
Translation, Poetics, and the Stage

Six French *Hamlets*

Romy Heylen

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London and New York

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Translation Studies

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Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame
André Lefevere

Translation/History/Culture *edited by André Lefevere*

Voor Sjoeki

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 next 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 re-writings, 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 process 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

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
Introduction: A cultural model of translation	1
1 Jean-François Ducis' <i>Hamlet, Tragédie imitée de l'anglois</i>	26
A neoclassical tragedy?	
2 Alexandre Dumas and Paul Meurice's <i>Hamlet, Prince de Danemark</i>	45
Translation as an exercise in power	
3 Marcel Schwob and Eugène Morand's <i>La Tragique Histoire d'Hamlet</i>	61
A folkloric prose translation	
4 The blank verse shall halt for't	77
André Gide's <i>La Tragédie d'Hamlet</i>	
5 Yves Bonnefoy's <i>La Tragédie d'Hamlet</i>	92
An allegorical translation	
6 Theatre as translation/Translation as theatre	122
<i>Shakespeare's Hamlet</i> by the Théâtre du Miroir	
Concluding remarks	137
Appendix: Table of selected <i>Hamlet</i> productions	140
<i>Notes</i>	146
<i>Index</i>	165

Introduction: A cultural model of translation

The development of translation studies as an academic field evolved from the work of the Russian linguist Andrei Fedorov and the American Eugene A. Nida who, using the insights of linguistics and the findings of logic, semantics, information and communications theory, discovered in translation certain regularities which they described in the form of theoretical statements. Subsequently, the study of translation came to be considered as one of two special branches of linguistics: either as applied or as comparative or contrastive linguistics. Yet the validity of the incorporation of translation studies exclusively into the discipline of linguistics is questionable. Translation theorists have pointed out that this integration only occurred in the first place due to a confusion of the field of study with the method of study.¹ Literary scholars and social scientists could likewise have annexed the investigation of translations and translating, respectively. Whereas in the past literary scholars, especially comparatists, seldom concerned themselves with translations as instruments of mediation and influence between national literatures, there has lately been a growing interest in the phenomenon of translation. The shift of attention in literary studies to considerations of the impact, reception, and communicative function of a literary work of art has acted as the motivating factor behind the study of literary translations and the role they play in the literary process.²

In recent years, the field of translation studies has become a relatively independent discipline with clearly delineated goals, i.e. the description of translations and translation processes and the discovery of general rules for the development of models capable of explaining these phenomena.³ In addition

to this descriptive and theoretical aspect, translation studies as an academic discipline involves the development of lexicographical, contrastive-grammatical, and comparative stylistic tools, translation criticism, and translation training.

Translation has traditionally been accorded a low academic status, since it was considered to be a secondary or derivative activity whose very existence depended on other primary or "original" text production.⁴ The comparison of translations with original works inevitably resulted in the evaluation of translations in terms of "right" and "wrong." The main objective critics had was to find fault with the translator and to pinpoint "mistakes" in the translation. The assumption was that all translations were in some way destined to fail the original, neatly reducing the critics' task to that of deciding whether or not a translation was "faithful" to the original text. Such an ideal was and is based on the principle of complete "equivalence," which is thought to ensure the accuracy of a translation. The conditions for equivalence are postulates of normative and absolute theories concerned with the problem of translatability. They imply a mechanical transfer of translation units or certain fixed data. While such normative, or prescriptive theories find a ready-made application in the research for machine translation, concerned with contemporary texts which contain technical information, they are not ideally suited to the analysis of literary translations.

Prescriptive theories of translation, at least in the English-speaking world, have their roots in the eighteenth century. Alexander Tytler's *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1791) is generally considered to be the first theoretical essay on the subject in English.⁵ Tytler introduces his essay with a description of a "good translation" and establishes the "general rules" derived from that description.⁶ Although it attempts to be a systematic study of the translation process in English, Tytler's essay is essentially a manual for eighteenth-century professional and amateur translators. The general, prescriptive rules are: (1) the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work; (2) the style and manner of writing should be of the same character as that of the original; (3) the translation should read with all the ease and fluency of the original composition.⁷ These "laws" are abundantly illustrated. Tytler's essay offers a blueprint, examples, and several

translation rules for eighteenth-century translators. His essay belongs to what today would be called applied translation studies and reflects eighteenth-century translation poetics.

However, most theories on translation, not just Tytler's, have been normative. The norms contained in these theories consist of the authors' personal, national, and time-bound values, which they have elevated to the status of general and universal rules. A more recent example of such a normative translation theory can be found in Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber's *The Theory and Practice of Translation*.⁸ Their guidebook for what should be done in specific instances of translation establishes

certain fundamental sets of priorities: (1) contextual consistency has priority over verbal consistency (or word-for-word concordance), (2) dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence, (3) the aural (heard) form of language has priority over the written form, (4) forms that are used by and acceptable to the audience for which a translation is intended have priority over forms that may be traditionally more prestigious.⁹

This "system of priorities" constitutes a normative theory which presents itself as a general theory of translation, although it is actually designed for a particular kind of text (the Bible), to help out a particular kind of translator (the modern Bible translator), and adheres to a particular notion of how the Bible should be read (aloud in worship services rather than, say, silently in one's home). These prescriptive theories of translation set out to discuss translation problems specific to certain texts, but very soon they prescribe what translation in general *should be*, and then develop a taxonomy of rules and laws for all translations.

