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Translation as Multi-Layered Performance: The Case of "Le Feu au cœur," Bertrand Belin's French Cover of Bob Dylan's "Ain't Talkin'"

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Abstract: Ten years before being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in October 2016, Bob Dylan released the album *Modern Times* (2006). The album's closing song, entitled "Ain't Talkin'," is an epic, dark and enigmatic eight-minute piece featuring a first-person narrator, more specifically a disillusioned 'lone pilgrim' figure that travels through defamiliarised, post-apocalyptic landscapes. On the second edition of his sixth album *Persona* (October 2019), the French singer-songwriter Bertrand Belin published "Le Feu au cœur," which, to this day, is the only existing French version of "Ain't Talkin'." This cover can arguably be considered a performance on at least two counts. Firstly, Dylan's lyrics were translated by Belin, who is also an acclaimed writer and stylist. As he performed the act of translating Dylan's words, Belin made them entirely his own, thus moving away from literalism and static structures of equivalence and producing, instead, a unique and highly personal text. Secondly, this translation was self-used by Belin, who also performed it as a studio recording and on stage, so that various electric and acoustic renditions of the French cover are now available. In this essay, I propose to analyse how Belin, as a translator-performer, goes beyond

transposing "Ain't Talkin"' as a purely literary text. As we will see, he never loses sight of the need to make "Le Feu au cœur" singable in French. Indeed, the oralised and embodied dimensions involved in the musical performing of the French lyrics determine most of his translational choices, not least those concerning the adaptation of rhyme schemes, which undoubtedly contributes to shaping the performed material and, ultimately, to turning his French translation of Dylan's song into a thoroughly transformative work––a re-creation in its own right.

Keywords: Belin, Dylan, Iterability, Translation, Song Performance.

1 Introduction: Translation as a Performative Trope

The notion of the event, whose relationship with translation this *Yearbook* volume seeks to investigate, together with that of performance, have in common the fact that they involve forms of action that can, *inter alia*, apply to translation. In the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary, an event is primarily defined as "something that happens" and, more particularly, as "a noteworthy happening," i.e. as something whose occurrence can potentially change the course of things, or as "a social occasion or activity" (Merriam Webster 2023: s.p.). Yet, if this and similarly broad dictionary definitions adequately describe real-life events, they are less directly useful to scholars in linguistic, literary or translation studies, since the latter are more interested in understanding what an event might mean at the level of discourse and, therefore, interested in including non-real, or discursive, events in their definitions. Indeed, while an event can take place in the real world, it can also refer to an episode that unfolds in the realm of fiction, simulacrum or mimicry, such as a fact narrated in a novel or *performed* on a theatre stage (cf. La langue française 2023: n.p.). Aware that relying on vague definitions would not suffice, translation studies, in particular, has attempted to advance the discussion

on these matters, notably by an appeal to notions of performativity.

In this context, translation itself has increasingly been depicted as a performative trope by scholars who strove to counter the historically dominant school of linguistics, one that views language as a static system and "a stable container of information" (Robinson 2003/2014: 29). In his 2003 book entitled *Performative Linguistics: Speaking and Translating as Doing Things with Words*, Douglas Robinson distinguishes between two branches of linguistics (and two different linguistic regimes), namely constative linguistics, which is based on "the idea that language is fundamentally communicative or informative" (i.e. "message-bearing, constative," ibid.: 29), and performative linguistics, which results from the notion that "words *do* things" and are, on this account, "invested with the power to effect change" and "shape reality": "I speak, and it comes to pass" (ibid.: 30), as Robinson puts it. The latter brand, which insists on the "*power* of words" rather than on their "*truth*" (ibid.: 33; original emphasis), originates from the pioneering linguist "J. L. Austin's distinction between ordinary, constative statements that 'say,' and performative statements that 'do' – that perform an action in themselves (cf. Austin 1962: 3–6)" (Bermann 2014: 285), more exactly "the action to which they refer" (ibid.: 287).

Just as an event can be said to occur on two different planes, it is possible to consider that translation, and more specifically literary translation, can be *performed* on at least two levels (the second of which similarly conjures up the theatrical sphere or, more generally, requires an artistic understanding of the term *performance*), as Sandra Bermann has argued in the footsteps of Edith Grossman:

> What does it mean to "perform" translation? In one sense the verb "perform" simply means "to do or to complete." But a semantic

> subset of such "doing" is "to act, as in a play." Literary translation has frequently been described with both these meanings in mind. Translation is definitely something one *does*. But as Edith Grossman has noted, it can also be considered a "kind of *interpretive performance*, bearing the same relationship to the original text as the actor's work does to the script." Like an actor, a translator may be said to "perform" a source text for her new public, hearing the "voice" of the author and the sounds of the text in her own mind and then interpreting through different words, in her own voice. (Grossman 2010: 11–12 as quoted in Bermann 2014: 285)

Readers may deem this analogy between translation and acting on a stage inadequate or unconvincing for at least two reasons. Firstly, they may find it unrigorous insofar as the stage on which an actor performs a script is far more literal than in the case of a translator, who will often—though not always—perform a text for an absent audience. Secondly, readers may feel that, as regards translators, the perils of simulation (consisting, for example, in passing off as your text what is actually a rendering of a source text the translator should preserve and whose authority should be identified) have been insufficiently acknowledged by translation studies scholars. Yet, even if this analogy may seem too vague or dangerous to be of use, it remains an interesting one in that it underscores the interpretive dimension inherent in the act of translation.

Similarly, Robinson (2003/2014: 41) has suggested that translation can "be thought of as performative" not only because it is unquestionably an "act," but also—as "a good many translation scholars" have contended—because it can be "likened […] to performing in another sense, the translator as performer, the translator standing in the same relation to the original as the musical performer to the score (cf. Wechsler 1998 for an overview)." Despite its potential shortcomings (cf. *supra*), the analogy between stage performers and translators 'performing' texts (as musicians would scores) is evocative

insofar as it highlights, once again, the work of interpretation translation involves. Interestingly, this analogy is doubly valid in the case of Bertrand Belin, who, as will be developed below, performs his translation of "Ain't Talkin'" as both a translator-performer—one who translates, i.e. interprets, Dylan's song for a French-speaking and initially absent audience—and a musical performer in a more traditional sense, namely one who will play variants of his translation on a real stage, in front of numerous audiences.[1]

As Bermann briefly retraces the history of translation studies, she also identifies a 'performative turn' in the field, which is perceived to have

> shifted its focus from the more formal and abstract strategies of linguistic equivalence towards a study of individual *acts* of translation and what they *did* in particular contexts. That is, if linguists first offered a view of translation in terms of *saying*, the attempt to restate in the receiving language what the source text said (and as accurately as possible), then later translation scholars, interested in the cultural and political *acts* and *effects* of translation, examined the *doing* of translation: in the doing of languages and texts; but also the doing of translators, readers, and audiences. In the process, this displacement signalled a move to a less essentialist or ontological view of translation, one less

1 Although the limited framework of this essay will not make it possible to elaborate on this aspect of Belin's interest and active involvement in the performing arts, it should be noted that he also has some experience as a narrator (as in *Playlist*, a 2021 film by French cartoonist, screenwriter and director Nine Antico) and an actor, both in films (in 2021, for example, he appeared in *Tralala*, a 'musical' of sorts by French directors Arnaud and Jean-Marie Larrieu, whose latest film *Le Roman de Jim* (2024) also features Belin; in 2023, he played a part in *L'Amour et les forêts*, French actor, screenwriter and director Valérie Donzelli's film adaptation of French author Éric Reinhardt's 2014 homonymous novel) and on stage. In 2018, he even played a part in *Calamity / Billy*, an opera staged by Jean Lacornerie (music by Gavin Bryars and les Percussions Claviers de Lyon, with which Belin subsequently released an album entitled *Concert at Saint-Quentin*).

> tied to the hierarchy of an authentic, "original" and a "secondary" translation meant merely to mirror the source. Scholars became more interested in examining translation's own productive and transformative potential, both in literary art and in what we call "real life." As translation studies turned in this "performative" direction, it often engaged with distinctly theatrical metaphors that heighten awareness of the interpretive act of translation, its *citational* quality. (Bermann 2014: 288; my emphasis)

Again, although some readers may find this metaphorical likening of texts to theatrical plays or musical scores somewhat perplexing, the shift in translation studies towards performative approaches at least draws their attention to the act of translation's interpretive quality. In other words, these approaches dismantle the twofold illusion that translators' voices do not mix with those of the source authors they translate and, therefore, that a 'secondary' translation can simply mirror an authentic original. As we will see, the citational nature of language makes it impossible to iterate a source text, notably through translation, without altering it.

2 Discursive Events, Iterability and the Theory of the Performative

This crucial citationality of language is, in fact, of paramount importance in Jacques Derrida's work, where the concept of iterability is discussed at length and contributes to a more thorough understanding of the performative. In *Limited Inc*, a book gathering a set of texts that are representative of Derrida's engagement with the theory of the performative, speech acts or discursive events (cf. Derrida 1988: 39),[2] the

2 Next to a foreword by editor Gerald Graff (pp. vii–viii), this book includes an essay by Jacques Derrida entitled "Signature Event Context" (pp. 1-23), Graff's summary (pp. 25–27) of "Reiterating the

French philosopher "seeks to discover what an event […] might be" (Derrida 1988: 37) in the discursive field and gestures towards "a differential typology of forms of iteration"—one that would "be dealing with different kinds of marks or chains of iterable marks and not with an opposition between citational utterances, on the one hand, and singular and original event-occurrences, on the other" (Derrida 1988: 18, 99). As will be explained below, a song, for instance, may initially appear as a pure and unique discursive event. However, *as a result of* this song's inherently citational or repeatable character, only its individual performances (including those of the song's translation[s]) will achieve the status of actual (or eventual—cf. section 5) occurrences, hence Derrida's refusal to strictly oppose "citational utterances" from "singular [i.e. performed on a given date and localisable stage] and original event-occurrences." Along similar lines, one of the leading experts on song translation, Peter Low, argues that a song cannot be tied to a specific perfomer, let alone reduced to a given performance: "many people associate a song with a particular performer – often a singer-songwriter – […yet…] it has a notional existence independent of any individual performance or recording" (Low 2017: 7) and can "be 'covered' several times, that is, re-recorded by another artist

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Differences" (American philosopher John R. Searle's reply to Derrida's article), Derrida's rejoinder (pp. 29–110) to Searle (under the title "Limited inc a b c…"), as well as an afterword by Derrida titled "Toward an Ethic of Discussion" (pp. 111–160). Derrida's texts were respectively penned in 1972 (French version published by Les Éditions de Minuit, in the wake of a 1971 lecture entitled "Signature, événement, contexte" and delivered in Montreal at the Congrès international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française), 1977 and 1988, and translated by Samuel Weber in 1977 (together with Jeffrey Mehlman for *Glyph* 1), 1977 (*Glyph* 2) and 1988 (Northwestern University Press).

with modifications to the music and sometimes the words" (Low 2017: 9).

