

## *On Translating "The Sunday Drive"*

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WHAT DIFFICULTIES CONFRONT the translator of a text by William H. Gass? Apart, that is, from the difficulties known to any translator of any literary text: differences of environment, culture, and mental habits, as well as linguistic problems regarding tense, aspect, or mode? The following text will point out a few of those difficulties by facing eight paragraphs from Gass's piece "The Sunday Drive" with a German translation, each section to be followed by a commentary on the text and an evaluation of the special complications which that text presented to the translator. The following analysis, however, is not meant to be merely an exercise in translation. It has been said often enough that poetic texts cannot be adequately translated. But I intend to show that finding a translation that scores high by the usual criteria is often not of prime importance. Instead, the translator needs to understand the underlying aesthetic principle of the text and reenact it within his or her own cultural setting and linguistic context.

Not even the briefest philosophy of poetic translation can dispense with an attempt to describe how any such translation mirrors, among other things, the translator's experience of his or her "personal" encounter with the author. This personal encounter comes into existence independently of the distance between the author and the translator in space and time. Taking the text as a given, the translator seeks to identify with the author in order to gain mental and emotional access to the text—to recreate the text, as it were. Translating a poetic text thus becomes a romantically erotic act. Even if the translator is originally in the position of simply wanting to serve, he or she will always eventually end up wanting to transform the text and thereby gain power over it. This, by the way, may account for the defiant enthusiasm of so many translators, most of them ill paid and employed only at irregular intervals. It goes without saying that the author is usually well advised to avoid any "real" contact with his enthusiastic translator. The translator will be the first to discover the weaknesses of the author's text and, in the process of remedying them, manipulate the author—something the author would want to avoid even if it were in the best interest of the text.

The foregoing may well be correct and applicable to most cases of translation, but it is also a pretty banal situation. Paradoxically, the relationship between author and translator becomes interesting only when an author—like Gass—attempts to create objects made of words which will take an

independent place among other objects of this world. Such an author attempts to create things—like the barns in the following text—that are “lost, alone, alive,” that need to be encountered by the reader, or the translator, on their own terms. Here identification with the author via his text is no longer possible, and the translator in the assumed role of privileged reader no longer has an easier access to the text. Instead, it becomes his task to follow the author’s lead and create as great a distance as possible between himself and the text in order to help the objects in the text to take their place in the world. The erotic atmosphere between author and translator becomes chilly under these circumstances, and while a distance in time or space could never prevent the erotics of translation as long as the translator had hope of identifying with the author, in a case like Gass’s even “real” closeness would not help to achieve better results when rendering Gass’s text in another language.

The distance Gass is intent on maintaining from, and for, the things of his texts is created by a series of metaphors: the constantly unexpected turn of language; the fresh association, cool like a beautiful blue morning and yet like “sunshine burning the page”—a phrase Gass has used in *Habitations of the Word* in reference to the sound of Emerson’s lectures. These metaphors give rise to sensations that are a constant blend of fire and ice. They repeatedly force the reader, and especially the translator, to redefine beauty as attentiveness, intensity, devotion—all directed towards the word. One of the ways Gass achieves this effect is by letting various times overlap. As narrator, he does not distort time sequences, but rather collapses various time levels into one *now*. He thus creates a new kind of spatial narrative time that relates to the metaphorical quality of his language: both require an almost literal leap of faith. In the instance of the text that follows, there are three time periods which the narrator experiences simultaneously: the time of the Sunday drive, the time of the remembered Sunday drive he went on as a child, and the time of his writing about these times. “The Sunday Drive” first appeared in its entirety in *Facing Texts*, edited by myself and published by Duke University Press in 1988. But part of the text appeared previously in *Esquire*. However, the editors of that magazine left out all the sections relating to the narrator’s childhood; only those sections dealing with the narrator’s relationship to his wife Martha and his two children remained. A straightforward story was the result of this stylistic surgery which, when compared with the text as it was published in *Facing Texts*, provides an excellent example for demonstrating how the metaphorical quality of Gass’s text depends on the simultaneous presence of various time levels. In a translation, the structure of Gass’s text can, of course, be taken into account. However, if even insensitive editing of Gass’s writing will result in the text’s departure from its appropriate metaphorical quality, the enormity of the task faced by any translator of a Gass text becomes abundantly clear.

