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Classical Spanish Drama in Restoration English (1660–1700)

Jorge Braga Riera

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Introduction

In his article "What Lies beyond Descriptive Translation Studies?" (1997), Gideon Toury urged translation scholars not to limit themselves to descriptive studies of this discipline as an end in itself, but on the basis of the discoveries made in an initial contrastive study, to go one step further in their analysis. Toury's proposal is made in the context of the dominant trend in Translation Studies over the last two decades, of which he has been one of the principal proponents: Descriptive Studies of Translation, that is, those which, far from focusing on what translation should or should not be, attempt to analyse and understand what are the initial possible options determined by various factors and contexts. Starting from this premise, Toury suggests four phenomena for study: texts that are considered translations and have functioned as such, the relationships between a translation and the text that has served as its immediate source, the strategies employed in the process and, finally, the function the resulting text has in the target culture, that is, its position in the receptor society (Toury 1997: 71). This last aspect acquires a special relevance, since the study of a translation should never lose sight of the functions for which it was intended. Suppression and addition therefore appear as totally legitimate strategies to achieve a perfect adjustment of the text to the recipient culture.

When we undertake a study of this kind we cannot take as the starting point an arbitrary selection of translations; on the contrary, far from pretending to formulate universal generalisations, our conclusions will have greater validity if we analyse the behaviour of a well-defined corpus. An appropriate selection of texts will allow us to determine more coherently the behaviour of the translators and the results of their activity.

This present work is not intended, therefore, to be a prescriptive study of what Spanish Golden Age translators should or should not have done; rather, in the conviction that translation studies should move away from sterile, decontextualised debates, it will follow the descriptive trend of the last two decades and show what the translators under study actually did by focusing on some Restoration works which make up our particular corpus. The translations will be defined as such with reference to the target system into which they are incorporated, and not only in relation to the original texts. It will therefore be the needs and expectations of the destination culture that will determine how it is preferable to translate. What is more, the translator and his product may be affected by a series of variables that

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is very difficult, and in some cases practically impossible, to define, such as the translators' mastery of the source language, their experience, the context, the working conditions, the status of the original and target languages, the medium in which the translation is made and its position in the target language, the conception of translation in the period, etc.

The importance of these variables is all the greater if we include the factors that condition theatre translation, given the singularity of drama. The stage experience is based on a series of acts of complicity between the actors and actresses on the one hand and the spectators on the other, establishing a mechanism of communication between them. This relationship is set within a context of certain sociocultural circumstances existing at a precise moment, which makes each performance unique, with a specific effect on the spectator. The theatre translator usually intends his or her work to produce a "similar" reaction in the audience of the target culture to that of the original, although the techniques used to achieve this will depend on the author, the translator, the culture and tradition of the language into which the work is being translated and the historical period. The difficulties inherent in the immediacy of theatrical performance are thus added to those of translation itself.

In the following pages I shall attempt a descriptive analysis of the relationships between source and target texts on the basis of a corpus of Spanish comedies translated into English between 1660 and 1700, and in this way try to discover the reasons underlying certain decisions taken and determine how far various translation mechanisms were accepted in the period and the genre under study. Texts, relationships and strategies will therefore be the object of this analysis, but always from the position that the translated text is intended to occupy in the destination culture.

Such a perspective requires a framework of translation theory, and it is on this that the first chapter in the first part of the book will focus, with special emphasis on theatre translation, which, as a specific area, merits an analysis to itself. Although the transfer of information from one language to another dates back to the earliest civilisations, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the great revolution in translation theory took place. The sixties and seventies were rich in theories with an almost exclusively linguistic bias, giving way in the eighties to descriptive notions of the work of translation, in which the text and the target culture require maximum attention. There was, then, a change of perspective, known as "cultural turn", developed by a group of authors belonging to the so-called "Manipulation School". It was a member of this group, James Holmes, who coined the term "Translation Studies", and in so doing converted the activity of translation into a discipline in its own right.

