

Responding to the Enigmatic Address of the Other: A Psychoanalytical Approach to the Translator's Labour

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to begin to tease out what it means to pay attention to the affective dimensions of the translator's labour in contemporary literary translation practices. Drawing from Jean Laplanche's theory of the formation/transmission of the unconscious as a "drive to translate" triggered by the intimate dynamics of "primal seduction", the article seeks to foreground the affective and unconscious components at play in the translation process, and argues for re-articulating the question of fidelity in translation not in terms of equivalence, but in terms of the translator's response-ability towards what Laplanche calls the "enigmatic message" present in the text of the other. The article further explores how this approach can help us read the "singularities" of translators' choices in relation to the historically situated generic constraints of translation as a practice of rewriting. Specifically, it does so by looking at a Canadian feminist experiment in collaborative translation first published in 1989, which productively incorporated the question of affect and of the unconscious in translation, and in doing so also creatively modified the gendered libidinal economies of translation practice.

KEYWORDS: affect, enigmatic message, feminist translation, Jean Laplanche, psychoanalysis, translator's singularities.