

TRANSLATION HISTORY CULTURE



A Sourcebook

Edited by
ANDRÉ LEFEVERE



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Translation Studies

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A Sourcebook

Edited by André Lefevere



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Two things can be held against me in connection with this translation: one concerns the selection of the work, the other the way in which I have translated it. One group of people will say that I should not have translated this particular author, another group that I should not have translated him in this way.

Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt

Contents

General editors' preface	xi
Preface	xiii
Acknowledgments	xv
Introduction	1
Anne Dacier: from the Introduction to her translation of the <i>Iliad</i>	10
1 The role of ideology in the shaping of a translation	14
Quintus Horatius Flaccus: from the "Letter to the Pisones," also known as the <i>Ars Poetica</i>	15
Aurelius Augustinus (Saint Augustine): from "On the Christian Doctrine"; from the "Letter to Saint Jerome"	15
Martin Luther: from the "Circular Letter on Translation"	16
August Wilhelm Schlegel: from the "History of Romantic Literature"	17
Anne Louise Germaine de Staël: from the <i>Writings</i>	17
Victor Hugo: from the preface to the New Shakespeare Translation	18
2 The power of patronage	19
John of Trevisa: from the "Dialogue between a Lord and a Clerk upon Translation," printed as the preface to his translation of the <i>Polychronicon</i>	20
Jean de Brèche de Tours: from the preface to his translation of Hippocrates.	21

Joachim Du Bellay: from the <i>Défense et illustration de la langue française</i>	22
Philemon Holland: from the preface to his translation of Pliny's <i>The Historie of the World</i>	22
John Dryden: from the "Dedication" to his translation of the <i>Aeneid</i>	24
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: from the "Writings on Literature"	24
3 Poetics	26
Etienne Dolet: from "On the Way of Translating Well from One Language Into Another"	27
Antoine Houdar de la Motte: from the preface to his translation of the <i>Iliad</i>	28
Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet): from a Letter to Anne Dacier	30
August Wilhelm Schlegel: from "Something about William Shakespeare on the Occasion of Wilhelm Meister"	30
Edward Fitzgerald: from the preface to the <i>Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam</i>	32
Ulrich von Willamowitz-Moellendorff: from "The Art of Translation"	33
4 Universe of Discourse	35
Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt: from the preface to his translation of Lucian	35
Jacques Delille: from the preface to his translation of Virgil's <i>Georgics</i>	37
Pierre Le Tourneur: from the preface to his translation of Young's <i>Night Thoughts</i>	39
Antoine Prévost, better known as Abbé Prévost: from the preface to his translation of Richardson's <i>Pamela</i>	39
Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet): from the Preface to his translation of Shakespeare's <i>Julius Caesar</i>	40
John Hookham Frere: from the preface to his translation of Aristophanes	40
Dillon Wentworth, Earl of Roscommon: from the <i>Essay on Translated Verse</i>	43

5 Translation, the development of language and education	46
Marcus Tullius Cicero: from "On the Orator"; from "On the Limits of Good & Evil"	46
Marcus Fabius Quintilianus: from the "Guide to Rhetoric"	47
Hieronymus (Saint Jerome): from the "Letter to Pammachius"	47
Roger Bacon: from "On the Knowledge of Languages"	49
Juan Luis Vives: from "Versions or Translations"	50
Jacques Pelletier du Mans: from his "Poetics"	52
August Wilhelm Schlegel: from "The Works of Homer by Johann Heinrich Voss"	54
Percy Bysshe Shelley: from the <i>Defence of Poetry</i>	56
Gaius Caecilius Plinius Secundus: from the "Letters"	56
Johann Christoph Gottsched: from the "Critical Poetics"	57
Thomas Carlyle: from "The State of German Literature"	57
6 The technique of translating	59
Desiderius Erasmus: from the "Letter to William Warham"	60
Antoine Lemaistre: from the "Rules of French Translation"	60
George Chapman: from the prefatory texts to his translation of the <i>Iliad</i>	62
Alexander Pope: from the preface to his translation of the <i>Iliad</i>	64
August Wilhelm Schlegel: from the "Letter to Herrn Reimer"	66
Dante Gabriel Rossetti: from <i>Dante and His Circle</i>	67
Matthew Arnold: from "On Translating Homer"	68
7 Central texts and central cultures	70
Sir Thomas More: from the <i>Confutation of Tyndale's Answer</i>	71
From "The Translators to the Reader," the preface to the <i>Authorized Version</i>	72
Johann Gottfried Herder: from the "Fragments"	74

