

## Chapter 5

# Literary Translation

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### Rat Poison to Ted Hughes

What, if anything, is distinctive about literary translation? Few would doubt their intuitive sense that there is a difference between Ted Hughes' rendering of a play by Aeschylus and the English-language label on the packet of white powder in a Greek supermarket identifying the stuff in it, for the tourist's sake and good health, as sugar, salt, detergent or rat poison. But how are they different? Interestingly, Emma Wagner, a translation manager with the European Commission who mentions the Ted Hughes versus rat poison example in a discussion with a translation theorist, refers to the two kinds of translation as the top and bottom ends of the range, respectively (Chesterman & Wagner, 2002: 5). Not only is there felt to be a difference between literary and other forms of translation, but value enters the picture as well.

The standard view is that literary translation represents a distinctive kind of translating because it is concerned with a distinctive kind of text. The theory of text types, which seeks to classify texts according to their functions and features, duly places literary texts in a class of their own. The fact however that text typologies do not agree on what to contrast literary texts with – technical, pragmatic, ordinary? – suggests that what distinguishes literary from other texts may not be entirely obvious. And if there is no agreement on what makes literature distinctive, it may be equally hard to decide on what grounds literary translation should be awarded its own niche. In her *Translation Criticism*, first published in German in 1971 and now also in English, Katharina Reiß reviews various attempts to distinguish different kinds of translation. A.V. Fedorov, Otto Kade, J.B. Casagrande and Georges Mounin, among others, all include literary translation as a separate kind, but their criteria for doing so remain unclear or seem haphazard (Reiß, 2000: 7–23).

In recent years a number of general reference works on translation have appeared. Can they shed light on what makes literary translation special?

The *Dictionary of Translation Studies* (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997) has entries for 'literal translation', 'free translation' and the like but not 'literary translation'. Its entry on 'aesthetic-poetic translation' turns out, with linguistic, ethnographic and pragmatic translation, to form part of J.B. Casagrande's fourfold and somewhat random list of translation types. The more encyclopedic reference works give out equally mixed signals. Writing on 'Literary translation: Research issues' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker, 1998), José Lambert considers the definition of 'literary' and the collocation 'literary translation' but does not reach conclusions. Its companion piece 'Literary translation: Practices' by Peter Bush side-steps the issue by declaring: 'Literary translation is the work of literary translators' and stressing the skill and worth of the latter. The German *Handbuch Translation* distinguishes only very broad text types: informative, appellative and expressive, the typology devised by Karl Bühler in the 1930s (Bühler, 1934). Under 'primarily expressive' texts, narrative, drama and poetry make an appearance along with film, comic strips and the Bible, but 'literary translation' as such is not featured (Snell-Hornby *et al.*, 1998).

There are now also a couple of reference works devoted specifically to literary translation into English. They must distinguish literary from 'other' translation; but how? In the preface to her two-volume *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English*, editor Olive Classe (2000) merely notes that she has followed general usage. Just as translation commonly refers to interlingual translation, and 'literature' and 'literary' tend to imply 'aesthetic purpose, together with a degree of durability and the presence of intended stylistic effects', so 'literary translation' is read as conventionally distinguished from 'technical translation' (Classe, 2000: viii). Peter France's *Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* makes a more determined effort. It speaks of literary translations as translations 'designed to be read as literature' and cites with approval Gideon Toury's distinction between 'literary translation' and the 'translation of literary texts', the latter, non-literary form of translation being described as 'informational' (France, 2000: xxi). Toury's distinction rests on his view, derived from Yuri Lotman and, beyond him, Roman Jakobson and the Russian Formalists, that literature is characterised by the presence of a secondary, literary code superimposed on a stratum of unmarked language (Toury, 1980: 36–7). A formal definition of this kind no longer has currency in literary studies and anyway sits uncomfortably with the intentional aspect of accepting as literary any translation *designed* to be read as literature.

The search for a definition of literary translation leads nowhere. To students of literature this will not come as a surprise. They gave up trying

to define literature some time ago. Today definitions of literature tend to be functional and contingent rather than formal or ontological. Let me use two introductory but influential textbooks to illustrate the point. Terry Eagleton's (1983) *Literary Theory* opens with a chapter 'Introduction: What is Literature?' which argues that literature is best defined as 'a highly valued kind of writing' and goes on to stress the social and ideological conditioning of values and value judgements. Jonathan Culler's (1997) *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* adopts a two-pronged approach. The designation 'literature' serves as 'an institutional label', now denoting 'a speech act or textual event that elicits certain kinds of attention' (Culler, 1997: 27). However, for historical reasons attention of the literary kind has been focused on texts displaying certain features, notably such things as the foregrounding of language, the interdependence of different levels of linguistic organisation, the separation from the practical context of utterance, and the perception of texts as both aesthetic objects and intertextual or self-reflexive constructs (Culler, 1997: 28–35). The label and the features tend to correlate, so that the recognition of formal traits will trigger the institutionally appropriate kind of attention and vice versa. A conceptually sustainable way of modelling literary translation may then be based on prototype theory (following Halverson, 1999). In this view the prototypical literary translation is one perceived, and perhaps also intended, as a literary text, and hence as possessing literary features and qualities; around prototypical texts a host of other texts of more or less questionable membership will cluster, allowing the system to evolve in time.

For all that, Culler also notes that not much attention has been paid to the issue of the definition of literature in the last 25 years; what has attracted interest, he argues, is literature as a historical and ideological category, and its social and political functioning (Culler: 1997: 36). Broadly speaking, this has also been the development with respect to the study of translation, and of literary translation in particular. Questions of definition and demarcation have given way to functional approaches that have been increasingly preoccupied with the roles assigned to and the uses made of translation by a variety of actors in varying contexts. In the case of the study of literary translation, however, another institutional issue had to be settled first. It concerned the acceptance, by the literary studies community, of translations as legitimate objects of study in the first place. Indeed comparative literature, the branch of literary study one might have expected to champion translation as an instrument of cultural transmission and negotiation, was decidedly slow to wake up to its relevance.

