



# translation — theory and practice

## A HISTORICAL READER

*edited by* Daniel Weissbort & Astradur Eysteinnsson



# TRANSLATION— THEORY AND PRACTICE: A HISTORICAL READER

EDITED BY  
DANIEL WEISSBORT  
AND  
ASTRADUR EYSTEINSSON



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## PREFACE

The aim of this book is to illuminate the essential activity of translation from a number of perspectives: historical and contemporary, theoretical and practical. At the same time, the contents of the present volume speak in many modes and voices to literary and cultural history, and to cross-cultural relations through the ages. The book draws on several hundred texts, translations, and texts about translation, ranging from classical antiquity to the present. Some are reprinted in their entirety, while others are excerpted, and the editors have supplied notes and introductions. Many of the texts included also themselves contain examples from translations under discussion, so that on the whole, this volume pulls together a sizeable world of translation.

For the sake of coherence and due to obvious limits of magnitude, a large part of the volume focuses on *translation into English*, although it contains several texts that discuss translation in general terms, and others that were originally written in (and concern translation into) other languages. The volume should be useful for anyone interested in the history and theory of translation, for what is true of the transfer from one specific language and culture into another may obviously be highly relevant—given important and interesting differences—for other parallel situations.

When we first started working on this project together, we had in mind to put together a collection of foundational texts in translation studies, from Cicero to around the mid-twentieth century, including several important prefaces by translators in the English tradition. As work progressed, the concept started changing. We realized that we did not want to limit the volume to a canon of a few statements of translation studies as a theoretical discipline. There were three basic reasons for this.

First, we wanted to bring across to our readers how valuable reflections about translation took form in contexts of actual translation practice. Some of the most important texts in the literary history of the English language, for instance the Bible and the Homeric epics, are translated again and again through the centuries. Hence, it is the need for translation, and the practice of translation, which opens the gateway between the present and history. So the sense of translation practice had to be built into the volume, if only by short examples of the main concern of many of those who have also made important historical comments on translation.

Second, we wanted to end the historical survey with a collection of recent and contemporary material in the field of translation. Ultimately, this material came to constitute the largest chapter of the volume, one that was extremely difficult to select, since we wanted to provide our readers with an insight into both the vibrant and growing field of translation theory, and at the same time to approach translation studies from a broad angle, emphasizing, again, the connection between the critical discussion and the practice of translation (even though we've had to restrain the length of examples from translations).

Third, we felt that limiting our selection to relatively few texts, even though this had the benefit of allowing us to reprint most of them as a whole, did not convey the multifariousness, or indeed the complexity, of translation studies as we understand that term. Yet, the volume must not be allowed to become an oversized collection of short quotations. We wanted to go for both breadth and depth and this is what we struggled with for a long time. The final product contains several texts that appear in their entirety, while we have selected what we felt are the most salient parts of others. Many of the entries focus on a single translator and/or critic, and some of them are presented in more extensive 'collages' (for instance Dryden, Pound, and Nabokov), a mode of selection and introduction we have also used to cover the translation activity in certain periods.

We put some of these collages in charge of specialists in the respective fields, and we should very much like to thank these colleagues for their contributions. They are Jonathan Wilcox, Jane Stevenson, David Hopkins, Ronnie Apter, Jenefer Coates, and Vinay Dharwadker. Most of the entries were prepared jointly by the two editors in what was a long-standing and enjoyable collaboration. In some cases, however, entries were largely selected and introduced by one of us. Thus, Daniel Weissbort prepared 'Classical Latin and Early Christian Latin Translation', 'Late Tudor and Early Jacobean Translation', 'The Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible', 'Anne Dacier', 'Alexander Pope', 'Samuel Johnson', 'Five Nineteenth-Century Translators', 'Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig', 'Ethnopoetics: Translation of the Oral and of Oral Performance', 'Translation of Verse Form', and 'Ted Hughes'; while Astradur Eysteinnsson prepared 'Renaissance Latin Translation in England', 'Johann Wolfgang von Goethe', 'Friedrich Schleiermacher', 'Victorian Translation and Criticism', 'Walter Benjamin', 'Jiří Levý', 'George Steiner', 'Mary Snell-Hornby', 'Gayatri Spivak', 'Talal Asad', and 'Eva Hoffman'. However, the shaping and presentation of many other entries, as well as the editing of the volume as whole, was our joint effort.

