**"Elsa my love my time of youth": from the concept of "mentir-vrai" to "Love which isn't a word"**

The ebb and flow of being cast atop the symbolic ocean of self-construction, as well as the incessant and infernal rhythm of sense-construction in the poetic language of "Love which isn't a word", forever shifting and incomplete, could be viewed as carrying Louis Aragon, much like the waves of a troubled sea – "That sea forever starting and re-starting" – towards the symbolic, intrinsically ambivalent mother, and towards that haunting concept of "mentir-vrai" ("true-lie") which she embodies so well. It seems to go without saying that, as Julia Kristeva puts it, "the lyrical and perplexed image of this mother [should be] immediately associated with the uncertain birth of language (the 'word') at the edge of the 'lie'". Emerging from a childhood steeped in the absence of the paternal word and in the falsity of the maternal word, Aragon is nobody's son, or the son of the Other – he who is neither visible nor audible and she who is visible but who perverts language irredeemably. "The word", a poem published after his mother's death in a collection titled *In a Strange Land Within My Own Country*, describes this endless chase after the word, that empty semantic form which can be as hypnotizing and unnamable as the search for the secret of meaning itself, an ongoing pursuit of endless perishing: CITATION

These few lines dedicated to the translation of the metaphors for love in one of Aragon's most beloved and praised texts – can one help being overpowered by sentiment before the dazzling awe of mad love? – attempt to outline a translational approach based on the analysis of semantic forms, in particular the theory developed by Pierre Cadiot and Yves-Marie Visetti. The spirit of their phenomenological thesis on the process of sense-construction at work in discourse lends itself particularly well to Aragon's writings. The conceptual crux of both the TSF (Theory of Semantic Forms) and of Aragon's thought relies on the complicity between sensibility and reason. Aragon declares as much in his *L'oeuvre poétique:* CITATION

The eternal perishing of the self in this poem from *Roman Inachevé*, a kind of "mentir-vrai" autobiography composed of elements that are both narrative and fictional, has dictated the different angles of the analysis that follows and raised numerous questions regarding possible translational approaches in response to several remarks made by Julia Kristeva about this text. It would have thus been easy, following in the footsteps of Kristeva, to construct a whole methodology of poetic translation glorifying, as is too often the case, the Muse – Elsa – whom Aragon met in 1928, in order to emphasize:

* The question of family origins in the expression of the "mentir-vrai" which naturally leads to the question of the translation of lyric poetry. However, it appeared sufficiently evident to us that the contents of the lyric subject's utterance are not "the experience of the object, but the object of experience".
* The question of infinite pathos which merges with the issue of translating Aragon's obsession with rhythm and constant motion. However, we cannot help but notice that the "specters" or images of a dispersed self diffract temporality, so that in the end what remains is one single present tense describing the dislocation or perpetual collapse of the utterance's frame of reference. Aragon's metaphors point to the aporias of time.
* The question of referential targets, which can be divided into "three major themes: wonderment, a crisis of confidence in the imagination, and the maddening cult of female pleasure."[[1]](#footnote-1) Yet, the aforementioned referential profiles and themes appear only punctually, or alternatively either in the shape of a lattice of progressive echoes or via the fusion of sounds and rhythms entering into the figurative process without allowing us to arrive at a stable or precise meaning. We will therefore opt for a holistic translational approach in light of the effect of textual synesthesia, especially when it comes to metaphors of love.
* The theme of the duel between reason and sensibility at the heart of the amorous experience. Nevertheless, the process of quasi-oxymoronic juxtaposition and the presence of contrasting elements underline motifs and seeds of chaotic meaning which refuse to rush to that kind of stability. Such motifs will be accentuated in the translation.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)