We would try another place farther on—no luck—so then I would veer away from the river, cross the main road and go up the ridge on the other side, passing people carrying dressed up babies out of a country church. At this time of day, Martha wondered. The males made no remark. They had grown sullen. We sat in our silence as though in heavy coats. I watched for fragments of my children in the rear view mirror. Carl licked at a place where his nose had run. Carl's brother untied his shoe. Martha gave it up. My aunt pretended not to want, my mother was afraid to want, I didn't know my wants, and my father was sick of the lot of us. I should have remembered how hard it was to find a place to picnic on a trip, I thought, or a place to pee, a place to pick elderberries, or, as now, weeds. There would be poison ivy or fierce persistent bees, a stretch of soft yellow mud, a steep bank or some other kind of unpleasant footing, cow plop, brambles, burrs. It was easier to find a place to neck. I don't want any of that cattle crap carried back to the car, my father would warn as we got out. I would have begun to clash the shears—a sound which seemed to annoy everyone. Maybe I'd see a snake. My mother would encounter something which would cause her to break out. My aunt would harvest fruits which were inedible and nuts nobody wanted. Once home we'd agree it'd been fun.

Wir probierten eine andere Stelle aus—umsonst! Darum lenkte ich den Wagen, wie sonst auch, weg vom Fluß, überquerte die Hauptstraße und fuhr auf der anderen Seite in die Hügel hinauf—vorbei an Leuten, die mit aufgeputzten Kindern auf dem Arm aus einer Dorfkirche kamen. Um diese Tageszeit, wunderte sich Martha. Ihre Männer blieben stumm. Ihre Laune hatte sich verschlechtert. Wir saßen in unserem Schweigen wie in dicken Mänteln. Ich versuchte, Teilansichten meiner Kinder im Rückspiegel zu erhaschen. Carl leckte gerade den Rotz unter seiner Nase ab. Carls Bruder knotete seinen Schuh auf. Martha gab es auf. Meine Tante gab vor, nichts zu wollen, meine Mutter hatte Angst, überhaupt etwas zu wollen, ich wußte nicht, was ich wollte, und mein Vater hatte uns alle satt. Ich hätte daran denken sollen, wie schwierig es ist, auf einem Ausflug einen Picknickplatz zu finden, oder einen Platz zum Pinkeln oder zum Holunderbeeren—oder—wie jetzt—Unkrautsammeln. Immer gab es entweder giftigen Efeu oder wilde, hartnäckige Bienen, ein Stück weichen, gelben Schlamms, eine steile Böschung oder irgendeinen anderen unangenehmen Untergrund, dazu Kuhfladen, Dornen, Kletten. Leichter ließ sich ein Plätzchen zum Knutschen finden. Ich will nicht, daß die Kuhscheiße irgendwie ins Auto gebracht wird, pflegte mein Vater warnend zu sagen, wenn wir ausstiegen. Ich hatte schon zuvor angefangen, mit der Gartenschere zu klappern—ein Geräusch, daß alle anderen zu irritieren schien. Vielleicht würde ich auf eine Schlange stoßen. Meine Mutter stieß gewöhnlich auf irgendetwas, was bei ihr Ausschlag hervorrief. Meine Tante pflegte Früchte zu ernten, die ungenießbar waren, und Nüsse, die keiner wollte. Wieder zu Hause angekommen, stellten wir alle übereinstimmend fest, daß es nett gewesen sei.

The passage harks back to Joycean achievements, creating as it does an impression of stream-of-consciousness narrative by dissolving and putting into a linear sequence clusters of personal associations, without actually using stream-of-consciousness technique. The description is straightforward,

the thoughts of the first-person narrator seem to relate to the situation at hand: "I should have remembered how hard it was to find a place to picnic." However, the situation witnessed by the reader is ambiguous, collapsing, as it were, present and past events. The cluster of personal associations makes sense only because the narrator is talking about nothing but Sunday drives and picnics: each Sunday drive is, or was, part of a series of such outings, and the narrator took part in all of them. In the past outings, he was the child in the back of his father's car; in the present outing he is the father of the two boys who now have to sit in the back of *his* car. Although the former and the present picnic groups are not, strictly speaking, comparable—in the past, the narrator was the only child, and the other people in the car were his mother and his aunt; while in the present his second son takes the place of the aunt—the narrator attempts to make it so. The reader never learns the name of "Carl's brother"—apparently there is only one son for whom the tradition of the Sunday drive must be upheld. This is a narrow, personalized interpretation of a tradition of hope, of the belief in the possibility that the son will fulfill the father's deepest frustrated desires. For the child, these usually perfectly predictable outings still contain an element of adventure: "Maybe I'd see a snake." Adventure for the adult narrator, on the other hand, no longer seems to be compatible with experience at all: at best adventure may be compatible with his role as narrator, but hardly with Sunday drives. He has long since ceased to love his wife; his children don't speak to him, they don't convey to him any sense of the anticipation they might feel: "We sat in our silence as though in heavy coats."

