The history of the translation of the Bible into English makes fascinating reading and an excellent account is to be found in a recent work by F.F. Bruce, Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester. Confronted with a list of the distinguished scholars and churchmen who, either singly or as members of official panels, have been responsible for our English translations of the New Testament, I take refuge in Professor Bruce's statement that 'criticisms of translations as translations are, of course, perfectly in order.' Let this be my apologia for what follows. A comparison of several English translations of the Gospel of St John aroused my curiosity over the persistent mis-translation of the questions addressed to Simon Peter on the occasion of his denial of Christ. Most translators (there are notable exceptions) ignore the force of the Greek negative adverbs, and the Latin interrogative particles, the nuances of which are not without significance.

In the account given by John Peter is asked three times whether he is one of Jesus' disciples. The first time he is asked by the maiden who kept the door (ἡ πορευόμενη η ἡμερών); the second by the servants and officers (οἱ δούλοι καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι) with whom he was standing warming himself, and the third by a servant of the high priest (ἐξ ἐκ τῶν δούλων τοῦ ἀρχιερέως) a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. Here is the relevant passage, quoted, with unashamed personal prejudice, from the Authorised Version:

15. And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple; that disciple was known unto the High Priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the High Priest.
16. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the High Priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.
17. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.
18. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood and warmed himself . . . .
25. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto

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2. Ibid p. 199.
him, *Art not thou also one of his disciples?* He denied it and said, I am not.

26. One of the servants of the High Priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, *Did not I see thee in the garden with him?*

27. Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

Now the form of the third question addressed to Peter, as is evident in both the Greek and Latin versions, is different from that of the first two; but, while the third question is always translated into an equivalent English idiom, the first two, generally, are not.

The interrogative particle, in Greek and in Latin, is essentially a practical device demanded by the nature of these inflected languages. In a language where a separate personal pronoun is not regularly used, and the verbal ending is sufficient indication of the person, some introductory word-device is required to signal that it is a question, and not a statement, that follows. The interrogative particles act as such signals; further there is a choice of three sets of signals to indicate (i) the ‘open’ question which merely seeks information and anticipates no one particular answer (ii) the question to which the answer ‘yes’ is expected and (iii) the question to which the answer ‘no’ is expected. The Greek particles are respectively (i) ἢ or ἢρα, which is thought to be a contraction of ἢ ἢρα (ii) ἢρ’ ὦ, ὦκουν, ὦ and (iii) ἢρα μή, μόν, μή. The double question is served by παράρον ... ἢ and the deliberative question is sufficiently indicated by the mood of the verb.

Denniston in his discussion of the particle ἢρα⁴ adduces a number of examples to show that ἢρα does not always expect an indefinite answer nor ἢρα μή a negative one, though he agrees that ἢρ’ ὦ ‘more definitely and more frequently expects a positive answer’. Some of his examples appear arguable and sometimes he seems to interpret them in the light of the answer given rather than of the answer expected.⁵ His arguments on the use of ἢρα μή in rhetorical questions also are not altogether convincing.⁶ Surely to equate ἢρα μή to ‘Can it be that ... ?’ is to admit that a negative reply is anticipated? The genuine exceptions do not, I think, invalidate the view of interrogative particles as signals. They do show the flexibility of a living language and the complexity of Greek particles in general. The negative adverbs ὦ and μή even without the particle ἢρα and even in the Koinē, retain their functions of introducing ‘yes’ and ‘no’ questions respectively.⁷

English, lacking the simplicity and economy of the Greek or Latin interrogative particles, resorts to various periphrases to express the three different types of questions, thus:

(i) Are you a disciple?  
(Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’)

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4. The Greek Particles. J. D. Denniston (Clarendon Press 1934)
5. Ibid p. 46.
(ii) You are a disciple, are you not? (Answer 'yes')
Surely you are a disciple, are you not?
Are you not a disciple?

(iii) You are not a disciple, are you? (Answer 'no')
Surely you are not a disciple, are you?

Let us return to St John’s Gospel and the questions put to Peter. The first question is: μὴ καὶ σὺ ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν εἶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου; nunquid et tu ex discipulis es hominis istius?
This is introduced by the negative μὴ and therefore expects the answer ‘no’.
The Second question is: μὴ καὶ σὺ ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ εἶ; nunquid et tu ex discipulis eius es?
This is also introduced by the negative μὴ and, like the first, expects the answer ‘no’.
The third question is: oὐκ ἐγὼ σὺ εἶδον ἐν τῷ κήπῳ μετ’ αὐτοῦ; nonne ego te vidi in horto cum illo?
This is the only one of the three that is introduced by the negative οὐ, expecting the answer 'yes'. But consider how few of the English translations reflect the true position.

The following analysis is far from exhaustive, but it gives a fair reflection of the confusion that exists among translators over the rendering of the first two questions. The third question, as stated before, is never in doubt. As the translations are based on the same text and there are no variant readings involved, differences in translation must be due to the vagaries of the translators themselves.

