

The Poems
and Aphorisms of
Maurice Chapelan

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By

Mary Munro-Hill

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This book, written in honour of Maurice Aristide Chapelan, is dedicated to Jeanne Cressanges and to my beloved husband, Thomas Peter Hill, who knew and admired them both.



MAURICE CHAPELAN
(SELF-PORTRAIT)

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PRÉFACE

Remarquable travail que celui de Madame la professeure Mary Munro-Hill qui, avec ses trois ouvrages sur Maurice Chapelan, a étudié tous les aspects d'une œuvre, miroir de l'auteur. Elle a fait revivre, avec passion et finesse, l'écrivain et l'homme dans sa complexité. Témoin de leur amitié joyeuse, au temps de leurs rencontres à Coye-la Forêt, je sais qu'ils auraient pu dire comme Montaigne évoquant son lien avec La Boétie : « Parce que c'était lui, parce que c'était moi. » Au vrai, ces deux beaux esprits avaient bien des points communs : l'amour de la langue, la réflexion philosophique et le sens de l'humour.

Dans *Aristide of Le Figaro* Madame Munro-Hill « décortique » les articles, signés *Aristide*, que Maurice Chapelan donnait toutes les semaines au *Figaro littéraire*, nous révélant les clefs de la célébrité de celui qui se disait « grammairien homéopathique » : un soupçon de science entouré de nombreux exemples, certains sérieux, la plupart burlesques, qui réjouissaient ses lecteurs et faisaient qu'ils retenaient la règle. Il eût été un merveilleux professeur. Des écrivains parmi les plus connus, tels Jean d'Ormesson, François Nourissier, Bernard Pivot et bien d'autres le considéraient comme leur maître pour le style—et la pensée, car l'un ne va pas sans l'autre.

Dans *Maurice Aristide Chapelan, Man of Three Parts*, Madame Mary Munro-Hill nous montre que, dans les récits autobiographiques de l'auteur, *Mémoires d'un Voyou, Rien n'est jamais fini* (Grasset) sous la relation souriante des amours enfantines, d'adolescence et du jeune homme, perce une déchirure. Sa mère, grande séductrice, n'a guère aimé ce fils unique, que son père occupé par son travail et un deuxième foyer a délaissé. Un homme qui, contre cette blessure première et bien d'autres infligées par la vie—dont celle jamais refermée mais gardée secrète, provoquée par la perte d'un fils de 12 ans—portait, dans la vie littéraire, un masque, des masques. Mais rappelons un de ses aphorismes : « masque n'est pas cuirasse ». Avec le même ouvrage, elle a montré que dans l'ensemble de ses écrits, dont des nouvelles, un roman (*Amoroso*), des poèmes et tout particulièrement dans ses quatre romans libertins signés Aymé Dubois-Jolly, la veine érotique est présente mais que là encore et toujours, la crudité de la scène et du propos est sauvée du vulgaire par l'ingéniosité et la vivacité du style. Notons, Mary Munro-Hill en est parfaitement consciente, que dans ces textes qui semblent inspirés par Éros, c'est Thanatos qui est là, maître du jeu. La littérature, les femmes, Dieu—il disait « je doute en Dieu »—étant les sujets qui nourrissaient sa pensée, donc ses livres.

Excellent traducteur, il disait que pour bien traduire, il fallait trahir, mais toujours « par le haut », ce qui signifiait que c'était l'esprit qu'on devait respecter, non la lettre. Nous ne nous étonnerons pas que « son frère » en littérature ait été le poète et philosophe persan de l'an 1100, Omar Khayyâm, dont il a traduit 142 Robaï. Un exemple, celui que, sachant qu'il résumait le sens de la vie pour Maurice Chapelan, j'ai fait graver sur sa tombe : « Malheureux dont le cœur/jamais ne le conduit/à l'amour dévorant/d'une autre créature/le plus perdu des jours/dans leur fuite est celui/ où la cendre se fait/sans l'or de la brûlure. »

Organiste, musicienne de talent, Mary Munro-Hill ne pouvait ignorer l'œuvre poétique qui occupa dix ans de la vie de l'auteur : « Amante en Abîme », publié par Grasset dans sa version classique et sa version moderne, qui lui valut le Grand Prix de la Critique de l'Académie française. Dans l'hommage qui lui fut alors rendu, elle note ce qui relève en premier du talent de Maurice Chapelan : « le don de perception des plus musicaux secrets de la langue française », rappelant que l'auteur disait lire et écrire avec ses oreilles. J'ajouterai un de ses aphorismes : « Une pensée bien exprimée est toujours musicale. »