The element of adventure provided by his role as narrator is important, however. It means the possibility of creating a linguistic pattern out of a seemingly haphazard state of affairs: "My aunt pretended not to *want*, my mother was afraid to *want*, I didn't know my *wants*, and my father was sick of the lot of us." The pattern is created through the three variations on the concept of "want" plus the contrapuntal "my father was sick of the lot of us." This serves to highlight the unsatisfactory nature of those wants, being as they are not quite desire but rather of a vague and therefore irritating nature. The German verb "wollen" can have the same meaning as the English word "want" (more so than the verb "wünschen," which, like English "wish," comes closer to denoting actual desire). Thus, the translation of the above sentence does not, in itself, pose any problems. Still, in order to convey the high degree of disgust the narrator's father feels (and which has duly become the narrator's own ever since he accepted his emotional heritage), it seemed appropriate to translate "was sick of the lot of us" as gustatorily as possible: "hatte uns alle satt" instead of, for instance: "war uns alle leid," or "hatte uns alle über"—"satt" meaning literally to be fed up.

I had at last got us down a half-grassy track which kept wandering in and out of a thin scrubby woods while following, I suppose, the path of least resistance, when we approached an artificial rise on which a spur of track had been mounted. Just over the hill ahead is heaven, I promised in the tones of a travelogue, but I couldn't raise a scoff. I proceeded slowly. These roads are not kind to large cars. Once gingerly over the track bed, we saw the barns—a line of them—and an abandoned barnyard: an overgrown fence, broken gate, high grass, of course weeds. We are like lambs who have found our way, I falsetto'd to no applause. White, with red shingled roofs, the barns are beautiful. Even Martha looks pleased. I know better than to believe in looks, but she does look pleased. Four doors open simultaneously and we pile out. I am, however, not parked on a slope.

Schließlich war ich auf einen spärlich mit Gras bewachsenen Weg hinuntergeraten, der in ein dünn mit Unterholz bestandenes Wäldchen rein—und rauswanderte—dabei vermutlich dem Weg des geringsten Widerstandes folgend. Plötzlich kamen wir zu einer künstlich aufgeschütteten Anhöhe, über die eine Wegspur führte. Jenseits des Hügels ist das Paradies, verkündete ich im Ton eines Reiseführers, konnte aber kein spöttisches oder amüsiertes Lachen damit hervorrufen. Langsam fuhr ich weiter. Diese Straßen sind großen Autos nicht wohlgesonnen. Sobald wir jedoch vorsichtig über die Anhöhe hinüber waren, sahen wir die Scheunen—eine Reihe von Scheunen—und einen verlassenen Hof: einen überwucherten Zaun, ein zusammengebrochenes Tor, hohes Gras, natürlich auch Unkraut. Wir sind Lämmer, die ihren Weg gefunden haben, tönte ich, ohne Applaus zu erhalten. Die Scheunen, weiß, mit rot gedeckten Dächern, sind schön. Selbst Martha scheint erfreut. Ich glaube nicht mehr an Mienenspiel, aber sie scheint wirklich erfreut zu sein. Vier Wagentüren gehen gleichzeitig auf und wir überstürzen uns—obwohl ich nicht auf einem Abhang geparkt habe.

In this paragraph, a significant change of tense takes place. As readers, we have again been moved forward into the present situation—the narrator is taking his family up a slope beyond which they will meet with something unexpectedly beautiful—but we have not yet been moved forward into the present tense. The narrative past tense prevails until we as readers are also confronted with the barns. There are three of them, we are to learn, as is customary in fairy tales, and the present tense will envelop us in an atmosphere of magic, a magic caused precisely by the timelessness of the fairy tale and anticipated by the narrator's promise to his family that "just over the hill ahead is heaven." As an element of the specific situation of the characters the promise is pointless: nobody thinks it's funny or even faintly suggestive. But for the reader, it sets the tone, alerting him to the change of mood in store for him. The anticipatory mood which the narrator seems to be incapable of arousing in his family ("I falsetto'd to no applause") becomes part of the reader's experience of the beautiful objects at the center of the text: the white barns, with red shingled roofs. Retroactively, the image of those barns "explains" the constant change in the text between past and present, recollection and experience. The transition from one to the other

highlights the quality of the beautiful, whose impact is all-encompassing. The present tense, which relates to the narrator as well as to the reader, is used to intensify the mental and emotional activity of all the participants until a kind of Joycean epiphany is achieved. This quality needs to be enhanced in the German translation, since a change of tense alone does not suffice to express it: switching to the present tense—the employment of the so-called historical present—is a more common feature in German narratives. The uncommon word order and the staccato style of the sentence, “Die Scheunen, weiß, mit rot gedeckten Dächern, sind schön,” was used to strengthen the epiphanic effect.

I had a cousin Lois once. I may still have a cousin Lois for all I know. She was said to be my first love, but I learned very early that adults lie about every feeling, so I never put any faith in the claim. Growing up and covering up were secret synonyms with them. Anyway, Lois was visiting us from Iowa, and she went along on one of our elderberry expeditions. She was only ten and didn't have to pick walnuts any longer than she wanted to—one privilege of a guest: to have one's wants recognized—or wade through the high weeds to get at a few remote and knobby apple trees, or watch out for the occasional damn dog.