In the aforementioned seminal article, Derrida also questions the purity, or "pure reproducibility" (Derrida 1988, 20), of discursive events, or performatives – a performative being defined as "a 'communication' which is not limited strictly to the transference of a semantic content that is already constituted and dominated by an orientation toward truth" (Derrida 1988: 13–14), by virtue of "a structural characteristic of every mark" he calls "iterability" (Derrida 1988: 15). While referring to the repeatability of linguistic elements (see Derrida 1988: 25, 46) i.e. the *possibility* of their being repeated, such iterability, which is viewed as being "indispensable to the functioning of all language, written or spoken (in the standard sense), and […] of that of every mark" (Derrida 1988: 53), is more specifically characterised—as indicated by the prefix *iter*, which "probably comes from *itera*, *other* in Sanskrit"—by what Derrida describes as a "logic that ties repetition to alterity" (Derrida 1988: 7, 62), namely sameness to difference:

> [I]terability supposes […] that the identity of the *selfsame* be repeatable and identifiable *in*, *through* and even *in view of* its alteration. For the structure of iteration – this is another of its decisive traits – implies *both* identity *and* difference. Iteration in its purest form – and it is always impure – contains *in itself* the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as an iteration. The iterability of an element divides its own identity a priori […]. (Derrida 1988: 53)

As this final sentence suggests, this logic of iterability can be defined as "differential" [*différentielle*] (Derrida 1988: 53) or *différante* (to use Derrida's coinage, one that simultaneously echoes the terms "differing and deferring;" ibid.: 49, 56), insofar as it prevents any mark, linguistic sign or discursive event from ever "being fully present to itself in the actuality of its aim or of its meaning" (ibid.: 57):

> [T]he possibility of its being repeated *another* time […] breaches, divides, expropriates the "ideal" plenitude or self-presence of intention, of meaning (to say) and, a fortiori, of all adequation between meaning and saying. Iterability alters, contaminating parasitically what it identifies and enables to repeat "itself". (Derrida 1988: 61–62)

This utter impossibility of self-presence is "the *stigmè* of every mark, already split" (Derrida 1988: 49). Derrida's groundbreaking concept of *différance* thus posits "spacing as a disruption of presence in a mark" (ibid.: 19), which, as a consequence, is "neither present nor absent" (ibid.: 53) in discourse. This is why Derrida endeavours to question—as previously submitted—the purity of discursive events: since "iterability […] can only be what it is in the *impurity* of its self-identity (repetition altering and alteration identifying)" (ibid.: 65), this supposed "purity [of discursive events] does not emerge *in opposition to* citationality or iterability, but in opposition to other kinds of iteration within a general iterability which constitutes a violation of the allegedly rigorous purity of every event in discourse or every *speech act*" (ibid.: 59). He thus argues that "a successful performative is necessarily an 'impure' performative" (ibid.: 17, 90), one that "needs to repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance […] that is identifiable as *conforming* with an iterable model" (ibid.: 18, 99). At the same time, Derrida makes an essential distinction between two pairs of related terms. On the one hand, he distinguishes between *iterability* (that "can be recognized even in a mark which *in fact* seems to have occurred only once [… but] is in itself divided or multiplied in advance by its structure of repeatability;" ibid.: 48) and *iteration* (namely the actual occurrence of an event); on the other hand, between *possibility* (that is the "fact that performatives can always be cited;" ibid.: 86–87) and *eventuality* (or "the fact that such possible events […] do indeed happen, occur;" ibid.: 87; "the *fact* or *facts* that transform [… an] ever-present possibility into an event, making the possible come to

pass;" ibid.: 88). I will return to these differences when I discuss the status of songs as intrinsically iterable events and their iterations in the form of actual performances or eventual occurrences.

The aforementioned considerations also account for the fact that Derrida seeks to challenge the possibility of equivalence in translation. Indeed, what Derrida helps us understand in the context of translation is that because of the "distance, divergence, delay, [or] deferral" (Derrida 1988: 7) entailed by *différance*, "no single word […] can by itself ever translate another word perfectly" (ibid.: 52). If a source text looks forwards to, and enables its translatability, it presumably calls for a translation that, as a form of iteration, will certainly alter it when it passes into another language: every mark being linguistically divided, translation will retain the selfsame at the level of meaning—and call that retention 'fidelity in translation'—while preventing source texts from fetishising their identity as source texts.

Iterability, or the "reusability of speech acts," as Douglas Robinson terms it (2003/2014: 61), is, above all, a phenomenon that occurs over the course of time and should thus be approached diachronically. Building (rather freely) on Derrida's theory, Robinson remarks in this regard that "iterability is most importantly a historical process" (ibid.: 68), which ties in with the performative:

> Iterability is repeatability. Iterability is the repeat-performability of all speech. It is the quality of our speech acts that comes from having learned them through other people, from other speech acts – by learning to emulate what we have seen other people do. [… It is] the quality every word we utter has of being saturated with every dialogue it has been used in. (Robinson 2003/2014: 63)

Although Derrida and Robinson respectively appear to insist on written communication and speech ("A *writing* that is not

structurally readable – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee would not be *writing*," the former states in "Signature Event Context [an essay Derrida abbreviates as *Sec*]" (Derrida 1988: 7; my emphasis), Derrida explicitly objects, in his rejoinder to John R. Searle's reply to his own article, to "imputing to *Sec* the intention of distinguishing between writing and speech, or even of opposing the two" (ibid.: 46). He goes so far as to declare that the "question [of] determining what distinguishes 'written from spoken language'" is "disqualified by *Sec*" (ibid.: 47). Derrida writes: "The demonstration of *Sec* moves in an area where the distinction between writing and speech loses all pertinence and where 'every mark, including those which are oral,' can be seen as 'a grapheme in general' (*Sec*, p. 10)" (ibid.: 46–47). Indeed, as Derrida proceeds to explain, "from the standpoint of iterability, there is no difference: precisely the thesis of *Sec*, if there is one" (ibid.: 46). Since iterability refers to the *possibility* of repeating linguistic elements, the latter *can*, but need not be reiterated. As we will see, a song's lyrics are, however, very likely to be reiterated, be it through their oral (re)performances or through their translations, which may themselves be orally (re)performed.

In Robinson's perspective, which elaborates on Derrida's, each supposedly original text is thus nothing but "an iteration of other words, other speech acts. Every reading of it, every performance of it is another such iteration" (Robinson 2003/2014: 67). Yet, it is crucial to note that even though "all language use is the reperforming of past performances […], performances are always transformations, never pure reproductions" (ibid.: 66). In his detailed discussion of Derrida's work, Robinson points out the following:

> In a 1971 article[3] on Austin and related topics entitled "Signature Event Context," Jacques Derrida argued that (to put it simply) an utterance must be performable, and thus distortable, in order to be spoken after all. This performability he called "iterability," the capacity to be misused, misperformed, changed or twisted in some way. (Robinson 2003/2014: 19)

It is, therefore, "through its iterability, its capacity for being repeated in new contexts," which tends to transform it, that "language becomes usable, speakable, writeable, performable" (Robinson 2003/2014: 20). Along the same lines, Bermann highlights the performative's bond with both iterability and the citationality of language, and moreover the production of linguistic difference and novelty: she submits that "Derrida relates the performative not only to this ongoing citational quality, but also to inauguration, the making of something new" (Bermann 2014: 289). As Bermann adds, this "spectacular citationality" not only induces the mere reproduction of language sameness, but also "offers ongoing opportunities for productive interpretations" and "linguistic innovation" (ibid.: 290). Such opportunities include opportunities for translation, which is the matter I will return to below.[4]

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3 Robinson is probably referring here to Derrida's 1971 conference lecture rather than to the actual article published in 1972 by Les Éditions de Minuit—see Footnote 2.

4 As Derrida argues, "'iterability'can define citationality *in its possibility*" (Derrida 1988: 100), which is indeed spectacular insofar as every linguistic element can, potentially, be endlessly iterated or cited. The full scope of this reflection and its implications (not least for translation studies) nevertheless goes beyond the bounds of this essay, which will attempt to explore how iterability can be a way of celebrating translation as a productive and innovating practice but will not focus on questions of copyright or on the desire of the source text *not* to be re-made or innovated.

3 On Bob Dylan's "Ain't Talkin'"

3.1 Bob Dylan's Nobel Lecture: On Reiterating Archetypal Songs and Books

When the recipient of the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature was announced, *The New York Times* published an article that addressed Dylan's fascinating propensity for "sopping up influences like a sponge." From a very young age, Dylan indeed demonstrated an ability not only "to impregnate himself with all the musical styles that preceded him, assume their ownership, and transform them successfully into new creations" (Dehout 2019: 56), but also to achieve a more complex synthesis and confer a "more profound meaning" (ibid.: 57) on his songs by injecting literary (and more particularly poetic) influences into them. Here, the notion of novelty should thus not be understood as a form of 'pure invention' but clearly stems, instead, from a creative practice of citationality involving a reliance on intertextuality.

Interestingly, Dylan's June 2017 Nobel Lecture offers what he styled a "roundabout" (Dylan 2017: n.p.) reflection on what Robinson has termed "the mutability of language in repetition [or] difference in the repetition of the same" (2003/2014: 63), one that implicitly ponders the concept of iterability and the ways in which "a voice is transformed in and through a series of iterations" (ibid.: 20). In his Lecture, Dylan explains "how [his] songs relat[e] to literature" (Dylan 2017: n.p), and in doing so, he explores his key aesthetic influences, be they musical or literary, often insisting on their archetypal or mythical quality. Indeed, all the artists and works he mentions have in common that they are one of a kind inasmuch as they seem to carry with them a multitude of previous voices, which they both repeat and transmute. Dylan

further expounds how, through a similar citational process, he in turn kept circulating the archetypal and mythical voices that preceded him by *creatively* appropriating them.

For instance, Dylan opens his Lecture by recounting "the dawning of it all" (Dylan 2017: n.p.), namely how the one time he saw Buddy Holly on stage when he was eighteen years old was decisive for his own calling as a musician. Despite his young age, Buddy Holly (who passed away shortly afterwards) seemed to embody, in Dylan's eyes, this striking mixture of permanence and novelty that left an indelible mark on him, and Dylan notes, in retrospect, how iterating and blending archetypal genres enabled Buddy Holly to create something new:

> From the moment I first heard him, I felt akin. I felt related, like he was an older brother. I even thought I resembled him. Buddy played the music that I loved – the music I grew up on: country western, rock 'n' roll, and rhythm and blues. Three separated strands of music that he intertwined and infused into one genre. One brand. […] And he sang great – sang in more than a few voices. He was the archetype. […] He looked older than twenty-two. Something about him seemed permanent, and he filled me with conviction. Then, out of the blue, the most uncanny thing happened. He looked me straight dead in the eye, and he transmitted something. (Dylan 2017: n.p.)