This turn also stimulated the interest of theorists in theatre translation, until that time largely neglected. Authors and translators became aware that the transfer of dramatic texts supposes certain peculiarities that deserve special consideration: phonological and syntactic elements, gesture, stage components, the destination culture, the figure of the translator, their (in)visibility and sociohistorical context all become significant factors that the scholar must take into account. The spectator, too, is faced with a series of concepts ("adaptation", "version", "translation") used to define the target text, and which are the result of the specific condition of theatre translation. The term employed, and its significance, have varied through the ages, as has the level of acceptance of Spanish comedies abroad: after various centuries of almost total oblivion, Spanish classics seem once again to be awakening the interest of English theatre-goers, recalling the incipient interest in Spanish theatre in seventeenth-century England due to the work of a small group of translators.

The second chapter will deal with the presence of Spanish classics in England in the seventeenth century. Although it is true that during this century there was a marked interest in Spanish *comedias*, especially in the years following the Restoration, this does not mean that the adaptation of Spanish works was a prime concern; on the contrary, it was translations of the Graeco-Latin classics and religious texts that attracted most attention. Furthermore, even in the case of Romance language translations, other genres were more popular, and Spanish theatre translation was simply one of many activities, with nothing like the importance it had in countries such as France and Germany. A study of seventeenth-century English translation theory is therefore necessary if we are to understand the changes and transformations undergone by Spanish dramatic texts on the London stage of the time.

Although, as we have said, theatre is something more than words, for our study the text is the only source from which we can carry out our analysis. Despite the fact some of these texts were neglected and have undergone significant changes during their transmission (they were meant to be performed, not to be read), it is only from them that we can extract all the information. As a result, and even though some visual elements can be deduced from stage directions or references by the characters, many are irrevocably lost for analysis. This is due to the large number of non-text conventions in Spanish comedy (also present in the *commedia dell'arte* or in French playwrights such as Molière), which mean that the texts themselves are little more than a starting point for the future *mise-en-scène*, a dynamic corpus to be moulded to suit the particular circumstances. It is for this reason that in the study of translations in the second part of this book we never forget that the text is an object destined for performance, and therefore the elements related to that end are not overlooked.

The second chapter, too, reflects the political, historical, social and cultural context of English theatre of the time, in which, as we have said, Spanish drama made its influence felt. England turned towards Spain and its dramatists for characters and plots that might prove attractive to its audiences. This Spanish background is clear in many English plays, although it is limited to those works that may be considered more or less faithful translations of the original. Although scholars disagree as to whether certain works should be termed "translations", "adaptations" or simply works "with Spanish influences", all coincide in attributing to Spanish sources the five translated comedies that are the object of study here: *The Adventures of Five Hours*; *Elvira, or The Worst Not Always True*; *Tarugo's Wiles, or The Coffee-House*; *An Evening's Love, or The Mock Astrologer*; and *Sir Courtly Nice, or It Cannot Be.*

These five plays, all first performed in London during the Restoration period (1660–1700), together with their corresponding source texts, will be the focus of attention of the second and central part of this book, and in its pages we shall survey the multiplicity of aspects that are closely related to the work of the theatre translator. First, we shall justify our choice of translations and examine those responsible for them, and then make our first approximation on the basis of the contrast between plots, characters and titles (chapter three). As a starting point, it is interesting to analyse how these translators organised the action of their works, the way in which they gave expression to the three unities and to verse in comparison with the guidelines dictated by Lope de Vega in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*, as well as the treatment of stage directions and the English fondness for prologues, epilogues and songs.

In spite of all this, it is impossible to avoid the dual nature of the theatrical text, the ultimate aim of which is to be performed on stage; for this reason, apart from all the textual elements, there are extralinguistic factors with a specific weight in the end result of the translation: as seen in chapter four, this is the case with the rhythm and rhyme of the work, the use of gesture and the kind of scenic space that will house the translated work, together with other factors, economic or political, that may affect the target text and are, together with the type of translator and the weight of the destination culture, key elements in understanding many of the translation strategies adopted.