We found ourselves that trip in the middle of a rather marshy meadow where a long warped board, gray as sea wrack, had apparently floated ashore, somewhat as we had, so while the rest of us gathered and rescued and thieved—Lois set out a row of mud pies decorated with flowers and grass and circlets of burrs, red berries for the centers of some, a yellow blossom or two, or red leaves braced with mud to make a bow. Little alyssum-like flowers covered one, I remember, like a nosegay poking out of a bride's fist. In the middle of a pie that

Ich hatte einst eine Kusine namens Lois. Möglicherweise habe ich immer noch eine Kusine namens Lois. Sie soll meine erste Liebe gewesen sein, aber ich habe sehr früh erkannt, daß Erwachsene immer lügen, wenn es um Gefühle geht; darum habe ich der Behauptung nie Glauben geschenkt. Erwachsenen werden und heucheln zu lernen sind für sie insgeheim Synonyme. Aber jedenfalls war Lois da, auf Besuch aus Iowa, und sie begleitete uns auf eine unserer Holunderbeerenexpeditionen. Sie war erst zehn Jahre alt und brauchte deshalb nur so lange Walnüsse zu sammeln, wie sie Lust hatte (eins der Privilegien, von Gästen: man berücksichtigt ihre Wünsche); sie brauchte auch nicht durch das hohe Unkraut zu waten, um an einige entfernte knorrige Apfelbäume heranzukommen; und nach dem gelegentlich auftauchenden verflixten Hund brauchte sie auch nicht Ausschau zu halten.

Auf jenem Ausflug landeten wir mitten in einer ziemlich morastigen Wiese, wo ein langes, verzogenes Brett, grau wie Seetang, an Land geschwemmt worden war, ähnlich wie wir; und während die anderen sammelten und bargen und stahlen, arrangierte Lois eine Reihe von Matschkuchen auf dem Brett und verzierte sie mit Blumen und Gras und Klettenkränzen. In der Mitte einiger Törtchen waren rote Beeren oder ein bis zwei gelbe Blüten oder rote Blätter, dreckbeschwert, damit sie eine Schleife bilden konnten. Eins, wenn ich mich recht erinnere, war mit steinkrautartigen Blumen besteckt und wirkte wie ein Strauß, der aus der Faust einer Braut herausguckt. Mitten auf einem Matschkuchen, der seiner Größe nach

might have been a cow's paddy, it was large enough, I noticed with disgust a pale emaciated pink worm she had rolled the way you'd roll a broken rubber band around a finger to create a satisfying whorl to place within the heart of her design. I stomped on several of her pies with a foot so fierce it set the board to shivering. The result was I carried gobs of mud mixed with tiny fruits and seeds back to the car on my shoes, the little shit screaming as if I'd pushed her down in a puddle. It was difficult for my aunt and my parents to make out what was the matter.

ein Kuhfladen hatte sein können, entdeckte ich voll Ekel einen dünnen, blaßrosa Wurm, den sie so gerollt hatte, wie man ein kaputtes Gummiband um den Finger wickelt, so daß eine recht artige Schnecke entstanden war, die als des Herz ihrer Anlage gelten konnte. Ich trampelte so gewaltsam auf mehreren ihrer Tortchen herum, daß das Brett erbebt. Das Ergebnis war, daß ich an meinen Schuhsohlen Schlammklumpen, vermischt mit winzigen Früchten und Samenkörnern, zurück ins Auto trug—während das kleine Luder schrie, als ob ich sie in eine Pfutze gestoßen hätte. Es war für meine Tante und meine Eltern schwer herauszufinden, was eigentlich los war.

Martha's unexpected and unwonted pleasure on seeing the barns causes an association with another frustrated love that the narrator himself managed to abort: that of his ten-year-old childhood cousin Lois. Although the narrator admits that he "may still have a cousin Lois" today, her role and meaning for him were exhausted during a childhood encounter when she caused him to fly into an extraordinary rage. There were two interconnected reasons for that rage. One, Lois was permitted to do all she wanted; she enjoyed the privileges of the guest which the narrator was not allowed to share. Thus she was granted the power of her pleasures, and he hated her for that. Two, Lois used that power in order to indulge in her own feminine designs: by creating mud pies decorated with flowers, burrs, and even a pink worm. Indeed, she felt no need for her ornaments to conform to aesthetic standards as long as they pleased her. Whether those ornaments would be categorized as pretty (flowers), bothersome (burrs), or even disgusting (worm), did not seem to make the slightest difference to her. She not only created her own world on the long warped board, but she created it as if there could be no doubt that the limits she thereby demanded for the world at large would be accepted by all. With her actions she innocently symbolized the domestic claims which men constantly rebel against, although—or because—they know that they will eventually give in to them. Stomping on Lois's mud pies hasn't helped the narrator at all. In the present, he is completely dependent on Martha's moods. His childhood rage only presaged his future impotence. Even his epiphanies can only occur in the space temporarily allotted him by Martha's pleasure.