A few days after Buddy Holly's mortal plane crash, Dylan received a record by Leadbelly that "changed [his] life there and then," as if "somebody laid hands on [him]," and started listening to other artists on Leadbelly's label, such as "Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, the New Lost City Ramblers, Jean Ritchie, [and] string bands," so much so that—at least momentarily—"[he] forgot about the music [he]'d grown up with." Compared to popular hits of the day, folk songs have a thickness and depth that "makes them more vibrant and truthful to life," and arguably comes from the repetition of previous voices, as the following quotation makes clear: "They

were different than the radio songs that I'd been listening to all along. […] With radio songs, a performer might get a hit with a roll of the dice or a fall of the cards, but that didn't matter in the folk world. Everything was a hit" (Dylan 2017: n.p.). North American old-time music is an umbrella term designating these songs, which chiefly find their roots in English, Scottish and Irish folk tunes, but may also have African origins. The archetypality of their endlessly reiterated lyrics, which shaped Dylan's imagination—let us note in passing that his first album, *Bob Dylan* (1962), is mostly made up of folk and blues covers (except for two original songs, "Talkin' New York" and "Song to Woody," whose lyrics tellingly pay homage to Woody Guthrie, "Cisco and Sonny and Leadbelly / An' to all the good people that traveled with you")—, is also explicitly pointed to in a paragraph that both thematises and textualises it:

> You know what it's all about. Takin' the pistol out and puttin' it back in your pocket. Whippin' your way through traffic, talkin' in the dark. You know that Stagger Lee was a bad man and that Frankie was a good girl. […] You've seen the lusty Lord Donald stick a knife in his wife, and a lot of your comrades have been wrapped in white linen. (Dylan 2017: n.p.)

From the quotation's opening sentence, Dylan seems intent not only on thematically evoking some of the archetypal characters that tend to recur in folk songs, such as Stagger Lee,[5] but also on producing feelings of déjà-vu that will remind the readers that they have seen or heard it all before. Dylan, who identifies in his young self "a natural feeling for the ancient ballads and country blues" (Dylan 2017: n.p.), unambiguously proceeds to explain how he worked hard towards making this

5 Other major contemporary songwriters and bands have spawned songs featuring one such bad man, for instance Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds on their 1996 album *Murder Ballads*, the second track of which is precisely titled "Stagger Lee."

ancient language (whose texture is made palpable in the previous quote) his own, both textually and musically, in a way that was in keeping with the *Zeitgeist*:

> By listening to all the early folk artists and singing the songs yourself, you pick up the vernacular. You internalize it. You sing it in the ragtime blues, work songs, Georgia sea shanties, Appalachian ballads and cowboy songs. […] None of it went over my head – the devices, the techniques, the secrets, the mysteries – and I knew all the deserted roads that it traveled on, too. I could make it all connect and *move with the current of the day*. When I started writing my own songs, the folk lingo was the only vocabulary that I knew and I used it. (Dylan 2017: n.p.; my emphasis)

Such internalisation of the folk rhetoric allows for a creative appropriation of all those sources, which—as will be shown below—are not always easily identifiable in the dense intertextual web of Dylan's songs and can thus be regarded as having been successfully turned into his own idiom.

As regards his literary influences, Dylan mentions various classics from the Western canon, such as Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*. These constituted, he says, a "typical grammar school reading that gave you a way of looking at life, an understanding of human nature, and a standard to measure things by" (Dylan 2017: n.p.). He then discusses three of these texts in more detail, namely Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Erich Maria Remarque's*All Quiet on the Western Front* and Homer's *The Odyssey*. In this context, he firmly emphasises the importance of ancestral themes (e.g. the existential quest for meaning, the loss of innocence, the violence, suffering and essential loneliness of mankind, the voyage home epitomising the journey through life, etc.) that these often tale-like, highly symbolic and thus deceptively simple novels contribute to perpetuating. Somewhat more

obliquely, he lays the emphasis on his own wish to take part in an iterative process that will allow him to reinvent and renew this legacy: "the themes from those books worked their way into many of my songs, either knowingly or unintentionally. I wanted to write songs unlike anything anybody ever heard, and those themes were fundamental" (ibid.). As was the case with folk songs, what Dylan seems to value is a brand of literature that, as it keeps circulating timeless characters, topics and stereotypes, succeeds in entering the realm of myth and allegory. Interestingly, Dylan refrains from mentioning the names of the major writers associated with these books, as if works mattered more than their authors (or even authorship itself) and were part of a broader intertext in which each individual text only gains significance through a dialogue with other texts, and achieves originality despite lacking it at the outset. To some extent (and although a detailed exemplification of this phenomenon would exceed the bounds of this essay), his own text is a hybrid object that—as it did with folk song lyrics—not only thematises his interest in mythical and allegorical literature, but also textualises it, unlike more typically analytical Nobel Lectures.

In this Lecture, Dylan intriguingly concludes his discussion of *All Quiet on the Western Front* with a reference to a "Charlie Poole from North Carolina" who

> had a song […] called 'You Ain't Talkin' to Me,' and the lyrics go like this:
>
> I saw a sign in a window walking up town one day.
> Join the army, see the world is what it had to say.
> You'll see exciting places with a jolly crew,
> You'll meet interesting people, and learn to kill them too.
> Oh you ain't talkin' to me, you ain't talkin' to me.
> It may be crazy and all that, but I got good sense you see.
> You ain't talkin' to me, you ain't talkin' to me.

> Killin' with a gun don't sound like fun.
> You ain't talkin' to me. (Dylan 2017: n.p.)

In this song, whose title is partly echoed by Dylan's own "Ain't Talkin'," an I-persona's "good sense" induces them to turn down the insistent (and seemingly tempting) invitation to "join the army" extended by "a sign in a window." While, in "You Ain't Talkin' to Me" (for the full lyrics of Dylan's song, see section 4.2, table 1), the narrator's repetition of those words reflects their determination to ignore the war propaganda symbolised by the sign and, therefore, to avoid any confrontation with the war's brutality, the I-persona in "Ain't Talkin'" has gone almost silent, perhaps as a result of their inability to escape the violence of "this weary world of woe" (verse 2, l. 6) through which they "Ain't talkin', just walkin'" (v. 2, l. 5; v. 4, l. 14; v. 6, l. 15; v. 8, l. 30; v. 10, l. 38; v. 12, l. 46; v. 14, l. 54; v. 16, l. 62; v. 18, l. 70). As will be discussed below, Dylan's title and important lines in his lyrics are also inspired, even more clearly, by "Highway of Regret" (1959), a country song by bluegrass band The Stanley Brothers. The fact that the letter *-g* is informally dropped in the verb *talkin'* (as in some—though not all—the lyrics' *-ing* forms) and the use of the contracted auxiliary *ain't* in Dylan's title may also be seen as a nod to the folk world and its oral tradition into which Dylan may seek inscription through reiteration—I will return to this point.

3.2 Reiterations of Lyrics and Literary Texts in "Ain't Talkin'" and on *Modern Times*

Although the "mystic garden" the narrator walks out in in the song's opening and second-to-last verse (v. 1, l. 1; v. 17, l. 66), with its "cool crystal fountain" (v. 1, l. 3) and "hot summer lawn" (v. 17, l. 67), seems relatively unstained, a sense of

impending doom—suggested, from the outset, by "the *wounded* flowers [that] were dangling from the vine" (v. 1, l. 2, italics mine)—appears to permeate the "weary world of woe" (v. 2, l. 6) they are walking through, as if it had been affected by various forms of violence. The latter quotation echoes "The Wayfaring Stranger," a 19th-century American folk song "about a plaintive soul on the journey through life," whose lyrics were published (though maybe not for the first time) "in 1858 in Joseph Bever's *Christian Songster*, which was a collection of popular hymns and spiritual songs of the time" (Wikipedia, "The Wayfaring Stranger (song)"). In *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, David Warren Steel and Richard H. Hulan "suggest that the song was derived from the 1816 German language hymn, 'Ich bin ja nur ein Gast auf Erden' by Isaac Nisvander" (ibid.; cf. also Steel/Hulan 2010: 234). As is the case of many traditional folk pieces, numerous versions of this song (involving alternative titles, such as "Poor Wayfaring Stranger" or "I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger," and variants of the lyrics, which were often "linked to times of hardship and notable experiences in the singers' lives" (Wikipedia, "The Wayfaring Stranger (song)") have been performed and/or recorded over time by various artists and bands, including Burl Ives, Paul Robeson, Emmylou Harris, Johnny Cash, Jack White and Sixteen Horsepower. As previously indicated, Dylan's very title, as well as the most repeated motif in his lyrics, namely "Ain't talkin', just walkin' […] Heart burnin', still yearnin'," also take their cue from The Stanley Brothers' "Highway of Regret," as this 1959 country song's opening verse shows: "Ain't talking, just walking / Down that highway of regret / Heart's burning, still yearning / For the best girl this poor boy's ever met." The line "Hand me down my walkin' cane" (v. 10, l. 39) similarly hints at a homonymous minstrel song turned into a folk song, for which James A. Bland has been credited

(cf. Bland s.d.). A music critic aptly noted Dylan's magisterial ability to appropriate material in "Ain't Talkin'" and referred to this skill as

> one of Dylan's greatest strengths in the twilight years of his career, using these elements as building blocks for something completely new, in the same way that producers in the golden age of hip-hop constructed beats from familiar samples. "Ain't Talkin'," *Modern Times*' bone-chilling closer, swipes lines from the traditional "The Wayfaring Stranger" and The Stanley Brothers' "Highway of Regret," then flips the songs' sentiments on their head: It's not deliverance that Dylan's yearning for, but vengeance, vowing to slit his enemies' throats in their beds. He's sung about the world's end before, but on "Ain't Talkin'," Dylan himself sounds apocalyptic, like he's the last thing his wrongdoers will see before they die. (Consequence Online Magazine 2021: n.p.)

By the same token, Dylan's song deliberately iterates a literary classic, in a more direct way than it does *Moby Dick*, *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *The Odyssey*. Richard F. Thomas, a Professor at Harvard University, has indeed traced several lines to the ancient Roman poet Ovid.[6] In a 2017 interview, he has observed that the song's closing line "In the last outback, at the world's end" (v. 18, l. 73) is a

> direct quote from Peter Green's Penguin translation of Ovid's exile poetry [Ex Ponto 2.7.66]. In case you think this is accidental, the same song has three or four other Ovidian lines or significant phrases, including: "Every nook and cranny/corner has its tears" [(v. 15, l. 59)…,] "loyal and […] much-loved companions" [(v. 11, l. 42)… and] "make the most of one last extra hour" [(v. 9, l. 36)], all on one song from *Tristia* 1.3 [24, 65, 68], Ovid's night of exile poem. (Thomas 2017: n.p.)