GROUP I: ‘Art not thou?; ‘Are not you?; ‘Are you not?’; ‘Aren’t you?’.
(1) Tyndale’s Bible (1526)
(2) The Great Bible (1539)
(3) The Geneva Bible (1560)
(4) The Bishop’s Bible (1568)
(5) The Douai Version (1609)
(6) The Authorised Version (1611)
(8) The Revised Standard Version (1952)
(10) The New Jerusalem Bible (1966)

8. The Textus Receptus and/or a collation of the best modern recensions.
GROUP II: ‘Art thou?'; ‘Are you?’
(1) The Revised New Testament (1881)
(2) The Holy Bible in Modern English. Ferrar Fenton (1903)
(3) The Knox Bible (1944)
(5) The New English Bible (1961)

GROUP III: ‘Surely you are not?’ ; ‘You aren’t, are you?’
(1) The Four Gospels. E.V. Rieu (1952)

Several interesting points emerge from this analysis (incomplete as it is). Of the seventeen versions classified, ten (Group I) treat the question as a question expecting the answer ‘yes’; five (Group II) translate as an open question; only two (Group III) translate, accurately, as a question expecting the answer ‘no’.

There is a further interesting anomaly. The first and second questions have identical grammatical forms (μη καί σὺ τέ;), but two translators (Group II nos 2 and 4) treat the first question as an open question and the second as a question expecting the answer ‘yes’! It is worth quoting these translations in full:

(1) Ferrar Fenton – The Holy Bible in Modern English (1903)
‘Are you also one of the disciples of this Man?’
‘I am not’ was his reply . . . .
‘Are you not also one of his disciples?’

‘Are you one of this man’s disciples, too?’
No, I am not’ retorted Peter . . . .
‘Surely you too are one of his disciples, aren’t you?’

It seems clear that the intention of both these translations (separated in time by five and a half decades) was to reproduce in the English idiom the increasing pressure brought to bear on Peter by his successive interlocutors. It is respectfully submitted, however, that this is not best done by taking liberties with the Greek text. I shall presently show that the original author achieves the same result in a more subtle and effective manner.

The difficulties of translation, of course, are not to be underestimated. Moreover, translators of the Scriptures have, in addition, to steer a delicate course between the Charybdis of a strongly conservative tradition on the one hand and the Scylla of religious dogma on the other.9 In this passage the


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influence of tradition may apparently be traced from Tyndale's Bible through the Authorised Version down to the New Jerusalem Bible of 1966 (Group I), and again from the Revised Version to the New English Bible of 1961 (Group II).

It is hardly surprising that in such a large number of translations, spanning some five centuries since Wycliff's first English translation of the Bible as a whole, discrepancies should occur. John Mill, in 1701, published a critical edition of the New Testament which alone showed 30,000 questionable readings. Many of Mill's discoveries, it appears, were concerned with the minutiae of style and grammar. What is surprising is that such an obvious example of mis-translation as the one under review should appear in the latest official translation. One respects the translator's desire to reproduce the spirit, rather than the letter, of his text, but here it seems too little attention has been paid to the actual words of the writer. It remains now to consider the implications of the form of the three questions addressed to Peter.

Now it might be thought that the exact phraseology of the questions is unimportant. Under certain conditions, as a colleague has suggested, to be questioned at all is to be threatened. Certainly Peter would have felt that these questions constituted threats. But, the first question, the first threat, was so phrased as to show that the threat, at this stage, was not a serious one. The questioner so obviously expected the answer 'no'. It is not told what that other disciple said to the doorkeeper to prevail upon her to let Peter in. Perhaps it was on the score of the inclement weather, for we know that it was cold enough for the officers to have lit a fire in the inner hall. Perhaps she was curious about Peter's identity, but clearly she did not think that he was one of the disciples. It was a casual question. 'Surely you are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' she asked, and she expected, and accepted, his denial. This, I believe, tipped the balance and made it just that bit easier for Peter to give the expected answer, to rejoin with that swift but irrevocable, 'I am not'.

The servants and officers (translated as police in the New English Bible) also did not seriously entertain the idea that Peter was one of the disciples. They, too, expected Peter's denial. But, questioned a second time, Peter was now in a more difficult position. He still had a choice, but he had committed himself once and again the form of the question acted as accomplice to his second denial. We can feel the pressure increasing, the threats becoming more menacing. For the first denial John wrote 'He saith, I am not'. Now he adds the word ἐναρκτομόνβαν. 'He denied it and said, I am not'.

11. C. W. Cook B. A. Hons. (Rhodes), M. A. (Cantab.), D. Th. (Princeton) My attention was first directed to the anomalies in the translations by A. Milne, M.A., one-time lecturer in Classics, Rhodes University.
not'. Peter still seems to be safe. Then the man who had good reason to recognise Peter speaks up. This time there is no easy way out because this time the question demands the answer 'yes'. It is now too late to draw back. Peter is trapped, trapped by the temptation offered by those first two questions. The man who had said he would lay down his life for his Master\textsuperscript{12} denies his Christ for the last time. 'Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.' The build-up to the climax is handled with remarkable skill by the author, from the first denial, through the second, and on to one of the most tragic climaxes in literature. The agony of Peter's dilemma, subtly suggested by the form of the three questions, is portrayed with a sensitivity that is lost in most of our translations.

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\textsuperscript{12} St. John 13.37.
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