The episode with Lois illuminates why the narrator can function only as narrator—text being the only space he will ever be able to manage according to his own aesthetic standards. In a translation of these two paragraphs it is especially important to convey how the boy's seemingly unaccountable

disgust for his cousin borders on self-loathing. Therefore, "mud" has been translated as "Matsch" rather than "Schlamm," "broken" with "kaputt" rather than "zerrissen." These words carry the connotations of impotent scorn and contempt. At the same time, those words had to be offset by others that would denote the claim to aesthetic distinction that the boy feels Lois has foregone, caught up as she is in her "dirty" games. The use of verbs like "verzieren" instead of "schmucken," or a poetic adjective like "besteckt" instead of "bedeckt," was intended to serve this purpose. In these paragraphs, a double battle is being fought, one between the sexes and one over aesthetics. The boy loses the former, but the narrator wins the latter.

Since Martha and the kids are happy clipping stalks and stems, I walk back to the rails for a better view of the barns. They appear to have been built of wood shingle, melancholy, and roofing tin. I could come upon them, from this vantage point, like Pizarro or Cortez upon the habitation of an ancient people. The barns are separated from the road by two isolated lines of track, by a drainage ditch which a crude little bridge skips, and by a clearing now crowded with vegetation: a tough looking patch of thistles and then a silver gray swatch of immeasurably delicate grass, and finally a lot of plants quite tall and imposing which I cannot identify. So the barns seem to rise out of a sea of fronds and pods and tiny leaves. There are three of them, steaming beam to beam like ships, each gable ridge a prow, although they vary slightly in size and certainly in design. To the west, the one struck last by the sun when it sets, is attended by three scaling gray silos. Wrapped in loops of fine wire, they rise beside it like the gigantic stumps of some prehistoric tree, and their shapes, as well as the patterns of the stains which have descended

Da Martha und die Kinder zufrieden ihre Stengel und Stiele schneiden, kann ich zum Zaun zurückkehren, um die Scheunen besser betrachten zu können. Sie wirken wie aus Holzschindeln, Melancholie und Dachblech zusammengebaut. Von meiner günstigen strategischen Position aus konnte ich sie entdecken, wie Pizarro oder Cortez die Wohnstätten eines alten Volkes. Von der Straße sind die Scheunen durch zwei einsame Spuren getrennt und durch einen Entwässerungsgraben, über den sich eine kleine, rohe Brücke schwingt; schließlich durch eine Lichtung, die jetzt allerdings dicht bewachsen ist: vorn ein abweisend wirkendes Distelstück, dahinter ein silbergrauer Streifen undermeßlich feinen Grases und dann eine Menge recht hoher und eindrucksvoller Pflanzen, die ich nicht identifizieren kann. Auf diese Weise wirken die Scheunen, als ob sie aus einem Meer von Farnen und Schoten und kleinen Blättern herausragten. Es sind ihrer drei, und sie dampfen entlang wie Schiffe, Bord an Bord, jeder Giebel ein Bug; doch unterscheiden sie sich ein wenig in der Größe und deutlich in der Bauart. Die westlichste Scheune, die zuletzt von der untergehenden Sonne getroffen wird, ist von drei hoch aufstrebenden grauen Silos umgeben. Umwickelt von feinen Drahtschlingen, ragen sie neben der Scheune empor wie gigantische Stümpfe einer prähistorischen Baumart; ihre Form sowie das Muster der Flecken, die seitwärts an ihnen hinunterlaufen, und die Linien des Weinlaubs, das an ihnen hinaufklettert, entzücken das Auge wie eine



their sides, and the lines of the vines which have climbed them, delight the eye the way good monumental sculpture does, by the force of its immediate mass and the caress of its eventual texture. There they store all that darkness which a day like this has defeated, and retain it for release at another time.

