the Radio Star," which in French became, "[*Dites moi*] *Qui est ce grand corbeau noir?*"<sup>15</sup> (With one more foot in English than in French.)

There is some logic to this kind of phonetic translation. Rhyming may sound old-fashioned in contemporary poetry, but in songwriting they are still the order of the day. So, getting the cover to rhyme with the original may seem quite natural. However, it often leads to awkward results, as when "Knocking on Heaven's Door" becomes "Knock, Knock *ouvre toi, porte d'or,*" on Hugues Aufray's *Trans Dylan* (Aufray 1995).<sup>16</sup> Sonic equivalence is not only a matter of rhyming, however. On the same record, Hugues Aufray covers "Maggie's Farm," in which emphasis is always placed on the name: "*Maggie's Farm, Maggie's Brother, Maggie's Ma, Maggie's Pa,*" and so on. So if one wants to respect the musicality of the phrase, it seems only fair to do the same thing in French. However, syntax works against us here. The English possessive forces a reverse word order in French: "*la ferme de Maggie, le frère de Maggie, la mère de Maggie, le père de Maggie,*" which loses its effect as a repetitive pattern. Hugues Aufray opts to keep the effect by shelving the first possessive and dropping the word "farm" in the process: "*J'irai plus bosser chez Maggie, c'est fini.*" And then he twists the word order regarding the rest of the family: "*Maggie-frère, Maggie-père, Maggie-mère,*" which is musically satisfying but lyrically weak, as well as idiomatically questionable.

The desire to be faithful to the original's musicality often leads to such second-rate solutions. This is especially the case with alliterations that are often dropped due to the complication of fitting them in. That is what Hugues Aufray and Pierre Delanoë do with Dylan's "Way out in the wilderness, a **cold coyote calls**" (from "The Ballad of Hollis Brown"),

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<sup>15</sup> Music by Woolley, Horm, and Downes. Lyrics by Étienne Roda-Gil. Label: Carrère/Formule 1, 1979. Lyrics available at <http://www.bide-et-musique.com/song/662.html> (Ringo 1979).

<sup>16</sup> Such is the original title on the double LP with extensive liner notes. The low-quality CD re-release has "*Knock, knock ouvre toi, porte du ciel.*" Hugues Aufray also keeps Bob Dylan's "badge" ("*Mama take this badge off of me/Maman, jette ce badge loin de ma vue*"), oblivious of the fact that the meaning is different in French. A more accurate translation would be *insigne*, or *écusson*.

where, for lack of an equivalent, the whole verse containing that beautiful line has been omitted in the French version. Yet, alliteration is a major component of a poetic system, and thus it is problematic to abandon it altogether. When adapting “Mr. Tambourine Man” in 1965, Pierre Delanoë and Hugues Aufray first translated the line “In the **jingle-jangle morning** I’ll come following you” as “*Dans le matin calme, tu vas me montrer l’horizon.*” However, when rewriting that cover in 1995, Hugues Aufray settled for the clumsy “*Dans cet jungle de jingle-monnaie, emmèn’ moi loin d’ici.*” This effort to carry over the sound of the English original into French is quite characteristic of his style, but still falls short of recreating a poetic line. The first version works much better because it actually deviates from the original. In the second one, we can see what he wants to get at, but we conclude that he is unsuccessful, leading to the listener’s artistic frustration.

### **Equivalence of Meaning**

Bob Dylan is not only a master rhymester; he has also been highly recognized for his political messages. The political connotations of his lyrics have led some of his adapters to choose faithfulness not to the sound of the words, but to the original lyrics or context. As Graeme Allwright tells us, “I adapted ‘Davey Moore’ and ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ because something touched me in those songs, namely the social context.”<sup>17</sup> Choosing to remain faithful to the song’s references limits the adapters’ choices in quite another way.

When introducing “Who Killed Davey Moore” during his infamous Halloween Concert in 1964, Bob Dylan ironically said, “It’s taken straight out of the newspapers. Nothin’s been changed, ‘xcept the words.” Graeme Allwright could stake the same claim regarding his (already mentioned) version of the same song. On the one hand, his adaptation is completely scrupulous; he uses the same structure, same message, same characters, and same American setting, with every line in the very same place and no added or subtracted images. It is hard to imagine a more faithful translation. His only change, though crucial, has to do with meter.