Certes, Aristide a été un journaliste-grammairien aimé de ses lecteurs, estimé par ses confrères, tout particulièrement de Grevisse avec lequel il avait noué amitié. Chapelan fut un critique littéraire redouté car, à plusieurs reprises, il donna des verges à des auteurs auxquels d'autres—et le public—avaient élevé une statue. Avant tout il était un écrivain. Un écrivain dont les idées rebelles et actuelles—amour de la nature, du silence, de la méditation—s'exprimaient dans une langue au classicisme le plus pur. C'est pourquoi Madame la professeure Mary Munro-Hill consacre ce troisième tome, *Poems and Aphorisms of Maurice Chapelan*, à une étude encore plus fouillée de la pensée, de la sensibilité et des secrets du style de cet acrobate de la langue française.

On ne peut que lui adresser un « merci » admiratif et ému.

Jeanne Cressanges

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INTRODUCTION

L'homme qui est poète à vingt ans n'est pas poète, il est homme ; s'il est poète après vingt ans, alors il est poète.

—Charles Péguy, *Œuvres complètes*, Gallimard 1941, volume 8, page 310.

Towards the end of my *Maurice Aristide Chapelan, Man of Three Parts* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), I declared my intention of writing a further book on Chapelan, concentrating on his poetry and aphorisms, areas which I had handled only cursorily. I hope that this present volume will provide further insights into his creative talent, discernible in all his work, from his earliest to his most mature writing. Although the majority of his poetic work was inspired by his own ideas and experiences, Maurice Chapelan also translated the work of other poets, sensitively transforming it into French verse of style and nobility, preserving as far as possible both the spirit and the content of the original.

From childhood he had longed above all to be a poet. Throughout his life he had written verse, but it was only in retirement that he found the time to apply himself seriously to composing poetry of the quality to which he had aspired as a young man. In 1934, at the age of twenty-eight and already a published poet, Chapelan launched a poetry review, *Le Beau Navire*, its title inspired by Baudelaire's poem of that name. He was the director of the publication, which appeared on only nine occasions: in the years 1934 and 1935 and then, in a slightly different format, in 1939. Despite its short life and very few editions, *Le Beau Navire* attracted the attention of prominent literary figures in pre-war Paris, drawing contributions from poets of the day, including Maurice Chapelan himself, who wrote in his own name as well as using the pseudonym Charles Mouron, the sound of that pen-name hinting at some of his deepest thoughts. Some of those whose poems appeared in *Le Beau Navire* were destined to become household names, renowned not necessarily for their poetry alone but for other forms of art: Jacques Audiberti, Luc Estang, Patrice de La Tour du Pin and Maurice Fombeure. André Salmon, himself one of the contributors, had written a complimentary critique of the publication in *Le Figaro littéraire*, comparing its director, Chapelan, to the great Alfred Vallette.

Cherished copies of *Le Beau Navire* are still to be found in 2020, though at a price, and, according to Chapelan himself, editions had already become collectors' items by the 1970s (1977: 264). Issue N° 7 is of particular interest to us as it includes a tribute, written by Chapelan, to his late friend Maurice

Rey, who had played such a significant role in his life (Munro-Hill 2017: 15) and whose poems had featured in *Le Beau Navire* from its first edition. Appearing in that same number is an introduction by François Mauriac, addressed to young poets:

Sur ce « beau navire » j'ai été mousse, il y a vingt-cinq ans. Les visages changent, mais de génération en génération le même équipage, avec la même passion, interroge les astres. Et quand nous sommes fatigués d'attendre la réponse et que nous regardons autour de nous, le temps a passé, la jeunesse est finie. Voilà la dernière escale : celle de l'âge mûr. Que nous y accueillent ou non les flonflons de la réussite, la même ténèbre se referme qui recouvre à jamais nos jeunes cœurs attachés à une chair déjà corrompue et presque détruite.

This paragraph expresses a sentiment similar to that of Péguy (see the epigraph to this chapter) but is strangely pessimistic when considered in the light of Mauriac's successful career.

I had thought at first that *Aristide of Le Figaro* (2017) and *Maurice Aristide Chapelan, Man of Three Parts* (2019) had said all that could be written about Chapelan and his work, but that assumption was wrong, for I realised there was still much to be examined, especially in his poetry and his philosophy, as expounded in his aphorisms. Jeanne Cressanges encouraged me to consider further those aspects of his work which I had not yet treated in depth and kindly agreed to write the preface.