The middle barn is appropriately crowned by a foursquare, double-shuttered cupola which holds into the wind the cutout metal figure of a circling hawk. It is a conceit I find in a farmer almost metaphysical. The eastern barn is slightly smaller, though more romantic, as if its lofts held whisps of nostalgia instead of the absent hay it has. Nearly circumscribed by a limping fence, the building's large upper loading door arrows abruptly into its own angular eave, while the barn's undeniably solid presence seems to be receding while I watch—into the past perhaps, into never-never land—as though there were, in its world, a vanishing point from which it might not choose or be able to return. Rimmed in red like tired eyes, the windows of all the buildings are watchful black voids. It's as though the holes themselves were looking out. They seem symmetrically placed in the barn with the hovering hawk, and in the one by the silos as well, but they are irregularly set in the smaller structure, which also lets its west wall lean out beyond the high hip of its roof to create a creature of singularly gawky beauty. All three face a large tract of bottom land which the Wabash regularly floods and thereby feeds fresh mud. Their tin

gute Monumentalskulptur—durch den Eindruck unmittelbarer Masse und die sanfte Harmonie ihrer vollendeten Struktur. Innen bewahren die Silos all die Dunkelheit, welche ein Tag wie dieser zu besiegen vermochte, und heben sie auf für eine spätere Zeit.

Die mittlere Scheune ist angemessen bekront: durch einen viereckigen Turm mit einer Kuppel mit doppelten Läden, die auf der Spitze dem Wind die aus Metall geschnittene Figur eines kreisenden Falken anbietet. Für einen Bauern erscheint mir dieser Einfall beinahe metaphysisch. Die östliche Scheune ist ein bißchen kleiner, dafür jedoch romantischer—als ob sich auf ihrem Heuboden Büschel der Sehnsucht stepelten statt solcher fehlenden Heus. Das Gebäude ist beinahe ganz umgeben von einem wackligen Zaun, und seine große obere Dachluke stößt abrupt bis zur eigenen eckigen Dachkante vor. Gleichzeitig scheint sich die zweifelsohne handfeste Gegenwärtigkeit der Scheune unter meinem Blick mehr und mehr aufzulösen—vielleicht in die Vergangenheit hinein oder in ein Land ohne Wiederkehr—als ob es in ihrer Welt einen zurückweichenden Standpunkt gäbe, von wo aus sie nicht mehr wiederkommen könne oder wolle. Rotumrandet, wie müde Augen, schauen die Fenster aller drei Gebäude dennoch aufmerksam aus schwarzen Höhlen. Es scheint, als ob die Höhlen als solche schauten. Bei der Scheune mit dem schwebenden Falken sind die Fenster symmetrisch angeordnet und bei der mit den Silos ebenfalls, aber bei dem kleineren Gebäude sind sie unregelmäßig verteilt. Außerdem läßt diese Scheune ihre westliche Wand weit über die hohe Hüfte ihres Daches hinausstehen, so daß insgesamt ein Geschöpf von einzigartiger unbeholfener Schönheit entsteht. Alle drei Scheunen blicken auf einen breiten Streifen Schwemmland, welchen der Wabash regelmäßig überflutet und auf diese Weise mit neuem Schlamm nährt. Von dort sieht man zuerst die Blechdächer der Scheunen, welche die Form der Spitzenhäubchen holländischer Mädchen haben, denn die Dächer reichen hinunter bis zum Fuß der Gebäude; sie lassen sie wie

roofs, in the shape of a Dutch girl's lacy cap, are what you see first, for they slope toward their own feet like local hills, and serve both as roof and wall for a while, their color a melted run of rust and pale blood the sun seems to have set in motion as though a clear stream were passing through the pigment.

Although at home, they are lost, alone, alive. They send a shiver through me.

ortsansässige Hügel erscheinen und dienen teilweise sowohl als Dach wie auch als Mauer. Ihre Farbe ist wie eine zusammengelaufene Mischung aus Rost und hellem Blut, welches die Sonne in Bewegung gesetzt zu haben scheint—so als ob ein klarer Strom sich durch die Pigmentierung zöge.

Obwohl daheim, wirken die Scheunen verloren, allein, lebendig. Sie lassen mich erschauern.

The style of these paragraphs, which contain a description of the three barns, is consistently metaphorical. The statement that "although at home," these barns are "lost, alone, alive," has been carefully prepared for by what precedes it. The timelessness of the event, both real and textual, that consists in the narrator's coming upon the three barns, now becomes functional. The present tense encompasses both past and future. On the one hand, the narrator comes upon the barns "like Pizarro or Cortez upon the habitation of an *ancient* people," and on the other hand, the silos standing next to one of the barns "store all that darkness which a day like this has defeated and retain it for release *at another time*" (my italics). Past and future have become part of the barns' time. Consequently, the image comparing the three barns to three ships that steam along through a sea of vegetation, tall plants that the narrator cannot identify, connects various seamless segments of time—through the idea of slow but constant motion. Within this timelessness, which is, rather, a blurring of contours, natural time and historical time may also overlap. Thus, the three silos can appear both "like the gigantic stumps of some *prehistoric tree*," while at the same time they "delight the eye the way good *monumental sculpture* does" (my italics). Again, as another historical comparison makes clear, that of the shape of the barns' roofs to "a Dutch girl's lacy cap," historic time here should be seen as the artist's—the Dutch painter's, the sculptor's, the narrator's own time. The barns have become *objets trouvés* for the imagination, found because they are "lost," visible because they are "alone," loved because they are "alive." And the barns seem to reciprocate the narrator's feelings. Their windows, although red-rimmed, tired eyes, meet his gaze, and when their shapes seem to recede into the past, "into never-never land," this indicates their presence in the land of the imagination where the narrator himself would like to go and whither they beckon him to come. The encounter between the narrator and the barns, an experience of intense presence, thus also becomes one of common loss: it is sublime and no longer of this world. This is adumbrated at the beginning of the two paragraphs (which, together with the concluding line, resemble a Spenserian stanza) in