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: from “Poetry and Truth”; from the “Book of East and West”; from the “Writings on Literature”	74
August Wilhelm Schlegel: from the “Argument between Languages”; from the “History of Classical Literature”	78
Edward Fitzgerald: from a letter to E.B.Cowell	80
8 Longer statements	81
Leonardo Bruni, called Aretino: from “The Right Way to Translate”	81
Petrus Danielus Huetius: from “Two Books on Translation”	86
John Dryden: from the preface to his translation of <i>Ovid’s Epistles</i>	102
Jean le Rond d’Alembert: from “Remarks on the Art of Translating,” printed as the preface to his translation of Tacitus	105
Charles Batteux: from “Principles of Literature”	116
Gaspard de Tende, sieur de l’Estaing: from the “Rules of Translation”	120
Johann Jakob Bodmer: from the “Ninety-Fourth Letter” in his “Painter of Morals”	124
Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee: from the <i>Essay on the Principles of Translation</i>	128
Wilhelm von Humboldt: from the “Preface” to his translation of Aeschylus’ <i>Agamemnon</i>	135
Friedrich Schleiermacher: from “On the Different Methods of Translating”	141
Ulrich von Willamowitz-Moellendorff: from “What is Translation?,” originally written as the preface to his translation of Euripides’ <i>Hippolytus</i>	166
Bibliographical references	172
Index	175

General editors' preface

The growth of Translation Studies as a separate discipline is a success story of the 1980s. The subject has developed in many parts of the world and is clearly destined to continue developing well into the 21st century. Translation studies brings together work in a wide variety of fields, including linguistics, literary study, history, anthropology, psychology and economics. This series of books will reflect the breadth of work in Translation Studies and will enable readers to share in the exciting new developments that are taking place at the present time.

Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live.

Since this series of books on Translation Studies is the first of its kind, it will be concerned with its own genealogy. It will publish texts from the past that illustrate its concerns in the present, and will publish texts of a more theoretical nature immediately addressing those concerns, along with case studies illustrating manipulation through rewriting in various literatures. It will be comparative in nature and will range through many literary

traditions both Western and non-Western. Through the concepts of rewriting and manipulation, this series aims to tackle the problem of ideology, change and power in literature and society and so assert the central function of translation as a shaping force.

Susan Bassnett
André Lefevere

Preface

This collection contains what many consider to be some of the most important, or at least most seminal texts produced over centuries of thinking about translation in Western Europe in Latin, French, German, and English. The collection spans approximately the twenty centuries that elapsed between the birth, in 106 BC, of the Roman orator, statesman, and translator Marcus Tullius Cicero and the death, in 1931 AD, of the German classical scholar and translator Ulrich von Willamowitz-Moellendorff. No attempt has been made to include modern or contemporary texts. These should, and will, be gathered in other collections to be published in the series for which the present collection endeavors to establish a modest genealogy.

A fair number of the texts collected here have been much referred to, infrequently quoted, and even more rarely read since they have not all previously been available in English. I have translated anew all the texts printed here, except for those originally written in English, and I have tried to select texts that should provide the essential background for current thinking about the translation of literature.

Not all texts collected here have by any means been translated or printed in their entirety. To do so would have necessitated the production of a book several times the size of this one. Moreover, a fair number of well-known texts on translation tend, on closer inspection, to say relatively little about translation while touching on a wide variety of other topics. I have, accordingly, limited myself to those extracts which bear directly on translation, as in Luther's famous *Letter*, for example, where I have excluded the (great majority of) passages dealing with all kinds of disputes between the German rulers of his time.

The texts have been arranged thematically, rather than chronologically. It is my conviction that translations are made under a number of constraints of which language is arguably the least important. I have therefore arranged the shorter texts according to the constraint they seem to address most obviously. Some texts deal with ideological constraints on the production of translations, with the power of patronage to enforce these constraints, with constraints of a more poetical nature, with so-called Universe of Discourse constraints and, finally, with both constraints imposed by the structure of different languages and attempts to expand the scope of languages in spite of these constraints. Other texts raise the question of the position of a central text in a culture and of a central culture in a configuration of cultures. Still other texts deal with the role translation has traditionally played in education. A final category of texts deals mainly with the technique of actual translating, usually in the form of lists of rules.

It is hoped that this arrangement will highlight the important topics that should be covered in any discussion of literary translation more effectively than any chronological arrangement could have done, even though the texts have been arranged chronologically within their respective sections, for reasons of historical continuity. Needless to say, I found myself pleasantly surprised and more than a little envious to discover the constraints I thought I had identified and elevated to the status of organizational categories neatly set out in Madame Dacier's introduction to her translation of the *Iliad*. This illuminating text therefore occupies the position of a "second introduction" to the present collection.

Both my surprise and my envy are symptomatic of current thinking on literary translation. Much of what we are saying has been said already, albeit in a different kind of jargon. This should not deter us, however. Looking back at the long tradition of thinking on translation in Western Europe, we realize that relatively recent attempts to limit discussions of translation to what pertains to constraints of language only, signally fail to do justice to the complexity of the problem. Furthermore, knowledge of the tradition, the genealogy of our thinking, helps us to focus not just on problems concerning translation as such, but also on ways in which the study of translation can be made productive for cultural studies in general. We are finally beginning to realize that translation deserves to occupy a much more central position in cultural history than the one to which it is currently relegated.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deep gratitude and great appreciation to Mr Roger Tavernier, chief bibliographer of the University Library in Leuven, Flanders, without whose help I would not have been able to gain access to some of the texts translated here, and most especially to my colleague and friend Dr Judith Woodsworth of Concordia University, Montreal, who has worked miracles proofreading the manuscript.