As an avowed admirer of Sainte-Beuve, Chapelan not only wrote literary criticism but also composed hundreds of aphorisms, sayings which set out his *Weltanschauung*, his observations on life and on his fellow human beings. His pithy maxims cannot fail to strike a chord in all who read them; some reflect his inherent cynicism, some show him as a self-styled *humoraliste* (a term he coined), yet others exemplify his ironic—sometimes cruelly sarcastic—fatalistic acceptance of humanity, *sans fard*. His bitter, wittily irreverent anti-clericalism defends his rejection of Christianity.

Maurice Chapelan's poetry deserves to be read. Much, if not most, of his lyric verse, his romantic poetry, is overtly erotic. His longest poem, *Amante en abîme : symphonie poétique classique et moderne*, was highly esteemed—and rewarded—by the *Académie française*; it was the culmination of the poetic aspirations he had nurtured since his youth, embracing thoughts of life, death, nature and love. Chapelan regarded it as the pinnacle of his *œuvre*, and it was the work of which he was proudest.

In this study I present every kind of poem created by Maurice Chapelan: his verse translations—as they are indeed creations—of the German romantics, Hölderlin and Novalis, of the modern Spanish poet, Lorca, and

of Omar Khayyám; his erotic love poetry; his comic compositions and his occasional pieces, written for friends.

For all Chapelan's cynicism and atheism, he is optimistic in his personal life and outlook, with one or two exceptions. In his work, it is as though he knowingly separates himself from much of what he writes, especially in his aphorisms, as his intellect seems somehow detached from his emotions, except in his lyric poetry, where the two are fused. Broadly speaking, we can distinguish his aphorisms from his poems as one separates the mind from the heart.

It is among his earliest poems that we find his translations of German romantic poetry and of one Andalusian ballad. Although such work is no mean achievement, to convey the sense of the quatrains of an eleventh-century Persian poet is a veritable *tour de force*. There is an unusual story, which will be told in detail in Chapter One, concerning Chapelan's *Cent quarante-deux Robaï d'Omar Khayyâm*. Having no Farsi, he took Edward FitzGerald's English translation of the *Rubáiyát* and translated it into French, being careful to ensure that his rendering was finer than the French translations he had encountered. Having little English, Chapelan was assisted in this task by a Polish friend with a mastery of both French and English, who spent many hours with him, translating FitzGerald's text *mot à mot* into French.

Readers who are familiar with Chapelan's prose works will know that they almost all contain substantial amounts of verse. Sometimes the poems are found within the main text; sometimes they form a separate section *en fin de volume*. In the case of his *Amoroso*, a work he defines as *roman vécu*, almost a third of the novel takes the form of poetry—his *Croquis libertins* and *L'agenda perdu*.

In his four erotic novels, for which Chapelan used the pseudonym Aymé Dubois-Jolly (Munro-Hill 2017 and 2019), there is also poetry, frequently humorous, sometimes essential to the plot but more often than not inserted to enhance the qualities of a character or an event.

By far the greater part of Chapelan's verse is lyric, romantic poetry: we shall see how most of his later work portrays his tender feelings and all-consuming passion for the woman he loves. When he writes comic verse, outside his *romans galants*, it is normally with the intention of amusing friends, colleagues and visitors. If we wish to find Chapelan's true being, his soul and very self, it is surely in his love poems that we shall find them.

We often detect the poet in Chapelan's philosophical musings, in his aphorisms, and even more so in his *Amours*, *Amour* and other collections, where the writing resembles the *petits poèmes en prose* (*Le spleen de Paris*) of Baudelaire, though without the ever-present darkness. The essence of

the author is tangible in his whole *œuvre*: his feelings in his verse and his philosophy in his aphorisms, for it is in those epigrammatic sayings that he most clearly reveals his understanding of humanity.

The first chapter of this present book will cover his verse translations; the second will treat his pre-war poetry and his work at *Le Beau Navire*; the third will examine the verse and the *poèmes en prose* in his prose works; the fourth will study the occurrences of aphorisms, epigrams and maxims in his prose; in the fifth we shall see how Chapelan, writing as Aristide, includes both verse and aphorism in his grammatical articles; in the sixth chapter, we shall look at Chapelan's serious lyric poetry, especially his *Amante en abime*; the seventh will consider his comic and satirical writing in the poems and sayings found in his *romans galants*, penned under the pseudonym Aymé Dubois-Jolly. The conclusion will seek to assess the contribution of Maurice Chapelan's poetry and aphorisms to twentieth-century French literature.



... la lecture apporte l'eau des autres
au moulin de notre esprit et lui permet de tourner.
H.C.