6 These intertextual references to Ovid's work did not appear, however, on an earlier take of "Ain't Talkin'" from the *Modern Times* recording sessions, which featured on the 2008 Dylan compilation *The Bootleg Series Vol. 8 – Tell Tale Signs: Rare and Unreleased 1989–2006*.

On *Modern Times* only, three other songs quote Ovidian texts almost exactly: in "Workingman's Blues#2," "The Levee's Gonna Break" and "Spirit on the Water," the lines "no one can claim that I ever took up arms against you," "Some people got barely enough skin to cover their bones" and "I cannot believe these things could fade from your mind" respectively echo Ovid's "No one can ever claim / That I took up arms against you" (*Tristia*, Book 2, l. 51–53), "there's barely enough skin to cover my bones" (*Tristia*, Book 4, Section 7, l. 51) and "Can't believe these things would ever fade from your mind" (*Black Sea Letters*, Book 2, Section 4, l. 24) (cf. Wikipedia, "*Modern Times* (Bob Dylan album)").

3.3 Reading (without overinterpreting) "Ain't Talkin'"

Like the song's Ovidian conclusion and its apocalyptic undertones, other lines convey a sense of threat and danger. Even in the rather peaceful mystic garden, the I-persona feels "hit […] from behind" (v. 1, l. 4) by an unidentified assailant. This attacker, who is occasionally addressed in the second person, is so menacing that the unnamed narrator seems ready to "burn that bridge before you can cross" (v. 4, l. 5) and even to go so far as to slay them, possibly "to avenge [their] father's death" (v. 9, l l. 37) or the "dead man" whose "shield" they are "carryin'" (v. 14, l. 55), as the following verse suggests:

> Now I'm all worn down by weeping
> My eyes are filled with tears, my lips are dry
> If I catch my opponents ever sleeping
> I'll just slaughter them where they lie (v. 5, l. 18–21)

While the narrator's personal grief can hardly be denied and may result from the individual sacrifices their life as a (former?) warrior or at least as a current wanderer may have prompted them to make (in v. 12, l. 49, for instance, they are "thinkin'

'bout that gal [they] left behind"), the enemy in question may equally be viewed as the personification of larger, perhaps historical, malevolent forces. For example, the "plague" (v. 6, l. 25) with which the cities the narrator is walking through are stricken may be a metaphorical way of designating capitalism, which "crush[es]" human beings "with wealth and power" (v. 9, l. 34) in a world where "speculation" prevails over "contemplation" (v. 7, l. 26 and 28). Whatever its source, the pain that is visible everywhere is both very real and apparently boundless, as the narrator observes:

> The sufferin' is unending
> Every nook and corner has its tears
> I'm not playing, I'm not pretending
> I'm not nursing any superfluous fears (v. 15, l. 58–61)

As a possible result of such intense and ubiquitous suffering, the spaces the narrator is silently wandering through are almost entirely devoid of human presence. In the second-to-last verse, a lady is addressed—"Excuse me, ma'am, I beg your pardon" (v. 17, l. 68)—but there appears to be "no one" to engage in dialogue, as if even "the gardener" (v. 17, l. 69) had deserted the seemingly preserved realm of the mystic garden. In this bleak, life-depleted world, a glimmer of hope nevertheless seems to persist for the I-persona thanks to both the presence-in-absence of "much-loved companions" (v. 11, l. 42) and the idiosyncratic, probably non-dogmatic, brand of faith they are driven by, as if they were sustained by a form of light that could never go out:

> I practice a faith that's been long abandoned
> Ain't no altars on this long and lonesome road (v. 11, l. 44–45)
> […]
> The fire gone out but the light is never dyin'
> Who says I can't get heavenly aid? (v. 13, l. 52–53)

This faintly optimistic note is borne out by the fact that Dylan ends his song—performed in A minor throughout—with an A-major chord.

While this reading of "Ain't Talkin'" may be deemed vague or slightly abstract, it is not unlikely that Dylan himself might reject more concrete or definite interpretations. In the chapter of his recent *Philosophy of Modern Song* dedicated to Uncle Dave Macon's "Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy" (1924) (a song that may have been an old minstrel tune and "is all about the repetition – all the time, time, time, home, home, home," Dylan 2022: 241), he makes the tongue-in-cheek observation that "[s]ometimes people ask songwriters what a song means, not realizing if they had more words to explain it they would've used them in the song" (ibid.). In the opening paragraph of his Nobel Lecture's concluding part, he similarly––and somewhat provocatively—challenges the need to interpret musical or literary artworks at all costs (as if the aesthetic emotions they spark were not self-sufficient) and condemns any vain obsession with rigid meaning:

> So what does it all mean? Myself and a lot of other songwriters have been influenced by these very same themes. And they can mean a lot of different things. If a song moves you, that's all that's important. I don't have to know what a song means. I've written all kinds of things into my songs. And I'm not going to worry about it – what it all means. When Melville put all his old testament, biblical references, scientific theories, Protestant doctrines, and all that knowledge of the sea and sailing ships and whales into one story, I don't think he would have worried about it either – what it all means. (Dylan 2017: n.p.)

Significantly, Dylan concludes his Lecture with a crucial reminder, which aims to stress the distinction between songs and literature (with the exception of plays):

> songs are unlike literature. They're meant to be sung, not read. The words in Shakespeare's plays were meant to be acted on the stage. Just

> as lyrics in songs are meant to be sung, not read on a page. (Dylan 2017: n.p.)

4 Bertrand Belin's Electric and Acoustic Reiterations of Other Artists' Works

"Le Feu au cœur," Bertrand Belin's cover of "Ain't Talkin'," implicitly aligns itself with both Dylan's critique of 'narrative rentability' and his concern with 'singability' (cf. section 4.2). This cover is far from being a one shot for Belin: over the years, and singularly since the release of his first (eponymous) solo album (*Bertrand Belin* (2005), prior to which he used to play with various bands, such as Stompin' Crawfish or Sons of the Desert, and in the wake of which he published another six albums, i.e. *La Perdue* (2007), *Hypernuit* (2010), *Parcs* (2013), *Cap Waller* (2015), *Persona* (2019) and *Tambour Vision* (2022), as well as various books, including *Sorties de route* (2011), *Requin* (2015), *Littoral* (2016), *Grands carnivores* (2019) and *Vrac* (2020)), he has regularly covered French- and English-speaking fellow artists, either by himself (i.e. with an acoustic or electric guitar), with his own band, or in the form of featurings (like the recent "In Heaven"—from David Lynch's *Eraserhead*'s soundtrack (1977)—on Swiss trumpet player Erik Truffaz's 2023 album *Rollin'*) or duets with other performers. His electric covers of French-speaking singers comprise "Ô Marie" (1989) by Daniel Lanois (which he also performed acoustically, either solo or as a duet with Arthur Teboul from French band Feu! Chatterton), "J'aime regarder les filles" (1981) by Patrick Coutin, "Quand t'es dans le désert" (1979) by Jean-Patrick Capdevielle (sung as a duet with Axel Bauer and aired in the French TV live music show *Taratata*, France 2, 25 March 2022), "La Ballade de Jim" (1986) by Alain Souchon (played in the wings of the same live show), "Épaule Tattoo" (1986) by

(and with) Étienne Daho (*Taratata*, 29 September 2023), "Bijou, bijou" (1979) and "C'est comment qu'on freine" (1982) by Alain Bashung (the former was performed for the programme *Monte Le Son* on 16 March 2016 while the latter was broadcast in a filmed tribute—entitled *Immortel Bashung*, France 5, 7 March 2020—to this respected French singer who passed away on 14 March 2009 and influenced many French musicians, including Belin),[7] "Ah que la vie est belle" (1997) by Brigitte Fontaine ("Fucking Night" tribute, Printemps de Bourges, 20 April 2022) and "Lumières" (1984) by Gérard Manset (which was performed live on 3 July 2020 in Parisian venue Le Centquatre, as a duet with Dominique A, and recorded by French radio channel France Inter; this gig also allowed both to revisit songs taken from each other's repertoires, namely Dominique A's "Je suis une ville" (1999), "Le Bruit blanc de l'été" (2009), "Corps de ferme à l'abandon" (2018) and "Pour la peau" (2001) and Belin's "Hypernuit," "Sur le cul," "Rien à la ville" and "Grand duc").

As for his acoustic covers, they include "Salomé" by Jean-Patrick Capdevielle (aired on France 3 Bretagne, 30 December 2023, in Gaëtan Roussel's TV programme *Abers Road*, where it was performed as a duet with Louise Attaque's frontman), "Pour moi la vie va commencer" by Johnny Hallyday (France Inter, 2022), as well as three unreleased songs by French singer-songwriter Georges Brassens, titled "Je me rappelle," "Quand tu m'auras quitté" and "Son corps au diable." During the COVID-19 pandemic and, more specifically, during the first lockdown (which started in March 2020), Belin also performed and self-recorded various acoustic covers (in both English and French) from his Parisian home, which he then

7 Together with French singer Bénabar, Belin also covered "Osez Joséphine" by Bashung (*Taratata*, 9 April 2005).

posted on his social media (i.e. Facebook and Instagram) accounts. In these unprecedented circumstances, he covered not only "La Limonade" (1999) by Dick Annegarn (Facebook and Instagram, 21 March 2020) and "La Tige d'or" (2009) by Jean-Louis Murat (Facebook and Instagram, 24 March 2020), but also "High on a Rocky Ledge" (1978) by Moondog[8] (Facebook and Instagram, 30 March 2020), "Norman Fucking Rockwell" (2019) by Lana Del Rey[9] (Facebook, 23 April 2020; Instagram, 24 April 2020) and "Rock Bottom Riser" by Smog (as part of a streaming session on Annie O's live music channel on Instagram [@annieomusiclive], also posted on Facebook on 24 April 2020). Next to Bill Callahan, whose "art of silence" and singular writing Belin has long admired (cf. Facebook post, 24 April 2020), David Bowie ranks among the Anglophone artists he covered prior to the initial lockdown—the song "Where Are We Now?" (2013) in particular (an acoustic rendition of which is available on YouTube). Prior to the pandemic, Belin had also recorded "Leaving the Table" for *Le Pont des Artistes* (#19), together with artists who had been invited to pay their respects to Leonard Cohen by performing songs from the latter's final album *You Want it Darker* (2016). More recently, in 2021, a version of Leonard Cohen's

8 Subsequently (25 May 2024, Musée Louvre-Lens), Belin coordinated "Looking for *H'art Songs*," a tribute to Moondog which consisted in performing the latter's entire eponymous album (including "High on a Rocky Ledge"), using some of his original instruments (like the trimba he created).