A striking feature of the original song is its use of clichés: all of its characters are human stereotypes. They are worlds away from those in “Visions of Johanna,” for instance, in that they evoke prefabricated human representations. The effect becomes even stronger in French as these

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<sup>17</sup> See Allwright 2004.

standard representations of the American way of life are transplanted directly into a cultural setting that accepts them with even less questions. To a French audience in the sixties, this described America. But in these two cases, those abstractions work perfectly well, because this song is a protest song about social roles and their deadly effects. What Graeme Allwright does, then, is to turn a negative factor—the presence of clichés—into a positive, meaningful one, thus heightening the effect of the original.

However, the wish to get the message across often entails adding some extra information to the verses. In “*Cauchemar psychomoteur*” [“Motorpsycho Nightmare”], for example, Hugues Aufray describes Rita (the farmer’s daughter) in the same way as Bob Dylan does: “*Elle me faisait de l’oeil comme Tony Perkins.*” An American audience in 1964 could easily make the connection with the lead actor in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, but a French-speaking one (in 1965) could not, since the French public would recall Anthony Perkins, not Tony.<sup>18</sup> As a result, French listeners are unable to understand why the narrator is more afraid of the daughter than of the gun-wielding father, making it impossible for one to grasp why that character would provoke the farmer with an expression of support for Fidel Castro (“I had to say something / To strike him very weird, / So I yelled out, / I like Fidel Castro and his beard”). The plot of the song simply does not work in French.

On the contrary, when covering “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” Hugues Aufray and Pierre Delanoë clearly wanted to make it understood that the victim was black (which was evident to American listeners in their own context). How is this information to be expressed, then? *Elle était noire, sa peau était noire, elle était d’origine afro-américaine*, or *elle était petite-fille d’esclave*? None of these options coincide with the poetic tone of the original. The adapters settled for “*Hattie Carroll était domestique de couleur*,” a well-intended, clumsy, bourgeois expression (the 1995 version will use the somewhat better “*Hattie Carroll était plutôt noire de couleur*”).

The difficulty is even greater with songs saturated with images, though some adapters have done quite a decent job, most notably Pierre Delanoë with “Farewell Angelina” for singer Nana Mouskouri.<sup>19</sup> A search for equivalence of meaning will tend to make an adaptation seem more like a

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<sup>18</sup> Likewise, when a French audience hears the name Jack Kennedy, they think that JFK had yet another brother.

<sup>19</sup> Delanoë’s lyrics for “Love Minus Zero-No Limit” (“*Amour moins zero. . .*”) or “A Hard Rain’s a-gonna Fall” (“*Le ciel est noir*”), however, are much less convincing.

simple translation, sacrificing part of the poetic effect. As Graeme Allwright says, in order to make up for that sacrifice in the performance, “you have to cheat.”<sup>20</sup>

In sum, whatever one’s choice may be, the perils of faithfulness are enormous. For this reason, singer-songwriter Jean-Michel Caradec, who had tried and failed to adapt “Masters of War” for Serge Kerval, finally decided to write his own Dylan-like songs instead (Guillot 1981). This example is not unique. Actually, Dylan’s influence on French singers in their own original creations, both in songwriting and in performance, has perhaps provided the most elaborate transmission of his poetic innovations. Indeed, a vast array of singers acknowledge Dylan’s impact on their work, whether mentioning him by name,<sup>21</sup> alluding to his songs,<sup>22</sup> imitating him,<sup>23</sup> mocking him,<sup>24</sup> or even his French impersonations,<sup>25</sup> and so forth.

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<sup>20</sup> See Allwright 2004.

<sup>21</sup> See Michel Sardou (1985), Michel Delpech (1969), Alain Bashung (1979), and Alain Souchon (1999).

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Michel Caradec also wrote a song using only titles of Dylan songs ([http://perso.wanadoo.fr/www.jeanmichelcaradec.com/jmc\\_raconte\\_dylan.htm](http://perso.wanadoo.fr/www.jeanmichelcaradec.com/jmc_raconte_dylan.htm)). In that regard, we may also mention Alain Bashung’s “*C’est la faute à Dylan*” (1979).