which the barns “appear to have been built of wood shingle, *melancholy*, and roofing tin”; it is enhanced by the notion that the silos contain *darkness* and the loft of the most romantic of the three barns holds “whisps [*sic*] of *nostalgia*.”

To translate these paragraphs at all adequately is close to impossible. One can only attempt to achieve a certain literalness. However, one stylistic change that became necessary on rendering Gass’s text in German nevertheless deserves special attention. It is a well-known fact (illustrated once again in the present text) that German sentences tend to be longer than English sentences. German sentences are usually more convoluted, and their structure tends to be hypotactic rather than paratactic. (For this reason some bilingual German readers, including myself, find it easier to read Kant, Hegel, or Gadamer in English translation.) The style Gass employs in these paragraphs, however, is so intricately metaphorical, subtly leading from one association to the next, that it was impossible to retain the convoluted English sentence structure. Although conjunctions and prepositions have been added where necessary in order to create a comparable chain of thought and feeling—like the loops of fine wire into which the silos are “wrapped”—the German sentences had to be broken in many places. There appeared to be no way in which the “singularly gawky beauty” of Gass’s sentences could be rendered in another language.

I was humming hit tunes in the back seat and watching the roadside go by as dreamily as it was watching me when I heard from my father half an inarticulate outcry and my head was slammed into the watching window. Almost immediately all of me was jerked back as though Martha was yanking one of the kids from the edge of an embankment, only now I was to be thrown onto the pile of elderberries we had wrapped in funnels of newspaper or stuffed in grocery sacks. As I rebounded from the floor of the car I received, like the rapid rasp of a saw, a series of terrible sounds: of rending metals, shattering glass, pissing vapors, unstaged screams. Actually, hearing scarcely intervened. They were palpable things, these noises, there like the rear window, rear seat, scissors, bags of berries. Through that window,

Ich sumgte auf dem Rücksitz Schlagermelodien vor mich hin und betrachtete die seitwärts vorbeiziehende Straße ebenso träumerisch wie sie mich, als ich meinen Vater einen unartikulierten halben Schrei ausstoßen hörte. Mein Kopf wurde jäh gegen das Seitenfenster geschmettert. Doch beinahe im gleichen Augenblick wurde ich jäh zurückgerissen, so wie wenn Martha eins der Kinder vom Rand eines Bahndamms zurückreißt. Nur wurde ich jetzt auf einen Berg von Holunderbeeren geworfen, die wir in Trichter aus Zeitungspapier gefüllt oder in Einkaufsbeutel gestopft hatten. Als ich dann vom Boden des Autos zurückprallte, vernahm ich, schnell wie das Kreischen einer Säge, eine Reihe furchterregender Geräusche: berstendes Metall, splitterndes Glas, zischenden Dampf, Schreie, die nicht inszeniert waren. Im Grunde hatte das Gehör mit allem auch gar nichts zu tun. Sie waren spürbar, diese Geräusche, ebenso gegenwärtig wie die Rückscheibe, der Rücksitz, die Schere, die Beutel voller Beeren. Durch diese Scheibe

back on the highway we had so abruptly fled, I saw two automobiles still shuddering from the force of their collision. Gray white steam rose chaotically. Glass began to patter upon the roof of our Chevrolet where we were stopped upon the shoulder. Then, almost slowly, eight doors fell off or opened and people fell or otherwise came out of them, some hugging themselves and rolling over on the highway or down the bank beside it near where we were. A fragment of white arm appeared in the steam. I stared. Staring was all I was. How quickly—inexplicably—my peaceful window had been entered by this other. A woman asmeared with blood stood up, fell softly down, stood slowly up again, wavering like a little flag. The car which had been in line behind us was new and shiny. I had noticed it because it had followed us awhile, unable to pass and impatient because of the traffic. The car which had struck it was a heap of rust, and now its weakened fenders and body panels were broken and scattered. Both hoods had risen in the air to allow the engines to rush at one another. One man had hopped away from the wreck on his unshattered leg and hugged a tree. Water appeared to be running down the leg of a lady who'd got no farther than the running board. The dust still rose in rivulets making the air seem to shake as if it were a pane of glass in the process, like the sky, of coming to pieces. My god, we've got to get out of here, my father said. Then I also smelled the gasoline. People began to come from other cars with coats and their own anguish. They appeared to be oblivious of the gasoline. I didn't utter a word—not one. What I saw entered me like a spear.