MAURICE CHAPELAN

(SELF-PORTRAIT)

... la lecture apporte l'eau des autres au moulin de notre esprit et
lui permet de tourner.*

—Maurice Chapelan, *Main courante*, Grasset, 1957, page 58

*The original text has *amène*.

CHAPTER ONE

VERSE TRANSLATION

Traduttori traditori.

Giuseppe Giusti, *Proverbi tuscani*, privately published, 1873

If it is difficult to carry over the exact meaning of a prose work from one language into another, it is all the more so when verse is involved. Many books and articles have been written on the art of translation, not a few in relation to the special challenges presented by poetry. Some of Chapelan's early poems (1960: 231) demonstrate his mastery of the art.

He includes in his second autobiography, *Rien n'est jamais fini*, under his diary entry for 2 avril 1973, his translation of one of Lorca's poems, *Arbolé, Arbolé*, preceded by a significant paragraph for us (1977: 117):

Traduire les poètes me passionne, lorsque l'original, à travers le français prosaïque que j'en ai généralement sous les yeux, m'inspire de le recréer d'une façon plus digne de lui, où la gageure reste néanmoins d'en respecter l'esprit et la lettre. Ainsi ai-je fait, il y a deux ans, pour cette chanson des Andaluzas.

ARBOLE, ARBOLE...

ARBRISSEAU

Arbolé, arbolé,
seco y verdé.

*Sec arbrisseau
Couleur de l'eau*

La niña del bello rostro
está cogiendo aceituna.
El viento, galán de torres,
la prende por la cintura.
Pasaron cuatro jinetes
sobre jacas andaluzas,
con trajes de azul y verde,
con largas capas oscuras.
«Vente a Córdoba, muchacha.»
La niña no los escucha.
Pasaron tres torerillos
delgaditos de cintura,
con trajes color naranja
y espadas de plata antigua.

*Fille au visage vivant
la voici cueillant l'olive
prise entre les doigts du vent
par la taille et la salive.
Quatre cavaliers qui passent
sur des poulains andalous
vêtus de verre et d'espace
sous des manteaux noirs de loups :
« Viens à Cordoue, la belle ! »
Mais elle est sourde et rebelle.
Passent trois toréadors
cambrés le torse engageant
leurs habits orange et or
ceints d'épées de vieil argent :*

«Vente a Sevilla, muchacha.»
 La niña no los escucha
 Cuando la tarde se puso
 morada, con luz difusa,
 pasó un joven que llevaba
 rosas y mirtos de luna.
 «Vente a Granada, muchacha.»
 Y la niña no lo escucha.
 La niña del bello rostro
 sigue cogiendo aceituna,
 con el brazo gris del viento
 ceñido por la cintura.

Arbolé, arbolé.
 Seco y verdé.

« *Viens à Séville, la belle* ».
Mais elle est sourde et rebelle.
Alors que le soir compose
son violet qui se meurt
passee un jeune homme où l'ardeur
met au front myrtes et roses :
 « *Viens à Grenade, ma belle* ».
Mais elle est sourde et rebelle.
Fille au visage vivant
cueille et cueille son olive
contre les lèvres du vent
qui lui sèche la salive.

Sec arbrisseau
Couleur de l'eau.

Although Lorca's poem was typeset as above, Chapelan chose to present his translation differently: in quatrains, which he separated one from another with couplets consisting of the recurring *Viens à...* In this way he succeeded in making the quasi-refrain stand out. For the sake of ease and uniformity of layout, I have conformed Chapelan's format to Lorca's.

There is no attempt to imitate the rhythm of the Spanish but Chapelan creates his own, using an unfamiliar but effective seven-syllable line for the main body of the poem and four-syllable lines for the opening and closing couplets. Although respecting the spirit of Lorca's poem, he has departed here and there from the letter, contradicting his declaration *d'en respecter l'esprit et la lettre* and negating his statement: *Ainsi ai-je fait, il y a deux ans, pour cette chanson des Andaluzas*. The fact that he alters—and adds to—the effect of the wind on the girl is surprising and hard to explain, other than by recalling his frequent use elsewhere of the word *salive*, and not solely in his poetry; there are three occurrences in one book alone, *Mémoires d'un voyou* (1977: 69, 126 and 234). It could be in *Arbolé, arbolé*, that each alteration aids his metre, although he could surely have found another way of “re-creating” the poem, had he so wished. He must have had a good reason for introducing alien ideas. The second instance is more puzzling still, in that Chapelan fails to make any reference at all to *la taille*, ignoring “la cintura”, thinking only of the effect of the wind on the girl's saliva:

El viento, galán de torres,
 la prende por la cintura.

con el brazo gris del viento
 ceñido por la cintura.

prise entre les doigts du vent
par la taille et la salive.

contre les lèvres du vent
qui lui sèche la salive.