<sup>23</sup> Everything is there: non-sequiturs, oblique titles, folk-rock musical background, veiled references, and most of all, wit. Some lines are borrowed quite directly from “I Shall be free” (which, in turn, is a reference to Leadbelly’s “We Shall be free”). Then came Jacques Dutronc, whose first recorded song, “*Et moi, et moi, et moi*” (1966a), was written as a parody of Antoine’s attitude (by this, I refer to the supposedly cool and selfish attitude Antoine put forth in his songs). Ironically, the French public apparently mistook it for the new single by Antoine, so we have a quadruple mirror-effect here: from Leadbelly to Dylan to Antoine to Dutronc.

<sup>24</sup> See Jacques Dutronc, “*l’Opération*” (Dutronc 1966).

<sup>25</sup> Particularly savvy are the Belgian Stella (1966a), who actually mocks Sheila in “*Un air du folklore auvergnat*” and Hugues Aufray in “*Cauchemar autoprotecteur*” and Les Cinq Gentlemen, with their hilarious “*Dis-nous Dylan*” (1966b), which was a minor hit in France (1966).

### Looking for justifications

The attempts at faithfulness thus far considered have yielded few masterpieces; they are honest efforts, some better than others, but few of them prove to be real works of art. This is largely because the songs in question are attempts at duplication, which inevitably run the risk of losing the spontaneity of the original, as well as the key feature of Dylan's art— orality. What was once a unique form has now been repeated. It is on its way to becoming a cliché, and clearly, a faithful copy can never be as good as the original. This is the eternal problem of purists, against whom Dylan (2004) himself has had a lot to say. Invariably, one feels the need to use liner notes as a defensive device to justify the intrinsic shortcomings of faithful adaptation. Of course, if the covers stood on their own as independent works of art, explanations would not be necessary.<sup>26</sup> Consider, for example, Pierre Delanoë's (1965) comments in the liner notes of *Aufray chante Dylan*: "Some listeners may be slightly surprised when hearing these songs for the first time, but the sincerity of the creator [Dylan] and of the interpreter [Aufray] will touch them to the heart"<sup>27</sup> [translation mine].

The singers who have attempted to carry over Dylan's art into French have all been faced with the dilemma of distance. That is especially true for those who released full-length CDs of Dylan songs. The very titles of those records—*Aufray chante Dylan*, *Serge Kerval chante Bob Dylan*, *Aufray Trans Dylan*—both acknowledge the gap between languages, and signal the intention to bridge it. Such an intention, however, puts the artists in an ambiguous and contradictory position. On the one hand, it amounts to telling us that we need a go-between to truly experience Bob Dylan's artistry (Monteaux 1971):

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<sup>26</sup> Of course we know that Dylan himself made extensive use of liner notes, but those, except for the occasional sentence, had no advocacy role. The only flagrant exceptions are those to *The Freewheeling Bob Dylan* (in 1963) and to *World Gone Wrong* (in 1993), where we can discover the riches of what *he* hears in the songs. Those of the original *Planet Waves* release also had a kind of defensive character, but, characteristically, they were not reprinted in the later editions, though one can easily find them on various websites, as well as on the well-known re-release of *Highway 61 Interactive*.

<sup>27</sup> The same Hugues Aufray was quite disappointed upon learning that his 1995 record (*Aufray Trans Dylan*) had been re-released without the liner notes (and with, in fact, a very hasty packaging, with typos and the unlikely addition of the words "Best of" (Aufray 2005).

Serge Kerval sings twelve Bob Dylan songs adapted in French [ . . . ] with a precise sense of equivalence pertaining both to form and intention, and suddenly Dylan speaks to us in French: [ . . . ] his songs, which used to arouse our interests, now reach out to us. [translation mine]

On the other hand, this go-between inevitably blocks our view of the original artist. Paradoxically, trying to bridge the gap only adds to the distance, and thus to the misunderstanding.

The contradictions of such a position have led to some interesting dialectical exercises. For instance, Serge Kerval is rumored to have perceived his record as a small victory of the French-speaking world over the tightening grip of American culture! More than three decades after Serge Kerval, a singer like Jean-Louis Murat—who always has nice things to say of his fellow-songwriters—reversed that contention, claiming that direct knowledge of Dylan’s songs in English was in fact more helpful for producing a genuine French record than listening to adulterated adaptations (Tandy 1999):

I think my record, though made in the United States, is much more French than those of [Francis] Cabrel or [Jean-Jacques] Goldman, who nonetheless pass for the heirs of [Georges] Brassens and others. Actually, the only thing Goldman does is grossly recycle trite American music, and Cabrel’s melodies are so American that they partake of the installation of McDonald’s in France [ . . . ] Myself, on the contrary, I got interested in music while listening to Bob Dylan during my homework, not to Hugues Aufray. [translation mine]

Regardless of one’s viewpoint and despite one’s determination to be faithful to the original, the distance will always remain, and the result will always be inferior to the original. Such an endeavor will always fall short. Such are the merits and perils of attempting fidelity when translating songs. Respect for the original, by its very nature, limits choice and thus tends to kill the poetic effect afforded by the density of meaning and by the presence of the unexpected in the initial song.