It is precisely culture which imposes an English stamp on many of the mechanisms employed in the translation process, and it becomes especially relevant in the way in which cultural references and proper nouns are translated into English (chapter five). In chapter six, the way in which the key themes of the Spanish comedies were received in England will be analysed, that is, the vision of love and women, of honour and, of course, humour in its different manifestations, both stage and textual. Finally, we shall briefly review the survival of *Siglo de Oro* comedy in the present day.

While it is true that the study of the influence of Spanish literature in England is not virgin territory, not many works focus exclusively on the genre of drama, still less on the period with which we are concerned. Furthermore, those authors that have compared the translations of Spanish classics during the Restoration with the originals (Allison Gaw, Patricia Seward, John Loftis, R.D. Hume and Floriana Tarantino, among others) have not done so as exhaustively as we have here, and in any case have taken a literary-comparative approach, never one that is translation-based. The novelty of this present work lies not only in its detailed study of the translations chosen, but also in how these are approached, always within the discipline of Translation Studies. In this way it aims to throw light on the reception of Spanish Golden Age theatre in the English speaking world, what texts the English public received, what they were about, why they were translated and why they took a particular form, in what sense they differed from their originals…, that is, it aims to take the "step further" suggested by Toury for descriptive analyses of translation, and, also, improve knowledge of the history of translation on the basis of a modest contribution to Translation Studies, particularly as regards drama.

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PART I

Background

CHAPTER 1

On drama translation

The transfer of literary texts from a language (source) to another (target) dates back to the origins of literary activity. Nonetheless, Translation Studies is a relatively new discipline, let alone Drama Translation Studies, which has remained unnoticed by most scholars until recent years.

The contribution to the study of theatre translation of strictly linguistic translation theories (characteristic of the sixties and seventies) has been practically negligible. Their exclusively scientific analysis of language and the great importance given to the original text left other essential elements in the translation process to one side. Even the notion of "equivalence", which constituted an important contribution at the time and was shared by all the currents involved, was not exempt from controversy from the moment it was formulated (Vinay & Darbelnet, Nida & Jakobson were the first to employ this concept), as it was difficult to reach agreement on its scope and meaning. The lack of clarity in this term was due both to the multiplicity of adjectives that accompanied the word "equivalence" (formal, dynamic, referential, ideal, etc.) and to the textual and extratextual factors that affect the translation process, making it very difficult to achieve a definition that would include all genres and types of translation. This became particularly evident in the case of theatre translation, as the textual context (genre and cultural elements), the end purpose of the translation (whether to be read or performed) and the socio-historical context (the target country of the work) meant that equivalences varied and the translator would use different techniques in each case, reaching solutions that might be appropriate on some occasions but not on others.

1.1 The "cultural turn" and the translation of drama

The appearance in the eighties of the term "culture" as a key concept in translation studies supposed an important shift of direction in the theories postulated until then. The process of translation, far from being a mere transfer of significants and signifiers from one language to another, could not overlook those extra-linguistic features that constitute an integral part of a text, that is, the translator could not ignore the culture of the source language, much less that of the target language. Indeed, this latter became the prime reference in the practice of translation, which is, therefore, "culture bound" (Álvarez & Vidal 1996: 2). This is recognised by Bassnett (1996a: 22) when she enumerates the five steps that the theatre translator should follow when faced with a specific problem in drama translation (although they may also be applicable to other genres):

(1) Accept the untranslatability of the SL phrase in the TL on the linguistic level.
(2) Accept the lack of a similar cultural convention in the TL.
(3) Consider the range of TL phrases available, having regard to the presentation of class, status, age, sex of the speaker, his relationship to the listeners and the context of their meeting in the SL.
(4) Consider the significance of the phrase in its particular context – i.e. as a moment of high tension in the dramatic text.
(5) Replace in the TL the invariant core of the SL phrase in its two referential systems (the particular system of the text and the system of culture out of which the text has sprung).