This is not only a book about translators—it is also one in which we had to rely on the help of a number of translators who provided valuable texts: special thanks go to Louis Kelly, but also to Stavros Deligiorgis, Jennifer Tanner, Norma Rinsler, and Gottskalk

Jensson. We thank Gardar Baldvinsson for scanning and other assistance in the preparation of the manuscript, Susan Benner for helping us with the preparation of some texts, Agnes Vogler for her work on the index, and Theo Hermans for his advice concerning the inclusion of material regarding Renaissance Latin translation in England.

We are, last but not least, deeply grateful to our wives, Valentina Polukhina and Anna Johannsdottir, for all their help, advice, and encouragement in the preparation of this book.

D.W. and A.E.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Editors:

**Daniel Weissbort** (b. 1935) is Emeritus Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Iowa; Honorary Professor in the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Warwick; Research Fellow, English Department, King's College, London University. He has published poetry of his own and translations of poetry, primarily from Russian. Publications include a number of anthologies, most recently *An Anthology of Contemporary Russian Women's Poetry* (with Valentina Polukhina; University of Iowa Press and Carcanet, 2006) and a translational memoir of Joseph Brodsky, *From Russian with Love* (Anvil, 2004). His *Selected Translations of Ted Hughes* (Faber) is to appear in 2006 and a book on Ted Hughes and translation is forthcoming from OUP. With the late Ted Hughes he founded the magazine, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, which he edited from 1965 to 2003.

**Astradur Eysteinnsson** (b. 1957) is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Iceland (Reykjavik). His publications include co-translations of works by Franz Kafka and Max Frisch into Icelandic, several articles in the general area of literary, cultural, and translation studies, various editorial projects, and three books: *The Concept of Modernism* (Cornell UP 1990), *Tvímæli* (on translation and translation studies, University of Iceland Press 1996) and *Umbrot* (on literature and modernity, University of Iceland Press 1999).

Scholars who provided the editors with new translations or who edited some of the individual sections of the volume:

**Ronnie Apter** is Professor of English at Central Michigan University. Her publications include 20 performable opera translations and the books *Digging for the Treasure: Translation after Pound* (1984; 1987) and a bilingual edition of the Love Songs of Bernart de Ventadorn in Occitan and English: *Sugar and Salt* (1999).

**Jenefer Coates** teaches literary translation and comparative literature at Middlesex University, London. She has edited various journals including *In Other Words* for the

Translators Association. Besides translating from French and Russian, she also writes on literary subjects, and is completing a book on intertextuality in Vladimir Nabokov, focusing on his use of medieval sources.

**Stavros Deligiorgis**, a University of Iowa professor emeritus, has published articles on the pre-Socratics, on the Hellenistic and Byzantine romances, and on Chaucer and Boccaccio. Deligiorgis has Englished contemporary Greek fiction (by Thanassis Valtinos; with Jane Assimakopoulos), Romanian poetry by Tristan Tzara, Eugene Ionesco, and Paul Celan, and has regularly participated in performance and inter-media art projects. Currently, he teaches in the Graduate Translation Studies Program of the University of Athens, Greece.

**Vinay Dharwadker** is Professor of Languages and Cultures of Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he teaches Indian literatures, literary studies, and modern theory. A poet, painter, and scholar, he translates poetry from Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit, Punjabi, and Urdu into English. His publications include *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (co-edited, 1994), *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan* (general editor, 1999), and *Kabir: The Weaver's Songs* (2003; 2005).

**David Hopkins** is Professor of English Literature at the University of Bristol. His chief research interests are in the English poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in the reception of Classical literature in England. Among his recent publications are (ed., with Paul Hammond) *The Poems of John Dryden* (5 vols., Longman Annotated English Poets) and (ed. with Stuart Gillespie) *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, Vol. 3: 1660–1790.