Yet is it important that these adaptations be considered works of art in their own right? The goal may be one involving the importance of *transmission* instead. Here, creativity appears second to passing something on, something which is greater than yourself and may involve something you may not even understand: “At times, a miracle happens [ . . . ] and you

become the *dybbuk*<sup>28</sup> of the author,” says Boris Bergmann.<sup>29</sup> When talking about his numerous adaptations of Leonard Cohen, Graeme Allwright (2005) says:

At the end, I was under the impression that I had written the original lines myself. There’s a mysterious side to it: even I am not sure about the meaning of those words I used. If you do translate every image, you may not understand the whole thing, but the mystery will be there. And that’s the point: the song has to retain its mystery.

That is why Hugues Aufray chose to put his 1995 effort under the sign of transmission, ransacking his dictionary for the occasion:

| Liner notes to <i>Aufray Trans Dylan</i>  | My attempt at translation   |
|---|---|
| <i>d’abord il faut transbahuter...<br/>transborder... transcoder...<br/>puis transcrire...</i>      | first, you have to transship... to<br>transcode... then to<br>transcribe...                             |
| <i>ensuite on doit tout transférer...<br/>transfigurer... transformer...</i>                        | then you must transfer everything<br>transfigure... transform...  |
| <i>transfuser... transhumer... et meme<br/>transgresser... souvent<br/>transiger...</i>             | transfuse... transplant... and even<br>transgress... often<br>compromise...                             |
| <i>on transige quant il faut!... alors<br/>seulement... le mot transite...<br/>il transmigre...</i> | you compromise when you need<br>it!...then, only then... the<br>word transits... it<br>transmigrates... |
| <i>l’idée commence à transperser... à<br/>transmuter...</i>   | the idea is slowly transfixed... gets<br>transmuted...  |
| <i>tandis que l’on continue... on<br/>transpire... mais on<br/>transparaît soudain...</i>           | while going on... your perspiration<br>transpires... but you<br>suddenly filter through                 |
| <i>il faut encore et encore<br/>transplanter... transporter...<br/>transposer sans cesse...</i>     | again and again, you have to<br>transplant... transport,<br>transpose without end...                    |
| <i>pour qu’enfin on se<br/>“transatlantique”...</i>   | so that at last, you get<br>“transatlanticated”   |
| <i>C’est le désir de transmettre... pour<br/>partager.</i>  | It is the desire to transmit... to<br>share.  |

<sup>28</sup> In Jewish folklore, the dybbuk is a demon that enters and controls the body of a living person. Actually, it seems more likely that the adaptor is possessed by the spirit of the original author.

<sup>29</sup> See Bergmann 2005.

Aufray's insights reflect those of Brian Swann (1992:xvii) with regard to translating Native American literatures: "The desire is not for appropriation but some sort of participation: a touch of an elusive essence. The fact that we no longer believe we can possess is what affords value. So even at its most 'definitive,' any translation [ . . . ] will always partake of the unknowable."

Is anything more elusive in pop culture than a Bob Dylan song? This particular quality explains both the will to pass those songs on to non-English speaking audiences and the failures most of those cover versions represent as works of art. As Joachim du Bellay famously wrote five centuries ago, a translator is not a creator, so using the criteria of translation, and especially faithfulness, leads to second-best solutions. This was well understood by some adapters, who insisted on claiming fidelity (see the above quote from Serge Kerval's liner notes), while doing exactly the reverse. Boris Bergmann (2005) thus jokes in an interview, "I practiced adultery on a grand scale." In this way, the original is no longer seen as an absolute reference, but instead as a blueprint, a starting point. It is bent into something different and often more convincing than any attempt at faithfulness. The arch-example for this second kind of adaptation is Francis Cabrel's 2004 cover of "Shelter from the Storm" ("*S'abriter de l'orage*"), which features different chords, different melody, different story, different rhythm, four verses instead of fourteen, and arrangements strongly reminiscent of another Dylan song ("Most of the Time"). Nonetheless, it is, in the end, a powerful and genuinely Dylanesque song. It is arguably the best Dylan cover in French, not because of its "accuracy" of replication, but because of the faithfulness of its transmission of greater meaning.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> I would like to acknowledge the work of Isabelle Pontécaille, Graeme Allwright, Pierre Gerphagnon, Éric Pesty, Hugues Aufray, Boris Bergmann, and Catharine Mason for their assistance in completing this article.