Nevertheless, Chapelan has produced a fine translation, a poem worthy of Lorca, and should be forgiven for injecting a little of himself into the work. His rendering of the recurring line “Y la niña no lo(s) escucha” by *Mais elle est sourde et rebelle* should be regarded as proof of his appreciation of the subtlety of Lorca’s language, which is here open to various interpretations. Chapelan has chosen to emphasise the girl’s unwillingness to hear, or to listen to, and thus to accept the invitations extended to her: she turns a deaf ear to them. In her refusal to listen to them, Chapelan discerns rebellion.

Among the German romantic poems he translated were Hölderlin’s *Hälfte des Lebens* and Novalis’ *Zahlen und Figuren*. Judging mediocre the French translations he had read of the poems of Hölderlin and Novalis, he decided in 1943 to see whether he could do better himself: *L’ignorance a de ces audaces*, as he comments (1960: 224). Although he certainly regarded his version as an improvement on the work of others, he could not help wondering, attractive as he found his poem: *ne trahissait-il pas plus qu’il ne traduisait ?* He therefore showed his translations to a friend, Lou Bruder, a bilingual writer from Alsace and professor of German literature, who assured him of their soundness. Below is Hölderlin’s *Hälfte des Lebens*, with Chapelan’s translation:

Hälfte des Lebens

Le milieu de la vie

Mit gelben Birnen hängen
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,
Ihr holden Schwäne,
Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr das Haupt
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

*Fruits dorés et roses sauvages
que mêle ensemble un air léger
du lac vous creusez le visage
et tout étourdis de baisers
beaux cygnes vous plongez la tête
dans son onde pure et parfaite.*

Weh mir, wo nehm’ ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen

*Où les pourrais-je prendre hélas !
les fleurs quand j’atteins l’hiver sombre ?
Le soleil par quel geste las
m’en saisir et la terre et l’ombre ?
Froids muets les murs sont debout
et la girouette au vent s’enroue.*

We see how Maurice Chapelan has used a regular octosyllabic verse of six lines to translate the irregular metre and seven-line stanzas of Hölderlin. There are no end rhymes in the German yet Chapelan supplies them in his translation: *ababcc*. We may wonder why he insists here on a traditional style when the original contains no trace of classical regularity. It is as

though he wished to put his own stamp on the poem. His version is more than a translation: it is a new creation. Some would say that any such refashioning of the original, especially the inclusion of an idea not present in the original, cannot be considered a faithful rendering: furthermore, he fails even to observe the punctuation. Others, however, would see in the new version a fine poem, a worthy tribute to the poet whose work Chapelan is translating, recognising in the new rendering an inherent respect and admiration for the essence and spirit of the original and appreciating its merit as a re-expression and re-interpretation of Hölderlin's poem. Perhaps this dichotomy is present in the minds of all who pass judgment on works of translation, whether prose or verse. If, however, a verse translation receives the approval of sound, scholarly critics, it is surely far from being an act of treachery but may be regarded as a work of literature in its own right, where the notion of *traduire—c'est trahir* has no place.

Chapelan translates another of Hölderlin's poems, *An die Parzen*, again lending his version a more traditional flavour than the original, providing end-rhymes, *abab*, and writing in regular alexandrines. The closing line of the translation is a hemistich, which Chapelan centres beneath the other three lines of the final stanza, perhaps in affirmation of the chosen layout of Hölderlin, who has centred the whole of his poem, as we see:

An die Parzen

Nur einen Sommer gönnt, ihr Gewaltigen!
 Und einen Herbst zu reifem Gesange mir,
 Daß williger mein Herz, vom süßen
 Spiele gesättiget, dann mir sterbe.

Die Seele, der im Leben ihr göttlich Recht
 Nicht ward, sie ruht auch drunten im Orkus nicht;
 Doch ist mir einst das Heil'ge, das am
 Herzen mir liegt, das Gedicht, gelungen

Willkommen dann, o Stille der Schattenwelt!
 Zufrieden bin ich, wenn auch mein Saitenspiel
 Mich nicht hinabgeleitet; Einmal
 Lebt' ich, wie Götter, und mehr bedarf's nicht.