Most contemporary theories of translation could be called prescriptive. This is partly due to the hybrid role of translation, which is both a technique for teaching and learning a foreign language, and an exercise to be taught and learned in itself. Translations rendered by students need to be judged according to certain criteria. Future professional translators are expected to produce reliable interpretations, and they have to be evaluated by their teachers. Critics who review published translations are asked to offer an informative judgment on the performance

of the translator or on the translation's value.¹⁰ All these activities occur within a prescriptive framework.

Those who advocate normative approaches to translation have traditionally been insensitive to certain socio-cultural aspects which play an important role in the translation process. They reduce the problem of translation to the problem of translatability and ignore the conditions under which translations are produced so that they may function in the receiving culture. In reality, however, the conditions required to produce "equivalence" differ from period to period, and from language culture to language culture. A text which functions as a translation today may not be called a "translation" tomorrow and may be named a "version" instead; a translation strategy (turning verse into prose) which was valid in the past may not be seen to be the most effective strategy of reflecting the original today. Historical changes and the socio-cultural context of the reception of translation determine a reader's expectations, and form part of his or her notion of what constitutes translation.

Jean-François Ducis translated Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into alexandrines and the play subsequently became the most frequently produced eighteenth-century drama at the Comédie Française after the works of Voltaire.¹¹ Marcel Schwob and Eugène Morand, 130 years later, translated the play into an artificially created seventeenth-century French prose, which was hailed by contemporary critics as daring and innovative, and performed by Sarah Bernhardt to packed houses in 1899.¹² Normative theorists would simply regard such translations as horrible mistakes. Since they are concerned with the evaluation of translations only on the basis of their own pre-established criteria, they can only tell us whether they are "good" or "bad" according to their own time-bound rules. Normative approaches offer no insight into the specific rationale behind certain translation practices, such as those behind the Ducis and the Schwob-Morand translations of *Hamlet*. Paying attention to historical and cultural constraints on translation, however, makes us more aware of the reasons behind a translator's decisions. A historically descriptive translation model can account for such "non-equivalent" efforts as those of Ducis and Schwob-Morand and will lead discussions away from normative notions of "right" and "wrong." At the end of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare's blank verse was an unfamiliar

poetic form for French readers. In order to appropriate *Hamlet* and to make the play accessible to French readers and spectators, Ducis decided to make use of a form to which they were accustomed. At the end of the nineteenth century Schwob and Morand sought to make the play produce the same reaction (in terms of its poetic and dramatic effect) in French readers and spectators as in their English counterparts, by grounding the play in French folklore. These examples demonstrate that translation can be a goal-oriented socio-cultural activity. Other translators, from different cultures and different time periods, will render *Hamlet* differently, not because they are making mistakes, but because they are working under different socio-historical and cultural constraints. Hence, in order to explain the time- and culture-bound criteria which play an important role in the translator's activity, a non-prescriptive translation model is essential. A descriptive, historical model of translation goes beyond questions of whether and to what degree a translation matches an original; it investigates the underlying constraints and motivations which inform the translation process. Translation is a teleological activity of a profoundly transformative nature. Therefore, normative models of translation based on the absolute concept of equivalence need to be replaced by a historical-relative and socio-cultural model of translation.

The proposal of a framework for such a cultural model of translation is necessarily beholden to a number of concepts developed by individual translation theorists whose work has taken them toward the advocacy of a basically functional, socio-culturally rooted framework for the study of translation. Itamar Even-Zohar, for example, introduces the idea of the polysystem; Gideon Toury adds the important notion of translational norms; James S. Holmes refers to his conception of the "translator's map" and also includes the notion of shifts in his analysis of the translation process. Jiří Levý, meanwhile, posits a framework based on a view of translation as a rebus which the translator must solve by means of a teleological decision-making process, necessarily involving shifts. For Lawrence Venuti, translation is largely a code-abiding process within the context of capitalist society, as opposed to Barbara Harlow, for whom the process of translation is a strategy of cultural resistance within the framework of deconstruction and

decolonization. Finally, the outline for the cultural model of translation proposed here is indebted to André Lefevere's notion of translation as a form of rewriting which in turn makes use of Fredric Jameson's concept of the master code as a means of interpreting the translation of texts as an exercise in manipulation.