Context and the target culture are thus raised above merely linguistic considerations.

Although in the late seventies researchers such as Even-Zohar or Gideon Toury contributed, with their "polysystem theory", to an approach that, while largely historical, had a broader application in the study of translation, it was not until the eighties that what Lefevere has termed the "cultural turn" was conceptualised by a group of students in the field that included Toury, Susan Bassnett-McGuire and Raymond van den Broeck. These authors, together with other translation theorists, set out their vision of translation in a series of articles that were brought together under the title *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation* (1985). According to the theories of this school, manipulation invariably starts with the translator, who modifies the source text either to adapt it to the conventions and expectations of the code into which it is received, or to make the target text formally resemble the original as far as possible. As Snell-Hornby (1988: 24) puts it, "in this approach, translation is seen essentially as a text-type in its own right, as an integral part of the target culture and not merely as a reproduction of another text". This explains her proposal that the old theories and methods which have contributed to the development of translation studies should be revised to create "an integrated approach that considers translation in its entirety, and not only certain forms of it" (*ibid.*: 26).

If, according to this definition, the translation becomes an integral part of the target culture, we shall have to explain what we understand by "culture" and what exactly it is that we mean by "translating culture". When we speak of culture, we are not referring to human intellectual capacity and its reflection in the world of arts, but rather "in the broader anthropological sense to refer to all *socially conditioned* aspects of human life" (Hymes in Snell-Hornby 1988: 39). This concept is vital when it comes to translating diverse cultural elements since, as Vermeer affirms, "if language is an integral part of culture, the translator needs not only to be proficient in two languages, but must also be at home in two cultures. In other words, he must be bilingual and bicultural" (in Snell-Hornby 1988: 42). These two concepts, bilingualism and biculturalism, will be especially important in our study of Spanish *comedias* in English.

This new focus in the translation process is important not only on account of its cultural, communicative and functionalist perspective, but also because, as we shall see shortly, some of the members of the *Manipulation School* started to research in depth the specificity of theatre translation.

Snell-Hornby (1988: 43–44) summarises the main maxims of translation theory in the eighties, thus: a cultural rather than merely linguistic orientation; the concept of translation not as transcodification but as a communicative act; emphasis on the target text, and the conception of the text not as an element in isolation but as an integral part of the world in which we live. To these four characteristics should be added that proposed by Susan Bassnett (in Mateo 1995a: 27), and which appears to have dominated translation studies in the nineties: that of the visibility of the translator, in what way and in what circumstances this presence is noticed, that is, it becomes visible.[1] This new image of the translator contradicts that of some scholars in the eighties (like Wellwarth, imitating Gogol), for whom "the ideal translation [is] one that is like a completely transparent pane of glass through which people can see the original without being aware of anything intervening" (Wellwarth in Espasa 2000: 57). According to this definition, the ideal translation is that which is felt to be original, in no way reflecting the hand that has made it. We shall return to this point when we come to deal with the specific complexity of theatre translation.

The importance given to the translator and the continuation of the "cultural turn" that had occurred in the previous decade are two fundamental factors in the development of Translation Studies in the late nineties. Once the concept of "equivalence" had lost its key position in language transfer, the thesis began to take root that "translations are never produced in a vacuum, and that they are also never received in a vacuum" (Lefevere & Bassnett 1990: 3). The translator translates "the culture to which the text belongs, the culture the translation is aimed at,

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[1] This adjective takes on a special meaning in the context of theatre translation. Aaltonen (2000: 32) complains of laxness in the criteria on which translators are chosen for certain works. In some cases the original text is translated literally by one person and then adapted for the stage by another, while in others, for purely economic motives, prestigious dramatists lend their name to a translation previously made by someone else; they receive the credit and the real translator becomes an "invisible" figure consigned to anonymity.

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