**Gottskalk Jensson** is a lecturer in Comparative Literature at the University of Iceland. He is a specialist in Classical Literature (Greek and Roman) and his publications include *The Recollections of Encolpius: The Satyrical of Petronius as Milesian Fiction* (2004).

**Louis Kelly** is Emeritus Professor of Translation History and Theory at the University of Ottawa and Senior Member of Darwin College, Cambridge. His publications include *Twenty-five Centuries of Language Teaching* (1969) and *The True Interpreter* (1979).

**Norma Rinsler** is Emeritus Professor of French at King's College London, and was Managing Editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 1992–2003. She is currently collaborating on the 5-volume translation of Paul Valéry's *Cahiers/Notebooks* (2000 – ).

**Jane Stevenson** is Professor of Latin at the University of Aberdeen. She has written extensively about early modern women Latinists. Her publications include *Women*



*Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (2005).

**Jennifer Tanner** has a B.A. in German Literature from Oberlin College and a M.F.A. in Literary Translation from the University of Iowa. She is currently working as a freelance translator of German and Russian.

**Jonathan Wilcox** is Professor of English at the University of Iowa. He is a specialist in Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature and his publications include *Ælfric's Prefaces* (1994; 1996) and *Wulfstan Texts and Other Homiletic Materials* (2000), along with numerous essays on Anglo-Saxon literature and culture.

But clearly there are many more contributors to this book, from Babel to present-day Britain.

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Astradur Eysteinnsson and Daniel Weissbort

How do works of literature and scholarship acquire international status? How have ideas and theories, learning and religion, historical and practical knowledge, traversed the globe? How have various transactions between groups and nations with different customs and conditions been facilitated? How do we learn of what has transpired in distant places?

To a large extent by building linguistic bridges across the channels that divide language spheres and cultural regions, whether by the rewriting of messages and works in another tongue, or through other interventions by individuals who possess knowledge in more than one language and can therefore act as cultural mediators.

In the empires of Antiquity, interpreters were essential intermediaries in trade and the various matters of state. With the onset of printing, some of this work was transferred to translators, who also came to play a key role in disseminating, and passing on to later generations, the documents that were to form the canons of literature, learning, and religion, works such as the Homeric epics, the Bible, and Greek drama, philosophy, and history, to mention obvious examples in the Western tradition.

Translation has been instrumental in the formation of writing and literary culture in every European language ('European' here refers to more than the geographical area of Europe, as defined today). Indeed, the history of international contact and cultural development, within and beyond Europe, can be traced by noting the routes of translation. Translation is still of the utmost importance in the affairs of a world that has gone through the rapid technological development called modernization, which furthermore has enhanced international relations to the point where people feel they can legitimately talk of 'globalization'. While this development is far from having reached all parts of the world in equal measure, it is true that science, media, entertainment, commerce, and the many forms of international relations embrace the globe so extensively now, that translation becomes an almost overwhelming issue, indeed a 'problem' (the notion of the 'problem of translation' has a long and colourful history). Many see a possible solution in the adoption of a single global language, and it seems that English is well on its way to

taking on this international role, as Latin did in the very different circumstances of the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

But the notion of a global culture in a single language is not a promising prospect; indeed, it is, perhaps fortunately, virtually inconceivable. Vital cultural expressions always involve both the local and the global; the problem of translation is inherent in them, and therefore also in their dispersion and historical delivery. In the world of literature, and in many domains of knowledge and culture, the need for translation is as great as ever. It is a need for trails of understanding between cultures that express themselves in different tongues. The blazing of such trails also facilitates understanding *within* cultures which may be more internally divisive than is apparent. The discovery of the other within ourselves is another by-product of translation.