Apart from the last line of its final stanza, Chapelan's version has an entirely different appearance. As with his translation of *Hälfte des Lebens*, there is no punctuation other than full stops, and the only capital letters are those at the beginning of sentences and those reserved for proper nouns, in which category he places, surprisingly, *le Poème*, bestowing on it a status equal to

that of *Orcus*, *les Parques* and *la Grâce*. He expresses his independence as a translator not only by ignoring the punctuation of the original but also by creating a strict rhyme scheme in line with his choice of classical alexandrines. The German original, *An die Parzen*, does not rhyme and is composed mainly in hendecasyllables. Here is Chapelan's translation:

Aux Parques

*Encore un seul été Parques : un seul automne
je ne demande rien que voir mes chants mûrir
enfin rassasié du bonheur qu'ils lui donnent
il sera plus facile à mon cœur de mourir.*

*L'âme qui fut privé au monde de justice
dans le gouffre d'Orcus ignore le repos.
Une fois ô mon cœur ! la Grâce te remplisse
le Poème une fois te comble—que dispos*

*j'aborde en souriant et l'ombre et le silence
dussé-je abandonner ma lyre avant d'entrer !
Si des dieux un seul jour j'ai vécu l'existence
Que pourrais-je pleurer ?*

Chapelan includes the essential meanings but often, as is his wont, converts the parts of speech involved and even proper names: the phrase *et l'ombre et le silence*, for instance, he uses to translate *Stille der Schattenwelt*, and in the opening line he decides boldly to take *ihr Gewaltigen*—O ye mighty ones!—and substitute, appropriately, *Parques*. By using such devices he succeeds in creating a fine new poetic work, worthy of Hölderlin's original.

The common opinion that poetry cannot be translated, though accepted by some, has been refuted time after time: in the case of French alone, poetry has always been translated, from Clément Marot's celebrated rendering of Virgil's *Éclogues* and the *Psaumes de David* in the sixteenth century to Jean-François Ménéard's inventive renderings in our present age of J K Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, with their many poems and songs.

We should remember that all poetry is written primarily to be spoken, recited, read aloud: it has rhythm, music and movement. If we recite the Hölderlin poems, followed by Chapelan's translations, we shall hear how the versions in French, by virtue of the nature of the sounds of the language, are smoother and softer than their German originals, as would be expected. There is no attempt on Chapelan's part to copy Hölderlin's commas, nor has he any intention of imitating the relatively harsh consonantal sounds *p*, *t* and *k* of *Hälfte des Lebens*, and his rendering of the last line of that poem is not

a translation but a re-creation. Since German and English have many sounds in common, especially those found in onomatopoeic expressions, an Anglophone poet would doubtless have retained the plural *Fahnen*, as *flags* or *weathervanes*, rendering *klirren* by *clatter*, *rattle* or *creak*, options impossible in French. Chapelan changes the plural *die Fahnen* to the singular *la girouette*, and provides a fitting verb for the new noun: the picture of flags flapping or weathervanes creaking noisily in the wind is now transformed into a single weathercock, which grows hoarse, an image he may have borrowed from Baudelaire's *Brumes et pluies*—« *par les longues nuits la girouette s'enroue* ». Chapelan's version of *An die Parzen* is closer to the original than was the case with his translation of *Hälfte des Lebens*.

In the following Novalis poem, *Zahlen und Figuren*, where the poet's archaic spelling has been retained, Chapelan is faithful to the character and form of the original, composed in rhyming couplets. The nonsyllabic lines of Novalis are rendered by octosyllables and, though the overall meaning is captured in the translation, Chapelan finds alternative vocabulary, though not departing seriously from the original meaning. He could, for example, metre permitting, have used *la lumière* and *l'ombre* for *Licht* and *Schatten* but chose instead *la clarté* and *la nuit*, the former also rendering *Klarheit*; Chapelan has thus made *la clarté* give birth to *la vérité*, neatly combining both idea and lexis.

Chapelan follows the structure of the German verse of Novalis more closely than was the case with the Hölderlin poems. When the original and the translation are compared, we see immediately how closely the two resemble each other, until we notice the complete absence of punctuation, apart from the final full stop, in Chapelan's version: this feature represents a significant difference. Perhaps we should ask why he decides to ignore the commas placed so strategically by Novalis: it may well be that, availing himself of the flexibility afforded him by the removal of any such constraint, Chapelan finds greater freedom of movement and consequently more creative independence. Although the translation follows the order of Novalis' ideas, Chapelan exercises his freedom as a quasi-new creator, transposing lexical forms, as we saw in his treatment of Hölderlin.