Introduction

A translation, says Petrus Danielus Huetius in a text translated in this collection, is “a text written in a well-known language which refers to and represents a text in a language which is not as well known.” This, to my mind, is the most productive definition of a translation made within the tradition represented here, simply because it raises many, if not all of the relevant questions at once.

First of all, why is it necessary to represent a foreign text in one’s own culture? Does the very fact of doing that not amount to an admission of the inadequacy of that culture? Secondly, who makes the text in one’s own culture “represent” the text in the foreign culture? In other words: who translates, why, and with what aim in mind? Who selects texts as candidates to “be represented?” Do translators? And are those translators alone? Are there other factors involved? Thirdly, how do members of the receptor culture know that the imported text is well represented? Can they trust the translator(s)? If not, who can they trust, and what can they do about the whole situation, short of not translating at all? If a translation is, indeed, a text that represents another, the translation will to all intents and purposes function as that text in the receptor culture, certainly for those members of that culture who do not know the language in which the text was originally written. Let us not forget that translations are made by people who do not need them for people who cannot read the originals. Fourthly, not all languages seem to have been created equal. Some languages enjoy a more prestigious status than others, just as some texts occupy a more central position in a given culture than others—the Bible, for instance, or the qur’an. Fifthly, why produce texts that “refer to” other texts? Why not simply produce originals in the first place?

So much for the questions. Now for some tentative answers, culled from the genealogy drawn up in this collection. If you produce a text that “refers to” another text, rather than producing your own, you are

most likely to do so because you think the other text enjoys a prestige far greater than the prestige your own text might possibly aspire to. In other words, you invoke the authority of the text you represent. It may be a sobering thought that some of the masterpieces of world literature, such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, profess to be translations of lost originals, i.e. that they refer to non-existent texts in order to derive some kind of legitimacy which, it is felt, would otherwise not be present to the same extent.

Translation has to do with authority and legitimacy and, ultimately, with power, which is precisely why it has been and continues to be the subject of so many acrimonious debates. Translation is not just a "window opened on another world," or some such pious platitude. Rather, translation is a channel opened, often not without a certain reluctance, through which foreign influences can penetrate the native culture, challenge it, and even contribute to subverting it. "When you offer a translation to a nation," says Victor Hugo, "that nation will almost always look on the translation as an act of violence against itself."

No wonder nations have always felt they needed some person or persons they could trust enough to entrust him or her with the task of translating: the Horatian "fidus interpres," or "trustworthy interpreter." It is important to remember that the trust is invested in the producer of the translation, not necessarily in the product itself. "Trusted" translators, like the group of translators who produced the Septuagint, in fact produced what is generally acknowledged as a relatively "bad" translation, but one that continues to function to this day as the "official" translation used by the Greek Orthodox Church. Trust may be more important than quality. Translations which members of a culture have come to trust may mean more to them than translations that can claim to represent the original better. Witness the following extract from one of St Augustine's letters to St Jerome:

When one of our brothers, a bishop, had introduced the use of your translation in the church of which he is the pastor, the congregation hit upon a passage in the prophet Jonah which you translated in a very different way from the way in which it had established itself in the mind and memory of all, and the way it has been sung for such a long time. Great unrest arose among the people, especially since the Greeks protested and began to shout about falsification in a vituperative manner. As a result the bishop—it happened in the town

of Onea—saw himself forced to rely on the Jews who lived in the city to clear up the matter. But they replied, either out of ignorance or out of malice, that the Hebrew manuscripts contained exactly what was also to be found in the Greek and Latin manuscripts. And then what? To escape from great danger the man was forced to correct himself, as if he had made a mistake, since he did not want to lose all the people in his church.

Obviously, trust is most important where the most central text of a culture is concerned, a text invoked to legitimize the power of those who wield it in that culture. It may just be possible that the West has paid so much attention to translation because its central text, the Bible, was written in a language it could not readily understand, so that it was forced to rely on translators to legitimize power. The other alternative was, of course, not to translate the central text at all, but to have those whose lives are ruled by it learn the language it is written in, or at least go through the necessary motions in that direction, as in the case of the Qur'an.

Huetius puts the matter in similar terms when he quotes St Jerome as saying

One word should be translated by one word in Holy Writ, *where even the order of the words is a mystery*, where a construction that has not been refined with great art often carries more than one sentence. Since the greater part of Holy Writ should not be studied for its elegance, however, Saint Jerome also admits that other texts should be translated in a different manner, nor does he always follow his own precepts.

Trust is one thing, expertise another. Not only does Huetius point to the ever present gulf between theory and practice, between what translators profess to be doing and what they actually do, he also suggests that trust need not be absolute in all cases. Translators can be trusted more with texts that are not central to the culture as a whole since they can only do limited damage at worst. Or, to put it simply in text-linguistic terms: different types of texts need to be translated in different ways.

The same reasoning has also been extended to different cultures. Whereas translators in the West have held Greek and Latin works in high esteem, as representing the expression of prestigious cultures within the Western world view, they have treated other cultures, not thought to enjoy a similar prestige, in a very different manner indeed. Edward Fitzgerald, translator of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, for instance, wrote to his friend E.B. Cowell in 1857: "It is an