The aim of this volume is to illuminate translation from a number of perspectives: historical and contemporary, theoretical and practical. The texts are drawn from a long stretch of Western history; from Homeric and biblical texts, via the translation of these and other texts at various times, via numerous commentaries on translation by figures like Cicero, King Alfred, John Dryden, and George Eliot, to translations as well as critical discussions by contemporary authors. The main focus of the anthology is on literary translation, and hence on the art as well as the craft of translation. But this does not imply that we are insisting upon hard and fast lines between literary and other forms of translation, be they scholarly, technical, or pragmatic in any other sense. Literary translation—as much as literature itself—draws on experience from diverse fields of human experience, and its discursive operations overlap with those of other kinds of translation. Literature combines cultural and aesthetic values, and this makes its translation so difficult and challenging, but also so urgent. It is because of this concentrated linguistic expression that poetry has so often been seen as the test case of translation—to the point where it has been defined as that which is not translatable. Yet, a great deal of poetry has been and continues to be translated, and it is important to emphasize that the lessons of literary translation are of course also relevant to other kinds of translation, although there they may often be downplayed by pressing contextual and practical concerns—these, of course, may also operate with regard to literary translation. Literary translation, as much as any other translation activity, takes place in concrete socio-cultural contexts, where a sufficient need has been felt to transport a linguistic product from one language to another. As George Steiner has pointed out, arguments against verse translation are arguments against all translation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Attacks on the translation of poetry are simply the barbed edge of the general assertion that no language can be translated without fundamental loss. Formally and substantively the same points can be urged in regard to prose.'

But literary texts of course also demand particular attention to language itself, its resonances and references, its historical depth as well as its personal relevance, and this gives an extra dimension to the 'problem' of the translation. This is obviously not only true of *literature* in the narrow sense, but also in a broader one, not excluding religious, mythological, and oratorical discourse, or various texts of philosophy, history, and other humanistic disciplines. Translation has to attend to the language and cultural heritage of such works, for it also has the function of extending that heritage, of lending it another kind of historical depth, of transforming it into a cross-cultural tradition.

'Translation' is a concept that is missing in Raymond Williams's useful book *Keywords*. It would, quite appropriately, have come right after 'Tradition'. However, it is, to an extent, embodied in Williams's entry on 'tradition', a word that 'came into English in C14 from *fw tradicion*, oF [Old French], *traditionem*, L[atin], from *rw tradere*, L—to hand over or deliver. The Latin noun had the senses of (i) delivery, (ii) handing down knowledge, (iii) passing on a doctrine, (iv) surrender or betrayal'.<sup>2</sup> Translation, too, hands over or delivers, and it is instrumental in passing on and handing down documents deemed worthy of such delivery. Interestingly, the notion of betrayal is also very much a part of the history of the concept of translation, the proverbial truth being that the translator is a traitor ('traduttore traditore'), that he or she is constitutionally incapable of delivering the original. In a recent report, for instance, in the *Guardian* newspaper (Saturday, 12 June 2004, p. 4), on the dropping of Latin and Greek by the largest examination board in the UK, a teacher of Classics, no less, is quoted as saying—quite casually one feels, and not fearing contradiction: 'And it is not enough to trust those who translate, for he who translates, not only explains but corrupts.' Williams says of the 'ceremony, duty and respect' often associated with tradition: 'Considering only how much has been handed down to us, and how various it actually is, this, in its own way, is both a betrayal and a surrender.'<sup>3</sup>

Yet, as Williams points out elsewhere, tradition is always 'selective',<sup>4</sup> this also being true of translation. Moreover, the selection process, in other words canon-formation, that forms the basis of literary traditions, is—unless we are working strictly within national borders—dependent upon translations, which secure the 'survival' of the work and attend to its 'ripening' process, as Walter Benjamin puts it in his well-known article 'Die Aufgabe

George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, (3rd edn.: Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 255.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976), 268–9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 269.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 115.

des Übersetzers' ('The Task of the Translator').<sup>5</sup> Ideas such as 'Western tradition', 'European literature', not to mention 'World Literature', are unthinkable in the absence of translation, and, indeed, of the *tradition of translation*. More practically: one does well to remember that most readers of most if not all the best-known works of Western literature read these works in translation.