9 For the France Inter *Music & Co* podcast series, Belin also performed "Video Games" (27 May 2024) by Lana Del Rey, as well as similarly acoustic renditions of "L'Ennemi dans la glace" (28 May 2024) by Alain Chamfort, "All by Myself" (29 May 2024) by Eric Carmen (famously covered by Céline Dion), country classic "Jolene" (30 May 2024) by Dolly Parton (notably covered by The White Stripes) and "Le Grand Sommeil" (31 May 2024) by Étienne Daho.

"Avalanche," featuring Belin and French singer-songwriter H-Burns (also known as Renaud Brustlein) was released on the latter's *Burns on the Wire* (at least one live version of the song, recorded at the Trianon in Paris, can be found on YouTube). As the title, which puns on that of one of Cohen's best-known songs ("Bird on the Wire," 1969), indicates, this record is a tribute to the Canadian icon's early work, also involving the likes of Pomme, Lou Doillon and Kevin Morby.

4.1 Performing Translation: Bertrand Belin's "Le Feu au cœur" as a Transformative French Iteration of "Ain't Talkin'"

While Jean-Louis Murat had written and recorded his own Francophone version of Cohen's classic, under the title "Avalanche IV," on the 1991 tribute album *I'm Your Fan: The Songs of Leonard Cohen* (produced by French magazine *Les Inrockuptibles* and echoing, again, one of Cohen's songs, "I'm Your Man," 1988), Bertrand Belin's rendition of "Avalanche"––just as his aforementioned covers of Anglophone artists—is performed in the English language. In this sense, "Le Feu au cœur" is already quite unique insofar as it is, to this day, the sole Anglophone song he chose to cover in the French language.[10] If only for this reason, the song arguably occupies a remarkable position in Belin's repertoire, too. Here is what he had to say about this cover in the Facebook post that complemented Simon Vanrie's live session (recorded at Bozar's Henry Le Bœuf room in Brussels):

10 In English, this song was covered by a couple of artists as well, like Julie Felix (on her 2008 album *Highway of Diamonds*) and Bettye LaVette (on her 2018 album *Things Have Changed*).

> J'habitais à Porto lorsque l'album *Modern Times* de Bob Dylan est sorti. Il est vite devenu une sorte de compagnon qui m'aidait à supporter la solitude dans laquelle je m'étais moi-même plongé, venu chercher les conditions nécessaires à l'écriture de mon premier livre *Sorties de route*. La chanson « Ain't Talkin' » en particulier me transportait par la grâce et la profondeur obscure de son propos. Une épique clameur du monde. Une chanson-monde. C'est à l'invitation de Syd Matters à chanter au concert de la Philharmonie de Paris à l'occasion de l'expo Dylan que j'ai eu l'idée de cette adaptation. Depuis, je n'ai cessé de songer à l'enregistrer. C'est chose faite. (Belin, *Facebook*, 5 February 2020)

Although the terms 'translating' and 'translation' have been generically applied to Belin's French cover of Dylan, the previous quotation makes it quite clear that Belin himself conceives "Le Feu au cœur" as an 'adaptation', an operation which Vinay and Darbelnet define as being poised on the outer edge of translation insofar as it involves a measure of re-creation in the target text (cf. Vinay/Darbelnet 1958/1977: 52). This creative iteration, which first took place when Belin was invited to sing his version of "Ain't Talkin"' on the specific occasion of a Parisian exhibition around Dylan's work, then took the form of an even more concrete event-occurrence, namely an actual recording (for the full lyrics of Belin's song, see section 4.2, table 2). Importantly, in this excerpt, Belin foregrounds aspects of the song that—as we have seen—also matter much to Dylan himself, such as its 'obscurity' and related 'depth', which the former allows himself to be carried away by instead of attempting to unravel them. Moreover, he pinpoints the 'epic' quality of the song, whose lyrics echo the 'clamour of the world' or even microcosmically encapsulate a world—as the phrase "chanson-monde" suggests—through which a heroic figure moves, as was the case in traditional epic poems. Unsurprisingly, "Le Feu au cœur" can then be seen as a continuation of "Ain't Talkin"' as it seeks, on the whole, to preserve the song's mystery and poetic atmosphere, especially

its somber and enigmatic tonalities. In the Facebook post that accompanied his acoustic cover of Daniel Lanois's "Ô Marie," Belin further verbalised—like Dylan before him—a taste for the ageless themes and 'ancestral pulse' that characterise folk songs, which also go hand in glove with an 'unknown' realm conjured up by this song's rhetoric and its obscure 'referents':

> Ô Marie, de Daniel Lanois, je la chante depuis de nombreuses années. J'aime ce qu'elle réveille en moi d'étranges réminiscences. Travail rude, exil, espoirs éternels de lendemains meilleurs, une part d'inconnu aussi, liée à un vocabulaire aux référents obscurs ; et sa forme que caractérise une pulsation ancestrale. (Belin, *Facebook*, 4 May 2020)

In this perspective, translators are iterators, insofar as "they reiterate a text written in one language in another" (Robinson 2003/2014: 66) but their iterations also performatively contribute to transforming the voices they translate and investing them with new meanings. By contrast, when Belin performs the act of translating "Ain't Talkin'," he achieves linguistic innovation, without compromising a relative degree of stability, by preserving Dylan's overall *voice* (hence blatant thematic similarities between the two songs), while entirely appropriating his *words*. As he does so, he radically departs from word-for-word translation—a move that might be expected from someone adapting lyrics meant to be sung in a different language (see section 4.2 for a more extensive discussion on the notion of 'singability')—and gestures towards more dynamic forms of equivalence, thus producing a uniquely personal text. As will be detailed in the next section, the need to make "Le Feu au cœur" singable in French obviously shapes Belin's formal treatment of Dylan's literary and musical citations, as well as his rhyme schemes. Even at the thematic level, various shifts in perspective, such as a different approach to spirituality or divergences regarding the

chosen musical register, are noticeable beyond the above-mentioned similarities.

In what follows, I will endeavour to put forward some of the main differences in point of view, as well as their chief implications in terms of language use. The shift in perspective is perceptible as early as the title (and not simply because it transposes, quite typically, English verb forms into French substantives): while Dylan's "Ain't Talkin'" drew attention to his I-persona's silence when walking, Belin's "Le Feu au cœur" lays the emphasis, from the outset, on the inner flame that guides the walker—the phrase, which may mirror the source song narrator's ongoing yearning, explicitly recalls Dylan's "Heart burnin'" and is also repeated nine times in the lyrics (v. 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 and 18), just like the motto "Je me tais, j'avance" (a more literal rendition of "Ain't Talkin', just walkin'"). Although Belin's phrase emerges as an even more powerful leitmotif in the French version as a result of its strategic use as a title, it should nevertheless be remarked that the translation "Le Feu au cœur" somehow fuses the two distinct English units "heart burnin'" and "still yearnin'," which might suggest that the target song narrator's yearning is more indefinite and, perhaps, distinct from religious faith (cf. *infra*).

Dylan's focus is shifted in other ways, too. The sense of doom that was apparent from Dylan's first verse onwards is strengthened, in Belin's version, by the removal of religious references that had the potential to comfort the traveller: for instance, the "mystic garden" that was featured in Dylan's opening line and second-to-last verse is simply translated into "ce jardin" (v. 1, l. 1; v. 17, l. 65) by Belin. Some of these references are nonetheless retained: in the third verse, where a (supposedly) benevolent mother is addressed by the narrator in the hope of being prayed for, it is a matter of invoking a

biblical precept, consisting in "a-tryin' to love [one's] neighbor and do good unto others" (v. 3, l. 12), but the difficulty for any human being to remain morally upright in life is simultaneously emphasised, since "in the human heart an *evil spirit* can dwell" (v. 3, l. 11; my emphasis). As Belin puts it in an even more metaphorical way: "Il faut aimer son prochain mais tu vois comme / Un *oiseau noir* niche au cœur de l'homme" (v. 3, l. 11–12; my emphasis). Later on, the comforting prospect of faith and the refuge it might provide the believer also appear to recede into the background, as if no brand of faith—let alone a religious or dogmatic one—could ever satisfy the narrator's ongoing spiritual hunger. In this context, Dylan's lines "I practice a faith that's long been abandoned / Ain't no altars on this long and lonesome road" (v. 11, l. 44–45) are more neutrally translated into "il n'y a pas ici de chapelles / Pour déposer le fardeau de nos âmes" (v. 11, l. 43–44). Indeed, "d'aucuns disent que le ciel est vide" (v. 13, l. 52).

Predictably, the echoes of (untranslated) folk songs are collapsed into Belin's lyrics: as we have seen, the first line Dylan quoted from The Stanley Brothers, the first half of which gave "Ain't Talkin'" its title, is—despite its repetition in the lyrics—given less prominence and translated more literally by Belin, who, in parallel, makes the second cited line fully his own and gives it pride of place in the French title. The lines referring to "The Wayfaring Stranger"'s "weary world of woe" (v. 2, l. 6) and to "Hand Me Down My Walking Cane" (v. 10, l. 39) are respectively turned into a metaphor involving a "jardin noir de bleu" (v. 2, l. 6) and into a noun- (rather than verb-)based phrase, "Le pas mal assuré dans la pente" (v. 10, l. 38), which underscores the wanderer's difficulty in moving forward (or even downward). The song's Ovidian lines are not immediately recognisable either: again, Belin chooses to appropriate them instead of using official translations of *Tristia*.

In this way, "I'll make the most of one last extra hour" (v. 9, l. 36), "All my loyal and much-loved companions" (v. 11, l. 42), "Every nook and corner has its tears" (v. 15, l. 59) and the final line "In the last outback at the world's end" (v. 18, l. 73) respectively became "Quant à moi, au bout je suis" (which rhymes with the following "Je veux venger mon père à tout prix" but semantically diverges from the English line), "Mes compagnons de route, mes sœurs, elles" (which authoritatively ascribes a female gender to the wanderer's companions, thus allowing this line to rhyme with the word "chapelles" in l. 43), "Partout de quoi pleurer, partout" and "Au bout du bout, dans le haut du paysage." These translational choices differ from an official French version of the text in which these lines were rendered as "L'heure qui me reste est une heure de gloire," "vous que j'aimai comme des frères" and "De quelque côté qu'on tournât les yeux, on ne voyait que des gens éplorés et sanglotants" (cf. Ovid s.d.). Understandably, Belin may have found the register of these (and similar 'poetic') translations too solemn and may have attempted to aim for less formality (for example by avoiding past subjunctive forms like *tournât*). Additionally, 'singability' required more concision in these (and other) cases.