sah ich hinter uns auf der Straße, von der wir so ruckartig geflohen waren, zwei Automobile, die noch immer unter der Wucht ihres Zusammenpralls erzitterten. Grauweißer Dampf bildete ein wogendes Chaos. Glas begann auf das Dach unseres Chevrolet zu prasseln, wo er auf dem Bankett stehengeblieben war. Dann fielen, beinahe sacht, acht Türen ab oder auf und Menschen fielen oder kamen anderweitig heraus. Einige druckten ihre Arme an sich und rollten über die Straße oder den Abhang daneben herunter in unsere Nähe. Ein Teil eines weißen Armes tauchte im Dampf auf. Ich starrte. Ich war ganz Starren. Wie unerklärlich schnell dieses Andere in mein friedliches Fenster eingebrochen war! Eine blutverschmierte Frau stand auf, fiel leise wieder hin, stand langsam wieder auf, schwankend wie eine kleine Flagge. Das eine Auto, welches hinter uns her gefahren war, war funkelnagelneu. Ich hatte es beobachtet, weil es uns eine Weile gefolgt war, ohne uns überholen zu können, ungeduldig wegen des Verkehrs. Das Auto, das hineingefahren war, ohnedies ein Rosthaufen, hatte seine schwachen Kotflügel und die Blechverkleidung verloren; die Teile lagen verstreut umher. Beide Motorhauben waren aufgegangen, damit die Motoren aufeinander losgehen konnten. Auf seinem heilen Bein war ein Mann von dem Auto wrack hinweggehüpft und umarmte einen Baum. Wasser schien am Bein einer Frau herabzulaufen, die es nur bis zum Trittbrett geschafft hatte. Immer noch stieg Staub in kleinen Wirbeln auf und schien die Luft zu erschüttern—als sei diese eine Glasscheibe, die wie der Himmel auseinanderzubrechen drohte. Mein Gott, wir müssen hier weg, sagte mein Vater. Dann roch auch ich das Benzin. Leute begannen aus anderen Autos herbeizueilen—mit Mänteln und ihrer eigenen Angst. Sie schienen den Benzingeruch nicht zu bemerken. Ich sagte kein Wort—nicht eins. Was ich sah, traf mich wie ein Speer.

The intensity of the aesthetic experience, the feeling of loss accompanying any spasm of sublime pleasure, can be matched, in the “real” world, by nothing less than the most devastating experience. For the narrator, this was witnessing a car accident as a child, an experience that sent a shiver through him when it entered him “like a spear.” The accident left the narrator with nothing more than a bruise and the fake blood of purple berry juice, which splattered over him when his father had to brake violently. But as with the barns, the decisive feature of the experience was how the visible can turn palpable: “Staring was all I was. How quickly—inexplicably—my peaceful window had been entered by this other.” However, whereas the barns, by staring at him through the holes that are their windows, quietly draw the narrator into the land of the imagination, the real world noisily assaults him from the outside. In both cases, the outside and the inside merge, but in one case this is the sign of irresistible seduction, in the other it is the result of a violent attack. Here, not even the metaphors manage to create distance any longer: “Both hoods had risen in the air to allow the engines to rush at one another.” The personification of the hoods and the engines serves no other purpose than to enhance the impression that the impact of a cruel reality cannot be avoided.

Therefore, the “real” world has to be resisted as long as possible. If Gass creates texts that take their place in the world, this does not mean that they are *like* the things of the real world. However, it also does not mean that the words he employs may not accidentally describe situations and events as they have already happened or as they might happen any time. The difference is, if not one of freedom and necessity, then of voluntary or enforced exile. Creating texts that *defy* reality, demands that the artist too be “lost, alone, alive.” His defiance, then, consists in redefining the conditions of our necessary predicaments through a willed change of perspective. The writer is exemplary in demonstrating how this change can be effected. Gass’s metaphors, for instance, purge language from many of its unhealthy and burdensome traditional connotations. He thus makes things out of words that have become young again, complete with the energy to strive for independence. In order, however, for the translator to render Gass’s text adequately, he or she would have to repeat this process of metaphorical purging within his or her own cultural and linguistic context. Whether Gass’s text has been adequately translated according to the usual criteria, or its underlying aesthetic principle has been understood and reenacted in the German text, the reader is called upon to judge for him- or herself. But one thing is clear: in order to recreate this text in the manner a traditional philosophy of translation would have it, one would have to be William H. Gass himself.