Zahlen und Figuren

Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren
Sind Schlüssel aller Kreaturen
Wenn die, so singen oder küssen,
Mehr als die Tiefgelehrten wissen,
Wenn sich die Welt ins freye Leben
Und in die Welt wird zurück begeben,

Quand les nombres et les figures

*Quand les nombres et les figures
n'ouvriront plus les créatures
quand le poète et les amants
seront plus fins que les savants
que libéré naîtra le monde
à son existence profonde*

Wenn dann sich wieder Licht und Schatten	<i>qu'unie à la nuit la clarté</i>
Zu ächter Klarheit werden gatten,	<i>enfantera la vérité</i>
Und man in Märchen und Gedichten	<i>qu'on décèlera dans la fable</i>
Erkennt die wahren Weltgeschichten,	<i>d'ici-bas l'histoire durable</i>
Dann fliegt vor Einem geheimen Wort	<i>alors d'un mot le secret doit</i>
Das ganze verkehrte Wesen fort.	<i>transmuer l'envers en endroit.</i>

With the following poem, *Es ist dem Stein*, Chapelan seems to take almost unacceptable liberties, yet if one reads the German original followed by his translation and then rereads them both, one begins to appreciate how close they are in spirit and in musicality, although so markedly different in lexis. In the end, there are two independent poems, each with its own beauty and character:

Es ist dem Stein

Es ist dem Stein ein rätselhaftes Zeichen
 Tief eingegraben in sein glühend Blut,
 Er ist mit einem Herzen zu vergleichen,
 In dem das Bild der Unbekannten ruht.
 Man sieht um jenen tausend Funken streichen,
 Um dieses woget eine lichte Flut.
 In jenem liegt des Glanzes Licht begraben,
 Wird dieses auch das Herz des Herzens haben?

Le diamant et le cœur

*Le diamant porte en lui son mystère
 comme un tombeau que dévore le feu
 et l'Inconnue en un cœur prisonnière
 me représente et la pierre et son feu.
 Autour du cœur éclate la lumière
 telle la pierre étincelle en ses jeux.
 Si la clarté gît au cœur de la gemme
 cœur cloras-tu—cœur du cœur— qui tu aimes ?*

The French translation retains all the meaning of the German, while daringly redistributing and transferring various elements: the idea of the grave in *eingegraben*, for instance, is seen in the noun *tombeau*; the *rätselhaftes Zeichen* is found in *son mystère*. *Le diamant*, though never mentioned explicitly in the German, is certainly there in the *Stein* with its *tausend Funken*. Chapelan again skilfully writes a poem of his own, inspired by Novalis but created by him.

Translating poetry, carrying it over from one language to another, is never easy, even if one has a near-native mastery of the second language. Being conscientious, Chapelan was always anxious to know that he had translated the original satisfactorily, and he was assured by the scholars he consulted that such was indeed the case. When handling the poetry of the eleventh-century Persian sage, Omar Khayyám, Chapelan had not in fact translated the original Farsi but had worked from FitzGerald's English translation (1859), which was, already by the late nineteenth century and even more so by the early decades of the twentieth, acknowledged as a masterpiece of English literature in its own right and had a cult following, having acquired a status almost equal to that of Shakespeare and the Authorised Version of the Bible. Chapelan's first attempts at translating FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* appeared as *Douze robai*, in the closing section of his *Lire et écrire* (1960: 235-238), immediately following the Hölderlin and Novalis poems, under the simple heading *Traduire*. Seventeen more quatrains appear in his *Amoralités familières* (1964: 243-247).

His major translation, *Cent quarante-deux Robai d'Omar Khayyám*, would not be published until 1969. It should be noted that the volume has an Introduction occupying the first twenty-nine pages. Although his translations of the quatrains have no page numbers, each of them bears a title number, 1 being found on what would have been page 31. Since all Chapelan's numbers identifying the quatrains, as well as those allotted to the pages of the Introduction, are Arabic numerals—whereas FitzGerald had used Roman numerals to designate Omar Khayyám's quatrains—references made to Chapelan's volume can be confusing: for this reason it is left to the reader to judge from the context which numbers are intended. Since FitzGerald published at least four editions of the *Rubáiyát*, adding new quatrains to each fresh version and making minor revisions at the same time, the best-known translations have been used in this chapter.

In the *Introduction* to his 1969 volume, Chapelan relates in detail the manner of his first encounter with FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*. It was thanks to the patience of his Polish friend, Allan Kosko, who had a native command of English, that Chapelan embarked on translating the work. On a walk, taken late one evening, during his friend's stay at the Chapelans' house in Coye-la-Forêt, the conversation had turned to FitzGerald's work. Kosko was a devotee of Omar Khayyám, and in response to Chapelan's obvious interest, had painstakingly dictated a translation, *mot à mot*, of a few of the quatrains he had learned by heart from his brother, who had introduced him to FitzGerald's work. From Kosko's literal translation Chapelan had produced French verse, of good quality, there and then, *sur-le-champ*.