The present anthology exemplifies the history and tradition of translation, for instance by highlighting key texts that have been handed down in Western literature through the efforts of translators undeterred by the fact that these texts have been translated many times before. Indeed, many of them are eager to attempt precisely those texts, to remake them, as it were, in the shape and texture of their own age.

Such translation—along with the translation of more recent or even contemporary foreign literature—is obviously a challenge to original writing and is bound to make an impression on its literary culture. Yet this crucial interaction, and the resulting hybrid character of literary history, tends to be left out of documented literary histories or dealt with in a cursory fashion, mostly because they so often work within national borders, identifying national canons and traditions. Still, the situation is changing as a result of a less exclusive concern with one's own culture and of the efforts of many translation activists, such as the late James S Holmes, who titled a talk given to the Translation Programme at the University of Iowa: 'Studying Translations, an underdeveloped Country in the World of Literary Scholarship'. Literary history, as we know it, has been very much a prodigy of Romanticism, cultivating and elevating national legacies.

The historical spectrum of this book, therefore, even though it dwells extensively on a number of canonical texts, challenges canonical literary history in most of its documented forms. The historical focus, as we move out of the Classical period, is on the English language tradition. But when this tradition is viewed from the present perspective, even Shakespeare is no longer as obviously central as he often seems to be—or at least not in the same way. Rather he appears as a writer of transcendent genius who rides a wave of creativity in the English language itself, as it was beginning to benefit from an age of prolific translation. And of course he makes his mark on an English literary culture, which will avidly continue, however, to seek the best way of bringing Homer, Ovid, Virgil, Dante, Beowulf, the Bible, into the living language. The more one familiarizes oneself with this tradition, the clearer it becomes that English possesses a rich history of translation, or what may be called a strong legacy of *translation culture*, one that has buttressed and inspired a great deal of linguistic creativity through the centuries. The poet and

<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin's essay is included in Sect. 4.4, below.



translator Charles Tomlinson, in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, draws attention to ‘a largely forgotten literature’.<sup>6</sup> Fourteen years before, George Steiner, in his innovative *Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*, focuses on the work of translators, without whom, as he puts it, ‘we would live in arrogant parishes bordered by silence’.<sup>7</sup>

It is beyond our capacity to do justice to the multiform nature of English, a world language or related world languages or group of related languages. It might even be said that English has become a language pre-eminently of translation, that is, of diffusion and international communication. (Latin was a means of international communication, but did not have the strong basis of a first language that English has.) In a number of countries English exists in a close relationship with another language (Canada, South Africa, India). These are very important sites of translation touched upon in this book only in the case of India. Edwin Morgan’s translations into Scots, rather than ‘standard’ English, has to stand for a range of such possibilities, now that the very notion of a standard English has become problematical, this in its turn allowing for a renewed and non-pedantic, so to speak, interest in foreignizing rather than the more traditional domesticating translation. The book also contains a number of important texts from other languages, from Classical times to the present, which have proved important for the translation debate in English. While a universal textbook might be desirable, this too is simply beyond our means.

A further word about English as the global lingua franca for many purposes, scholarly, scientific, commercial, political. There are, of course, many Englishes today, which, however, are similar enough not yet to require by and large the work of translators to ensure their mutual intelligibility, even if the possibilities of misunderstanding are considerable. It is partly because of its multiform character that English, with its tendency to regard itself as self-sufficient, is also suffering from a paucity of translations into it, whereas, as noted, the language’s richness in, say, the Renaissance was largely due to the voluminous importations via translation. As Ezra Pound comments, in his essay on ‘Elizabethan Classicists’, (1917): ‘A great age of literature is perhaps always a great age of translation; or follows it.’<sup>8</sup> The present volume argues, by its very existence, for an inclusive approach to the literary legacies of the world, for greater interaction between them, *especially* in respect to the dominant language, English. Cross-cultural communication involves translation; translation implies cross-

<sup>6</sup> Charles Tomlinson, ‘Introduction: The Poet as Translator’, *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, chosen and edited by C. Tomlinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Steiner, ‘Introduction’, in *The Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*, ed. by George Steiner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the Ezra Pound ‘collage’ in Sect. 4.2, below.