Another notable difference between the two songs has to do with Belin's decision, in verse 3, to clarify the notion of at least one of the dangers facing the narrator. Whereas Dylan rather vaguely alluded to the world of "speculation" (l. 26), Belin relies on a metaphor that more explicitly identifies capitalism as a threat to human beings, whose potential responsibility in their own downfall is suggested by the use of the second-person pronouns and determiner *te*, *toi-même*, *tu* and *ta* (as opposed to Dylan's more passive third-person *they*):

> Le *loup capital* veut ta peau
> Le monde cupide veut ta peau

Il *te* fera lâcher tôt la lutte
Toi-même tu guideras *ta* chute (v. 7, l. 25–28; my emphasis)

More than in Dylan's version, Belin's metaphor induces us to equate "le loup capital" with "l'ennemi dans mon dos" (v. 1, l. 4), namely the wild and malevolent force the narrator feels chased by from the first verse onwards.

Last but not least, Belin introduces an exhausted or perhaps even dying dog ("Mon chien est à bout, à bout," v. 12, l. 46) as the speaker's four-legged companion, where Dylan had settled for a "sick" "mule" and a "blind" "horse" (v. 12, l. 47), which—in spite of appearances—may contribute to further darkening the song's atmosphere. Indeed, Belin has recognised a sustained interest in dogs,[11] which appear in all his albums. While he defines dogs as his "totem" animals, he also sees them—in keeping with Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Teorema*––as embodiments of trouble-making figures and even as "psychopomps," namely creatures that belong to "a parallel realm" and have, consequently, the power to guide human beings towards death.

Musically, too, it can be argued that "Le Feu au cœur" sounds slightly more threatening and pessimistic than "Ain't Talkin'" as the former—unlike the latter—ends with an A-minor chord in all of Belin's renditions of the song. This is far from being the only musical difference between the two versions. Even though Belin preserves a number of crucial elements, such as the A-minor key (including, in his case, in the final chord), the overall tempo and most of the original orchestration (including drums, guitars and violas, as well as a very discreet piano), he introduces differences that point to a

11 An entire programme aired on French channel Radio Nova on 28 March 2023 and entitled "Bertrand Belin et ses 30 millions d'ami.e.s" was even dedicated—on a funny and slightly surreal mode—to this canine obsession.

darker mood. For instance, the drums are much more audible in his version than in Dylan's, marking each beat as if to underline fate's inescapability. In both versions, the length of the song and its repetitive character are compensated for by instrumental and rhythmic variations with each return of the theme, although those variations appear within an unchanging harmonic and rhythmic framework. These slight variations concern the bass (transitional notes added between those marking the base of the chord, on the beat) and the guitar accompaniment (small rhythmic and melodic variations in the arpeggios). In Dylan's case, the drums also introduce small variations from verse to verse, whereas in Belin's case their use is more monolithic. A recurring rhythmic difference in the first words of the refrain ("ain't talkin"' in Dylan's version, "je me tais" in Belin's) reflects a difference in verb use between French and English. While there are three syllables in both linguistic versions, in Dylan, the first syllable is on the off-beat (also called upbeat or unaccented beat) and the second and third syllables are on the on-beat (also called downbeat or accented beat), whereas in Belin, the first two syllables are on the off-beat and the third syllable is on the on-beat. Thanks to this, the main verb (in English) or element of the verb (in French) is stressed (by being set on the accented beat) in both versions, even though the English verb has two syllables ("talkin"') while the French verb has only one ("tais"). Other musical differences concern the orchestration. While keeping its overall structure, Belin uses electric instead of acoustic guitars, and a bass guitar instead of a double bass. Besides, an echo effect amplifies the words "j'avance" in the refrain. On top of being darker than Dylan's, Belin's version can thus also be said to be more 'electro'. More strikingly, rather than just keeping the viola, known for its rich, deep sound, Belin uses a group of several violas, whose ornate polyphonic motifs give the song

extra gravity. Finally, a sense of narrative is provided by musical means, as Belin removes Dylan's instrumental introduction and gets off to a barer, more direct start, before gradually making the orchestration richer and more dense throughout the song.

4.2 Towards Singability: Belin's Adaptation of Dylan's Rhyme Schemes

Because Belin knows, of course, that "Le Feu au cœur" will be repeatedly performed on stage, his adaptation of "Ain't Talkin'" seeks to transcend any purely literary transposition of the original song. In his Nobel Lecture, Dylan convincingly submitted, in this regard, that "our songs are alive in the land of the living. […] They're meant to be sung, not read" (Dylan 2017: n.p.). Yet, he does not seek to clarify—nor does Belin—what is regarded as 'singable'. Although the concept of 'singability' has been addressed in various studies on music-bound texts (and their translation), it remains a slippery one. Marco Agnetta contends that with these texts, language and music, as well as scene in certain cases, "form a unified and supersummative polysemiotic artifact ('co-text')," which implies that none of these genuine "work constituents" can operate as mere context (Agnetta 2024: 35). He further argues that "texts can be characterized as singable, i.e. suitable for a vocal performance, in different respects depending on whether the term of singability is primarily considered in terms of structure (a), distribution/reception (b), or performance (c) (cf. Agnetta 2019: 342ff.)." Agnetta further writes:

> a. […] from a structural point of view [, a text or its translation are singable if] they can be performed simultaneously with the original music (Dürr 2004, 1036).

> b. From a medial and physiological perspective, […] the concrete question […] is to what extent a translator has to consider the singers who are to perform this translation. […].
>
> c. Finally, it is also possible to speak of singability where the suitability of a vocal piece is discussed in relation to the abilities of a very specific singer or ensemble. A text intended for vocal performance, possibly a translation, can be considered singable if it can be sung by a particular intended performer, whether that performer is a mediocre or an outstanding singer" (Agnetta 2024: 23–25).

The specificity of our case study is that Belin is both the translator of "Ain't Talkin'" and the performer of his own translation. He is, therefore, the one who guarantees "signifier unity between language and music" (Agnetta 2024: 23) and, ultimately, the production of French lyrics suiting his vocal skills, which he knows better than anyone else.

According to Low, singability, which he defines as "*relative ease of vocalisation*" (Low 2017: 81), is one of the five variables—next to sense, naturalness, rhyme and rhythm—on which his Pentathlon Principle is based, i.e. a translation tool in which none of these individual features is sacrosanct: the translator following these guidelines simply "attempts to score highly in the overall effect of the text, without insisting on unbeatable excellence on any single criterion" (ibid.: 109) since "the objective is a *high aggregate score across all these five events*" (ibid.: 80, original emphasis). Clearly, Belin strives to preserve the main structural traits of the source song. Indeed, both "Ain't Talkin'" and "Le Feu au coeur" are strophic songs (in which each verse, or strophe, is "'sung to the same music'") that include "a refrain – the same words repeated at the end of each verse" and a chiefly[12] "syllabic setting" (ibid.: 14) in each

12 Melisma, which "is when one syllable is sung to more than one note" (Low 2017: 14), is used sparingly by Belin but it is generaly applied to significant words (most strikingly and systematically to the term *coeur*

strophe (where every syllable corresponds to a note). In addition, both are narrative songs, in which "the story is carried by the words" (ibid.: 12), and more specifically first-person character ones. Moreover, both are rather logocentric, i.e. word-focused songs even if they arguably "shift" between the logocentric and musico-centric poles of the continuum, not only because the music does matter in each case, but also because "the verses (the varying stanzas) have more verbal content, whereas the repeated refrains add little to the meaning" (ibid.: 13). As a result, "Le Feu au coeur" potentially ranks among "the songs that benefit most from performance in the language of the audience," as "logocentric" and particularly "narrative" ones do (ibid.: 74). Quite logically, in this context, Belin places a premium on Low's third criterion, namely naturalness of language, producing "*a text that could have been spontaneously created in the TL* [target language]" (ibid.: 88)—which does not rule out stylistic sophistication. However, it is worth observing that Low's other three criteria of sense, rhyme and rhythm have all been adapted to varying degrees. As has been expounded in section 4.1, aspects of verbal meaning have been "willfully modified" by Belin: this brings the target song closer to "a typical adaptation," namely "a derivative text" that "mixes genuine transfer with forms of unforced deviation," as opposed to "a translation," which refers to "a TT [target text] where all significant details of meaning have been transferred" (ibid.: 116). As will be shown in what follows, other elements, including rhyme and rhythm, have been adjusted as well. In both cases, Low advocates flexibility, claiming, on the one hand, that "the original rhyme-scheme is seldom crucial to the song" (ibid.: 105) as long as "similar frequency of rhyming"

in the refrain, in some renditions also to the terms *eau* in l. 3, *bleu* in l. 6, *suis* in l. 35, *bout* in l. 46 or *miens* in l. 54).

(ibid.: 78) is maintained and, on the other, that "rhythm is certainly an area where 'tweaks' (small adjustments) are often possible" (ibid.: 100) instead of retaining the original rhythm, i.e. the exact syllable-count, intact (see comments on Belin's approach to metrical patterns at the end of this section). All in all, Low defends the view that such modifications are necessary to preserve singability.[13]

With—presumably—this idea of 'singability' in mind, Belin does not attempt to replicate Dylan's most unmistakable quotations. As we have seen, he decides, for instance, against providing literal translations of well-known Anglophone folk songs' lines, which a French-speaking audience would be hard-pressed to recognise anyway; likewise, he refrains from reproducing 'poetic' translations of Ovidian lines, whose inadequate formality may have disrupted the French lyrics' fluency. While a form of continuity with Dylan's work is maintained through the preservation of rhyme schemes, the latter are, inevitably, thoroughly adapted by Belin, as the following demonstrates:

	Bob DYLAN, "Ain't Talkin'"	
1	As I walked out tonight in the mystic garden	A
2	The wounded flowers were dangling from the vine	B
3	I was passing by yon cool crystal fountain	A
4	Someone hit me from behind	B
5	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C

13 In Low's theory, singability loosely rests on four principles: (a) *try to have open-ended syllables,* (b) *avoid consonant clusters*, (c) *be sparing with plosive consonants* and (d) *pay close attention to vowels* (cf. Low 2017: 82–84). Drawing on Heinzelmann (2004) and Drinker (1950), Agnetta nonetheless notes that "considerations of singability are usually overrated, since not even the originals adhere to [… general] principles and since the interpreters should be credited with the ability to master or compensate the respective challenges" (Agnetta 2024: 24).