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<sup>31</sup> The names in brackets refer to the author and/or composer; the titles in square brackets refer to the original Bob Dylan song covered.

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Delanoë is often rumored to have written those French lyrics alone, but Hugues Aufroy strongly denies this and adds that he was able to prove his authorship with SACEM, the French equivalent of ASCAP or BMI (Aufroy 2005). Besides, he is credited as co-adaptor on the cover of *Aufroy Chante Dylan*.

<sup>33</sup> Released in 1965, this LP is the most popular body of French covers of Dylan songs in French, with a beautiful front cover in which you can study the details of Aufroy’s right ear, and a somewhat more surprising back cover that illustrates in two black and white pictures an exchange of patent leather boots between Aufroy and Dylan. Though highly criticized, it sold quite well and has had a lasting musical influence.

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According to Mr. Aufroy, this was the first time somebody used picking-style guitar or a fuzz-guitar in France.

<sup>34</sup> This includes everything except “*Ce que je veux surtout*” (Hugues Aufroy). In 1995, Hugues Aufroy rewrote and re-recorded most of his 1965 and 1966 songs, rewriting *L’homme orchestre*, and added thirteen more recent songs to the lot. The motivations were twofold. First, there was a royalty problem: after 30 years, most of the rights from his 1965 record were supposed to revert back to the record company (Barclay), leaving only a small share (4 per cent) to the artist, so it seemed only fair to re-record the whole batch. Second, Hugues Aufroy himself was unhappy with the adaptations he had co-written with Pierre Delanoë, which led him to make quite a few corrections to those and to adapt the newer songs all by himself.

<sup>35</sup> There is no known adaptor to that song since, as the legend has it, the French lyrics were written by three volunteers from the audience. Thanks to Chris Rollason for that information.

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### Songs<sup>37</sup>

- Authier 1993 Christine Authier. “Salut Dylan.” From *Salut Dylan*, France.

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<sup>36</sup> This record was re-released as a CD in 1996 by Scalen Disques (Toulouse). Serge Kerval had been trained as an opera singer before changing directions to become the French equivalent of a folksinger. He had a deep, strong voice, and recorded a large number of songs out of the French folk tradition. The record is very pleasant musically and the arrangements are excellent. Another interesting feature is the choice of songs: seven out of twelve stem from *Blonde on Blonde* (the whole carnival-like third side of the original LP, plus *Just Like a Woman* and *I Want You*), three from *New Morning* and the remaining two from *Self Portrait*. This, in addition to its title, makes it a logical follow-up to Hugues Aufray’s record. The adaptors are Pierre Delanoë, Boris Bergmann, and Luc Aulivier. According to one source (*Troubadours de France*, n.d), it was endorsed by Bob Dylan himself. It was a commercial failure, however. According to another source (Ducray et al. 1975), covered in English by the Sandals in 1966, it then prompted a long standing ban on all Dylan covers in French. It would be 22 years before Graeme Allwright’s recording of *L’homme donna un nom à chaque animal*.

<sup>37</sup> The information included in this section of the references is an attempt to provide an as complete as possible account of songs mentioning Bob Dylan, related to him or otherwise noted in this contribution. Unfortunately, not all details regarding the record labels, years, or places of release are available. We apologize for this to our readers.

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- Souchon 1999                 Alain Souchon. "C'était menti." From *Au Ras Des Paquerettes*. Paris.

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<sup>38</sup> Covered in English by The Sandals in 1966.

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NICOLAS FROELIGER

Stella 1966a

Stella. "Cauchemar autoprotecteur" (Zelcer, Chorenslup).  
Paris: RCA Victor 86.171M.

Stella 1966b

Stella. "Un air du folklore auvergnat" (Zelcer, Chorenslup).  
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