Itamar Even-Zohar's collection of essays, *Papers in Historical Poetics*, introduces the idea of literature and translated literature as a polysystem.¹³ His approach is based on the working hypothesis that it is more convenient to take all sorts of literary and semi-literary texts as an aggregate of systems, a heterogeneous system of systems, or a polysystem. Even-Zohar first posited the concept of the literary polysystem in 1970 in order to study the relationship between different kinds of texts: "great" literary works, popular literature, translations, etc. His approach is deeply rooted in the structuralist and semiotic traditions of the Russian Formalists and Czech Structuralists.

Even-Zohar focuses on the relationships between various types of literature and their synchronic and diachronic interaction. He observes that the part played by translations in a literature is inherently connected with the historical evolution of that literature. Every literary system necessarily exists as an evolution and this evolution is inescapably of a systemic nature. This means that the opposition between the synchronic and diachronic study of literature loses its importance in principle. Averse to translation studies which treat "translated works" as individual units in isolation from other texts, Even-Zohar argues for the study of translation in terms of "historical functions." In other words, individual literary translations and their intrinsic meaning are no longer considered a relevant object for literary studies. Instead, Even-Zohar encourages the investigation of translations in their systemic relationship with the surrounding literary polysystem. This theory conceives of literature as a stratified whole, itself a polysystem whose main components are "canonized" as opposed to "non-canonized" literature, each consisting in its turn of separate sub-systems or genres. The term "canonized literature" roughly indicates what is generally considered major literature: those kinds of literary works accepted by the literary milieu and usually preserved by the community as part of its cultural heritage. "Non-canonized literature" refers to those kinds of literary

works which are usually rejected by the literary milieu as lacking in "aesthetic value." Even-Zohar recognizes that canonization is not a simple notion; the dichotomy he refers to also denotes the tension between official and unofficial cultural strata. The intra-systemic relationships within a polysystem are ultimately constrained by a larger socio-cultural system. Many components of this mechanism have been transformed into functions operating within co-systems "closer" to the literary polysystem; sub-divisions of "literary life," for example literary institutions such as publishing houses, periodicals, critical works, and other mediating factors, often channel the "more remote" constraints of the socio-cultural system. Literary stratification does not operate on the level of "texts" alone, nor are texts stratified exclusively according to features inherent in them. Rather, the constraints imposed upon the "literary" polysystem by its various semiotic co-systems (religious, political, socio-economic, etc.) contribute their share to the hierarchical relationships which govern it.

The various literary systems and types maintain hierarchical relationships: some occupy a more central position than others, or some are "primary" while others are "secondary." "Primary" activity is presumed to be that activity which takes the initiative when it comes to the creation of new items and models in literature; it represents the principle of innovation. "Secondary" activity, on the other hand, is conceived of as a derivative and conservative activity; it represents the principle which conforms to established norms and codes.

Translated literature must be included in the literary polysystem in order that its interaction with other literary systems may be studied. Whether translated literature becomes primary or secondary depends, according to Even-Zohar, upon the specific circumstances operating within the polysystem. As long as it maintains a primary function, translated literature participates actively in shaping the center of the polysystem. This situation often results in the blurring of any clear-cut distinction between original and translated writings. Perceived as such, translations are likely to become one of the ways of elaborating new models and will form an integral part of innovative forces in the receiving culture. Even-Zohar distinguishes three major historical moments in which translated literature may acquire a primary position: (1) when a poly-

system has not yet been crystallized (i.e. when a literature is "young," for instance, or in the process of being established); (2) when a literature is either "peripheral" or "weak" or both; (3) when there are turning points, crises, or "literary vacuums" in a literature. At any of these moments translated literature may assume a primary position within a literary polysystem. However, if translated literature occupies a secondary position, it cannot influence the canonization of works in the receiving literature and will be modeled according to norms already conventionally established; in such cases it operates as a major force for the preservation of the receiving cultural norms and models. The conditions under which translated literature assumes a secondary position indicate either that there are no major changes in the polysystem or that these changes are not brought about through the intervention of interliterary relations manifest in the form of translation.

The hypothesis that translated literature may fall into either a primary or secondary category does not imply, however, that it is always wholly one or the other. As a system, translated literature is itself stratified, and it is from the vantage point of the central stratum that all other relations within the system are observed: while one section of translated literature may assume a primary position, another may remain secondary. The major clue to this issue, according to Even-Zohar, is the close relationship between literary contacts and the status of translated literature. Arguing against gratuitous "influence" studies, Even-Zohar suggests some universals of "literary contacts."¹⁴ He also reminds us that not all polysystems are structured in the same way and that cultures do differ significantly, especially in their "openness" toward other literatures or in the flexibility with which they negotiate cultural differences.¹⁵

The position translated literature occupies at a given point in time also has its bearing on translational norms, the prevailing literary taste, and the policies of publishers and editors with regard to foreign material. The distinction between a translated work and an original work in terms of literary behavior, for instance, is, according to Even-Zohar, a clear function of the position assumed by translated literature at a certain time. When translated literature takes up a primary position, the borderlines between translated works and original works are diffuse. The translator's main concern in this case is not to look