6	Through this weary world of woe	D
7	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
8	No one on earth would ever know	D
9	They say prayer has the power to heal	E
10	So pray from the mother	F
11	In the human heart an evil spirit can dwell	E
12	I am a-tryin' to love my neighbor and do good unto others	F
13	But oh, mother, things ain't going well	E
14	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C
15	I'll burn that bridge before you can cross	G
16	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
17	There'll be no mercy for you once you've lost	G
18	Now I'm all worn down by weeping	C
19	My eyes are filled with tears, my lips are dry	H
20	If I catch my opponents ever sleeping	C
21	I'll just slaughter 'em where they lie	H
22	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C
23	Through the world mysterious and vague	I
24	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
25	Walkin' through the cities of the plague	I
26	Well, the whole world is filled with speculation	J
27	The whole wide world which people say is round	K
28	They will tear your mind away from contemplation	J
29	They will jump on your misfortune when you're down	K
30	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C
31	Eatin' hog-eyed grease in a hog-eyed town	K
32	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
33	Some day you'll be glad to have me around	K
34	They will crush you with wealth and power	F
35	Every waking moment you could crack	L
36	I'll make the most of one last extra hour	F
37	I'll avenge my father's death then I'll step back	L
38	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C
39	Hand me down my walkin' cane	M
40	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
41	Got to get you out of my miserable brain	M
42	All my loyal and my much-loved companions	J

43	They approve of me and share my code	N
44	I practice a faith that's been long abandoned	J
45	Ain't no altars on this long and lonesome road	N
46	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C
47	My mule is sick, my horse is blind	B
48	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
49	Thinkin' 'bout that gal I left behind	B
50	Well, it's bright in the heavens and the wheels are flyin'	C
51	Fame and honor never seem to fade	O
52	The fire gone out but the light is never dyin'	C
53	Who says I can't get heavenly aid?	O
54	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C
55	Carryin' a dead man's shield	P
56	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
57	Walkin' with a toothache in my heel	P
58	The sufferin' is unending	C
59	Every nook and corner has its tears	Q
60	I'm not playing, I'm not pretending	C
61	I'm not nursin' any superfluous fears	Q
62	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C
63	Walkin' ever since the other night	R
64	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
65	Walkin' 'til I'm clean out of sight	R
66	As I walked out in the mystic garden	A
67	On a hot summer day, a hot summer lawn	S
68	Excuse me, ma'am, I beg your pardon	A
69	There's no one here, the gardener is gone	S
70	Ain't talkin', just walkin'	C
71	Up the road, around the bend	T
72	Heart burnin', still yearnin'	C
73	In the last outback at the world's end	T

Table 1: Verse structure and rhyme scheme of Bob Dylan's, "Ain't Talkin'"

With the exception of the third stanza, which includes five lines (EFEFE), Dylan uses four-line stanzas (17 in all) and relies, throughout the song, on alternate rhymes in which the first and

third lines respectively rhyme with the second and fourth lines, thus following the pattern ABAB. In total, the lyrics thus feature 73 lines (1 five-line and 17 four-line stanzas) and 19 different rhymes (A-S, including the imperfect rhyme E-E'[14]), which change until the final stanza. Indeed, few rhymes are reused. With the notable exception of thyme C, only rhyme A recurs (with *garden-fountain* in stanza 1 and *garden-pardon* in stanza 17). As for rhyme C (*walkin'-yearnin'*) it is repeated nine times in the refrain (stanzas 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 and 18, where it also operates as an internal rhyme since *walkin'* and *yearnin'* respectively rhyme with *talkin'* and *burnin'*) and a variant of it (based on the *-ing*, rather than *–in'*, sound) appears in stanzas 9 and 15 with the words *weeping-sleeping* and *unending-pretending*. In addition, three rhymes may be said to echo each other through a similar *-ai-* sound, namely rhyme B (*vine-behind* in stanza 1 and *blind-behind* in stanza 12), rhyme H (*deny* and *lie* in stanza 5) and rhyme R (*night* and *sight* in stanza 16).

By contrast, Belin, whose lyrics include 72 lines (18 four-line stanzas), regularly oscillates between alternate rhymes and coupled rhymes, namely dual rhyme schemes following the

14 In *Translating Song: Music and Texts*, Low pleads "for tolerance of flexible rhyming" (2017: 107): while this generally involves "a willingness to accept a word as rhyming merely if the vowel is correct" (ibid.: 106), Low's plea should be understood as "a call to extend the acceptance that has long been given to a few imperfect rhymes (e.g. time/mine in English) to the acceptance of many others" (ibid.: 107). In this broader understanding, imperfect rhymes (also called partial rhymes or near-rhymes) could include, for instance, a similar vowel type (e.g. closed vowels) used "'alone or in combination with other devices like assonance or alliteration"' (Apter 1985: 309–310 as quoted in Low 2017: 106), as is the case in the third stanza, where closed vowels are combined with the same final consonant (*-l(l)*). Since the main vowel sounds remain different (*i:* and *è* respectively), I have still referred to these rhymes with the distinct notations E (*i:* + *-l*, as in line 9 with *heal*) and E' (*è* + *-ll*, as in lines 11 and 13 with *dwell* and *well*).

pattern AABB—at least in the first half of the lyrics (v. 1–9). In the second half of the song (v. 10–18), this pendular movement is interrupted and the overall rhyme scheme shifts to alternate rhymes, as in Dylan's lyrics, except that three verses prove slightly more irregular in this regard, i.e. verses 12 and 17 (where the second and fourth lines in the first case and the first and third lines in the second case do not rhyme, ending as they do with *bout-hante* and *jardin-madame*). Moreover, verse 13 is partly based on coupled rhymes (as its third and fourth lines end with the words *rides* and *vide*) but the first two lines (ending with *s'ouvre* and *soulagé*) do not rhyme. However, Belin attempts to compensate for some of these losses through a perceptible reliance on repetition: for example, although verse 12's fourth line fails to rhyme with its second line (cf. *supra*), it deliberately reproduces verse 10's final line ("Toujours ton image qui me hante"), which creates its own kind of assonance, one that differs from the original but may attempt to textualise the haunting the narrator is subjected to when the image of an unnamed being recurs in their mind's eye. In the second-to-last stanza, the first line does not rhyme with the third, which nevertheless echoes a previous rhyme (N) in the eleventh stanza (indeed, *madame* rhymes with *âmes* and *flammes*, with which lines 42 and 44 respectively end). Similarly, the final stanza's alternate rhyme is based on the repetition of *j'avance* (first and third lines, as in the previous occurrences of the refrain) and the full phrase *dans le haut du paysage* (second and fourth lines). While these repetitions reduce the total number of rhymes (15 in Belin's version, against 19 in Dylan's, which may lead some to consider that this somehow 'impoverishes' the original version), they do contribute to generating a new form of regularity, reinforced as it is by Belin's exclusive use of four-line stanzas.

	Bertrand BELIN, "Le Feu au cœur"	
1	Comme la nuit, je m'avance dans ce jardin	A
2	Aucune fleur debout, pas de parfum	A
3	À la fontaine, au chant glacé de son eau	B
4	Je sens l'ennemi dans mon dos	B
5	Je me tais, j'avance	C
6	Dans ce jardin noir de bleu	D
7	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	C
8	Tous ignorant tout de ce feu	D
9	On dit, prie et tout va mieux	D
10	Ô mère, prie pour moi si tu peux	D
11	Il faut aimer son prochain mais tu vois comme	E
12	Un oiseau noir niche au cœur de l'homme	E
13	Je me tais, j'avance	C
14	Passé, je brûlerai ce pont	F
15	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	C
16	Les pauvres ne portent même plus de nom	F
17	Je suis las, las de pleurnicher	G
18	Les larmes ne m'ont rien apporté	G
19	Si je devais les trouver endormis	H
20	Je tuerais un à un mes ennemis	H
21	Je me tais, j'avance	C
22	Parmi les fourberies et les tromperies	H
23	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	C
24	Par les villes foutues, vidées, endormies	H
25	Le loup capital veut ta peau	B
26	Le monde cupide veut ta peau	B
27	Il te fera lâcher tôt la lutte	I
28	Toi-même tu guideras ta chute	I
29	Je me tais, j'avance	C
30	Parmi les on-dit, dans les commérages	J
31	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	C
32	Il est temps de faire équipage	J
33	Leur mépris bientôt te cloue	K
34	Un beau matin, tu ne te lèves plus du tout	K
35	Quant à moi, au bout je suis	H
36	Je veux venger mon père à tout prix	H

37	Je me tais, j'avance	C
38	Le pas mal assuré dans la pente	L
39	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	C
40	Toujours ton image qui me hante	L
41	Mes compagnons de route, mes sœurs, elles	M
42	N'ont pas moins que moi le cœur en flammes	N
43	Mais il n'y a pas ici de chapelles	M
44	Pour déposer le fardeau de nos âmes	N
45	Je me tais, j'avance	C
46	Mon chien est à bout, à bout	K
47	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	C
48	Toujours ton image qui me hante	L
49	Maintenant le ciel s'ouvre	K
50	On veut se sentir soulagé	G
51	Honneur, sagesse et rides	O
52	D'aucuns disent que le ciel est vide	O
53	Je me tais, j'avance	C
54	Sur mon dos, le reste d'un des miens	A
55	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	C
56	Dans le talon, un mal de dents de chien	A
57	La peine semble sans fin	A
58	Partout de quoi pleurer, partout	K
59	Qui pense que cette peine est feinte	A
60	N'à qu'à venir ici prendre le pouls	K
61	Je me tais, j'avance	C
62	Voilà bien longtemps que je crains	A
63	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	C
64	De n'être plus qu'un point dans le lointain	A
65	Comme la nuit, j'avançais dans ce jardin	A
66	Dans la soirée d'été, dans l'herbe chauffée	G
67	Pardon madame, j'ai dit pardon madame	N
68	Il n'y a plus personne, plus de jardinier	G
69	Je me tais, j'avance	A
70	Me voilà dans le haut du paysage	J
71	Le feu au cœur, j'avance	A
72	Au bout du bout, dans le haut du paysage	J

Table 2: Verse structure and rhyme scheme of Bertrand Belin's, "Le Feu au cœur"

Arguably, an overly-detailed analysis of metrical patterns may nevertheless prove fruitless or even irrelevant insofar as they do not display the type of strict regularity—either within the lyrics of each song or between the English and the French versions—one might expect to find in a poem (in a formally well-defined or categorised one at least). As regards song translation and more particularly rhythm, and in terms of the fifth and last criterion of the Pentathlon Principle, Low aptly recalls that "*when translators of strophic songs make minor adjustments from verse to verse, they are simply claiming latitudes that are a normal part of songwriting*" (Low 2017: 101). Indeed, Belin does not seek to match Dylan's lines as regards the exact number of syllables, just as neither singer strives, in their own lyrics, to produce perfectly regular stanzas. As Dylan pointed out in his Nobel Lecture (2017: n.p.), "songs are unlike literature" and give a kind of metrical leeway formal poetry cannot offer, one that may be strengthened by live performances during which the performers may take more liberties with their material and rhythmic patterns in particular. One noteworthy exception to this, unsurprisingly, is the refrain: since it provides the rhythmic backbone to the song, its unchanging lines (i.e. the first and third lines: "Ain't talkin', just walkin' / Heart burnin', still yearnin"' in Dylan's lyrics, "Je me tais, j'avance / Le feu au cœur, j'avance" in Belin's) are metrically regular and include the smallest, as well as a near-identical, number of syllables in both versions (six syllables in the first line and six in the third for Dylan's against five in the first and six in the third for Belin's).