To illustrate the poetic character inherent in much of Chapelan's prose writing, a feature to which we shall return in Chapter Two, when we begin to consider his *poèmes en prose*, a short passage from the *Introduction* to his *Cent quarante-deux Robaï* is reproduced below (1969: 10):

Il me souvient seulement de la nuit d'octobre si douce, avec sa lune pleine, ouatée de brume, que nous décidâmes, en sortant de table, d'aller faire le tour des étangs de Comelle. Pour moi, c'est au bord de ces eaux tranquilles, en foulant les feuilles mortes des hêtres, le ciel redevenu clair et dans le silence nocturne de la forêt, que mon ami Kosko commença à m'entretenir de Khayyâm.

Whether such writing should be termed prose poem or poetic prose is difficult to determine, but it is certainly *poésie*. Chapelan quotes the first of the FitzGerald quatrains (L) that Kosko had recited to him. Directly beneath it, he places his own French verse, commenting (1969: 11):

Le voici donc, en anglais et en français, puisque tout ce livre devait en sortir :

The Ball no Question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Right or Left as strikes the Player goes:
And He that toss'd Thee down into the Field,
He knows about it all—*He knows*—*HE* knows!

*Qu'irait demander la balle les oui les non ?
Elle obéit muette au pied qui la bouscule
et toi dans ce désert ta course sa raison
il est seul à savoir le Joueur majuscule.*

Chapelan later encountered Arthur Guy's translation of that same quatrain, which he quotes (1969:12):

Toi, comme la balle que le Sort meut du maillet,
À gauche et à droite va, à sa guise, et te tais !
Car cette personne qui en la danse te met,
C'est elle qui sait, elle qui sait, elle qui sait !

He hated it, declaring it entirely devoid of poetry. Arthur Guy was a learned orientalist, whose respected translation of the Rubáiyát had been published in 1935 by Malfère in the collection *Les grands événements littéraires*. In the longer term, however, Chapelan would find the translation useful to him, as he studied it in conjunction with the literal translations Kosko continued to send him and with other French versions he would find. Ironically, Guy's book, described by Malfère as [*une*] *étude suivie d'une traduction française*

en décalque rythmique avec rimes à la persane, was in fact instrumental in gradually revealing to him the mind of Omar Khayyám, although he had at first dismissed Guy's more literal translation of the quatrains as *indigeste*. Subsequently, Chapelan's friend, Yves-Gérard Le Dantec, learning of his interest in the Rubáiyát, sent him a copy of his own translation, which had been published in 1954 in a bilingual edition by Falaize; this, together with Guy's book and Kosko's translations, would inform his final version. Chapelan quotes Le Dantec's translation of that same quatrain (1969:13):

La Balle est hors du Jeu des Non comme des Oui,
 Mais, Droite ou Gauche, aux coups du Joueur, elle suit :
 Et Celui-là qui T'a fait rouler sur l'Arène,
 Lui sait tout de l'affaire. Il sait Lui—Il sait LUI !

Le Dantec has employed the rhyme scheme of the original quatrains of Omar Khayyám, *aaba*, which FitzGerald himself had used, almost without exception. From his study of the available translations, Chapelan was able to embark on his own, which he saw primarily as a tribute to FitzGerald, thanks to whom he had encountered Omar Khayyám, [*qui*] *devait parvenir jusqu'à moi et bientôt toucher profondément mon esprit* (1969: 14).

Further translations would subsequently inspire his work: that of Claude Anet and Mirza Muhammad, dated 1920 and republished in 1957 by *Le Club des Libraires de France*, and also that of Mahdy Fouladvand, published in 1940 by *Les Éditions G-P Maisonneuve*. Anxious to share with his readers all the various published French versions at his disposal, as well as wishing them to understand how he had arrived at his own translation, he takes one single quatrain—not the one quoted earlier—as an example (1969: 15):

Claude Anet :

Avant toi et moi il y avait des nuits et des jours,
 et le ciel longtemps avait tourné sur lui-même.
 Pose avec douceur le pied sur la terre,
 car cette terre était peut-être l'œil vif d'un adolescent.

Arthur Guy :

Sans nombre, avant nous des nuits et des jours ont été.
 Les Cieux, en tournant, à l'œuvre, toujours ont été.
 Prends garde, ne mets le pied qu'en douceur sur la terre
 Dont les grains, des prunelles de velours ont été.