4.3 The Performance(s) of Translation: Belin's Reiterations of "Le Feu au cœur"

As proposed above, the specificity of this translation, which may now be more productively envisioned as an adaptation, is that it was also self-used by Belin. As a translator-performer, he performed not only the act of adapting Dylan's "Ain't Talkin'," but also the song itself in a more traditional sense, as musical performers generally do. While an electric studio recording of "Le Feu au cœur" was released in October 2019 on the second edition of Belin's sixth album *Persona*, the song was also performed and recorded as an acoustic live session, which was posted on social media (Facebook and Instagram) on 5 February 2020 (cf. section 4.1). More informal recordings of the French cover are available on online platforms like YouTube. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of cultural activities for many months, only seven (solo acoustic and electric) renditions of the song can currently be found. These were respectively performed—with minor yet noticeable variations[15]—on the stages of the following six French venues: Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris (5 October 2019, *Le Monde* Festival), Casino de Paris (4 and 5 December 2019), Marciac's L'Astrada (14 December 2019),

15 For example, the lyrics may be slightly modified: a word may be changed, as in "Ô mère, prie pour moi si tu *veux* [instead of *peux*]" in l. 10 (Casino de Paris, 4 December 2019; FNAC Live festival, 1 July 2022), or "Dans la *chaleur* [instead of *soirée*] d'été, dans l'herbe *coupée* [instead of *chauffée*] in l. 66" (Casino de Paris, 4 December 2019, and Marciac, 14 December 2019, in the first case, FNAC Live festival in the second); a syllable may be added, as in "*Et* toujours ton image qui me hante" in l. 48 (Marciac); a specific term may be stressed, such as *chien* in l. 56 (Cassuejouls, 27 May 2023) or *peine* in l. 57 and 59 (Casino de Paris, 4 December 2019, and Marciac respectively), or the final line (l. 72) may be repeated (FNAC Live festival). At the musical level, some guitar parts may be added, lengthened and/or transformed: for instance, Belin may improvise more or less extensively after certain stanzas (after stanza 16 in Marciac and Cassuejouls) or at the end of the piece (Marciac and Cassuejouls).

Alfortville's !POC! [Pôle Culturel] (15 January 2020), Paris's Grand Salon de l'Hôtel de Ville (1 July 2022, in the framework of the 2022 edition of the FNAC Live festival) and Église Saint-Cyr and Sainte-Julitte in Cassuejouls, Aveyron (27 May 2023, "Bon Esprit de Clocher" Micro Festival). These unofficial recordings do not take into account potentially unrecorded and—by definition—unrepeatable variants that may have been, and will be, performed live.[16]

As Robinson asserts in his reading of Derrida, each of these performances can be regarded as an iteration which "is simultaneously *repeating* something that went before and *adapting* that thing to the current speech situation, localizing it" (Robinson 2003/2014: 67). In other words, not only is Belin's translation (or adaptation) a performance that takes part in an iterative process but it is also the case that every *embodied* performance of that translation (or adaptation) actually participates in that very same process. In Robinson's "physicalist approach" (1991: xiii), translation (and adaption) "take place under the aegis of body" (ibid.: xiii–xiv). This occurs firstly through the *act* of translating (or adapting) a seemingly singular discursive event like a song and, secondly, through its subsequent stage performances. The body arguably plays, then, a crucial part in turning *iterability* into *iterations*, i.e. in materialising the ever-present *possibility* for discursive events to come to pass, and—in that 'taking-place'—morph into actual (or *eventual*, to use Derrida's terminology) and embodied occurrences. Bodily experience thus conditions translation in at least two ways. Indeed, "somatic intuition" not only "guides the performance of the translator's task" (Robinson 1991: xv)–

16 For instance, a French website specialising in gig setlists (www.setlist.fr) references that the song was also performed on 18 December 2019 in Lille (Théâtre Sébastopol).

–often "past fictions of equivalence;" (ibid.: xvi) that have repeatedly been called into question, not least by Derrida whose concept of *différance* leads every linguistic mark to be essentially split (cf. section 2)—, but it also shapes all the following reiterations of a given translation (or adaptation).

5 Conclusion: Songs as 'Event-Ridden' Performatives, Translation as Performance and the Performance(s) of Translation

In this essay, what has been at stake is a thorough reexamination of the extent to which the Derridean concept of iterability and its implications can help us gain a better understanding of the performative. Iterability, which theoretically enables the repetition of a linguistic mark, is indeed intimately interconnected with performability insofar as language's ability to signify depends on its capacity to be performed and reperformed, cited and recited or even misperformed and miscited by means of all kinds of iterations (or actual event-occurrences). As we have seen, iterability and the related concept of performability also concern translation studies since every apparently singular discursive event can be (re)iterated, i.e. both preserved *and* changed by individual acts of translation whereby the translators' voices mix with the source authors'.

In this context, we have explored how a song could possibly be conceived of as the performative *par excellence*, namely as the "most '*event-ridden*' utterance" (Derrida 1988: 19; my emphasis) in discourse. Located in-between written and spoken language due to its typical alliance between lyrics and musical (or sung) features, a song is indeed characterised by its

absolute singularity but also by the impossibility of pure reproducibility. As a unique artwork, it might appear as a singular and original event-utterance (cf. Derrida 1988: 18) but as a result of language's intrinsic structure of iterability, namely the *possibility* of a linguistic mark being repeated, "an allegedly original 'event' […] is itself divided and multiple" (ibid.: 33). As we have seen, even if a discursive event "seems to have occurred only once [it] is in itself divided and multiplied in advance by its structure of repeatability" (ibid.: 48) and is, therefore, "capable of being reiterated as though it were the first time" (ibid.: 50). Moreover, as Derrida insistently recalls, iteration involves difference-in-sameness in that it alters "whatever it seems to reproduce" (ibid.: 40). This is illustrated by the multiple individual performances of a single song: every time the latter is performed, "something new takes place" (ibid.: 40). In this way, the song, as a structurally iterable and thus necessarily impure event—i.e. one that need not but can, in essence, be reiterated and consequently altered—, achieves "eventhood" (ibid.: 99) or the status of an occurrence, i.e. a seemingly singular, actual, datable event that, in fact, might be endlessly reiterated in slightly different (and infinitely diverse) shapes.

In this sense, the concept of iterability is "never pure" or "safe from all contamination" (Derrida 1988: 119). According to Derrida, iterability is "an aconceptual concept," one that is "heterogeneous to the philosophical concept of the concept" insofar as it "marks both the possibility and limit of […] all conceptualization" (ibid.: 118). As this essay has shown, "'iterability' does not simply signify […] repeatability of the same, but rather alterability of this same idealized in the singularity of the event" (ibid.: 119). The apparent singularity of the discursive event is, therefore, illusory to the extent that language's structure of "repeatability itself ensures that the full

presence of a singularity thus repeated comports in itself the reference to something else, thus rending the full presence it nevertheless announces" (ibid.: 129). For this reason, iteration can never be equated with sheer repetition.

In the performative perspective of iterability, Dylan and Belin can both be regarded as iterators, whose localising acts and idiosyncratic modes of iteration reflect something of their approach to art. For Dylan, iteration seems to be part and parcel of the creative process. As I have argued, quotations in "Ain't Talkin"'—be they excerpted from traditional folk songs or literary classics—are too numerous and too obvious not to be deliberate and are fused, with the rest of Dylan's lyrics, into a new work of art. Folk music, as a genre whose origins can be traced back to the roots of popular music, perhaps just like music as a more general category, is a language that is both historical and out of time, one that becomes universal by dint of being repeated—and yet endlessly renewed. This is precisely what Dylan suggests in the final paragraph of his *Philosophy of Modern Song*:

> music […] is of a time but also timeless; a thing with which to make memories and the memory itself. Though we seldom consider it, music is built in time as surely as a sculptor or welder works in physical space. Music transcends time by living within it, just as reincarnation allows us to transcend life by living it again and again. (Dylan 2022: 334)

As a form of iteration, translation involves change rather than a mere repetition of the same, as Belin's "Le Feu au cœur" doubly evidences. On the one hand, the performance of translation in "Le Feu au cœur" emerges as a creative act, which Belin himself defines as an adaptation. This adaptation, through which Belin, as a translator-performer,[17] creatively

17 It should be noted that the terms 'performer' and 'performance' have been understood and applied in diverse ways to translators and

mixes his words with Dylan's and others', thus making those entirely his own, is further embodied, oralised and transformed by its various performances, whether acoustic or electric, on record or on stage. While its live performances ensure a form of continuity with Dylan's work, if only because the original version of "Ain't Talkin'" has not been performed on stage since 7 November 2013 (in Rome),[18] they also contribute to adapting and localising what they appear to reiterate since we modify whatever we somatize and alter whatever we repeat. Translation as performance *versus* the performance(s) of translation: the possible coexistence of these reciprocal phrases ultimately serves to confirm language's mutability-in-sameness in the performative realm. As this case study has hopefully demonstrated, translation, on this understanding, merely extends a supposed original which is itself, in fact, but a derivative intertext. In the concluding lines of his

translation. As a performer, a translator is, for instance, supposedly also able to perform "the fictional world depicted in a literary piece" in their mind, "leading to *cognition*" (Piecychna 2021: 46). As Beata Piecychna points out in her essay entitled "Translational Hermeneutics Meets Cognitive Science: On the Notion of Performance, Intersubjectivity and Space in the Translational Process," "translation here is understood […] as the act of performing the storyworld depicted in the source text" (ibid.: 47). In this so-called "paradigm of embodied simulation," the translator also makes it "possible for the reader to visualize the experience described": in this way, the former has the power to shape the latter's mental—not least spatial—perceptions and representations, "as if the reader performed or observed the actions themselves" (ibid.: 50).

18 According to The Official Bob Dylan Site (www.bobdylan.com), the song was played 118 times on the Never Ending Tour between 20 November 2006 (and its live debut at New York City Center) and 7 November 2013 (and its last performance to date at Rome's Atlantico).

aforementioned Lecture, the 2016 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature seemed well aware of this when he stated:

> I hope some of you get the chance to listen to these lyrics the way they were intended to be heard: in concert or on record or however people are listening to songs these days. I return once again to Homer, who says, "Sing in me, oh Muse, and through me tell the story." (Dylan 2017: n.p.)

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