The changing attitude may be gauged from the three successive 'Reports on Professional Standards' issued in 1965, 1975 and 1993 by the American

Comparative Literature Association or ACLA (Bernheimer, 1995). The first report stressed the need for 'some access to all the original languages involved' and drew a stern line between teaching 'foreign literature in translation' and comparative literature proper. Students of the latter were urged to read original works wherever possible and to rely on translation only as a last resort and for 'remote languages' (Bernheimer, 1995: 23). The 1975 report still called on teachers to work with original texts, not only for the benefit of those with a command of the relevant languages, but in order to 'make the remaining students aware of the incompleteness of their own reading experience' (Bernheimer, 1995: 35). The 1993 report strikes a different note. Not only is there the conciliatory statement that 'the old hostilities toward translation should be mitigated', but translation is now held up as 'a paradigm for larger problems of understanding and interpretation across different discursive traditions' (Bernheimer, 1995: 44). Coincidentally, Susan Bassnett's (1993) *Comparative Literature: a Critical Introduction* came out in the same year as the final ACLA report. Bassnett argued that traditional comparative literature was now well and truly dead and the new impulses were coming from cultural studies, gender and postcolonial studies, and translation studies. Rather than suggesting that the old hostilities towards translation be mitigated, she proposed translation studies as 'the principal discipline from now on, with comparative literature as a valued but subsidiary subject area' (Bassnett, 1993: 161). The provocation did not go down well in comparative literature circles. Nevertheless, introductions to comparative literature today pay attention to translation (e.g. Zima, 1992; Tötösy de Zepetnek, 1998).

Several things brought about the change in attitude signalled in the ACLA reports. Globalisation was one. As knowledge of Latin and Greek waned, comparative literary studies in the West found themselves in a postcolonial world full of potentially valuable texts in what the 1965 ACLA report could still refer to as 'remote languages'. Hermeneutics may well have been another. As early as the 1960s Hans-Georg Gadamer (1977: 98) observed that '[h]ermeneutics operates wherever what is said is not immediately intelligible.' The operation takes place in the first instance within the same tradition, when the accidents of time and change have erected obstacles to the transmission of linguistic meaning, but applies *a fortiori* across languages and cultures. Negotiating these barriers requires translation. Hence, as Gadamer (1977: 19) put it, '[f]rom the structure of translation was indicated the general problem of making what is alien our own'. How this process works in practice within one and the same linguistic and cultural tradition was illustrated in the opening chapter of George Steiner's (1975/1998) *After Babel*. Demonstrating the kind of deciphering needed to

make sense, in contemporary English, of the language of English writers from Shakespeare to Noel Coward, the chapter was suitably entitled 'Understanding as Translation.' In his *What is Comparative Literature?* Steiner (1995: 11) went on to insist on what he called 'the primacy of the matter of translation' for all cross-cultural study. From a purely institutional point of view the fact that André Lefevere's *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context* (1992b) was published under the aegis of the Modern Language Association of America was no less significant.

There are similarities between the emergence of translation studies as an academic discipline and the recognition accorded to literary translation by comparatists. The study of translation generally had to emancipate itself from its ancillary status with respect to translation criticism and translator training so as to be able to approach translation as a phenomenon worthy of attention in its own right. In a parallel movement the study of literary translation had to legitimise itself in the context of comparative literature by pointing to the significance of translations, not just as vicarious objects standing in for originals as best they can, but as significant counters in the symbolic economy and carriers of ideas, attitudes and values.

## Comprehending Translating

In the Anglo-Saxon world the traditional academic approach to literary translation went via the practical workshop, often supported by exercises in close reading as popularised by the New Critics of the 1930s and 1940s (Gentzler, 2001: 5–43). The mutually beneficial combination of practical translation and criticism is summarised in Marilyn Gaddis Rose's (1997: 13) *Translation and Literary Criticism*: 'What translating does is to help us get inside literature'. For D.S. Carne-Ross, who became the editor of one of the first English-language journals devoted to literary translation (*Delos: A Journal On & Of Translation*, Austin, Texas, 1967–70), translation was 'essentially an instrument of criticism'. Carne-Ross added that '[t]rue translation is much more a commentary on the original than a substitute for it' (in Arrowsmith & Shattuck, 1961: 6). The statement highlights the alliance between translation and criticism while firmly assigning translation its place in relation to original writing.

Apart from serving as a workout and/or skills acquisition course for translators, the workshop employs translation as a means of probing the meaning of complex texts. Translating and understanding are two sides of the same coin. One of the leading New Critics, I.A. Richards, not only took a close interest in semantics but argued in the essay 'Toward a theory of

translating', later renamed 'Toward a theory of comprehending' (Richards, 1955), that in principle it is possible, though exasperatingly difficult, to reach an adequate understanding of a unique text through a careful mapping of all its denotative and connotative dimensions.

Hands-on experience of translating is the workshop's main strength. In addition, the concept invites reflection on the process of translating, on the aims and contexts of the exercise, and on other people's achievements. Broadly speaking, two lines emanate from the workshop concept. One consists of testimonies by practising translators, the other of translation criticism and, eventually, history.

The former line can boast some grand names of translator-writers, among them, in the 20th century, Ezra Pound and Vladimir Nabokov. Book-length testimonies in English include Ben Belitt (1978), Burton Raffel (1971, 1988), John Felstiner (1981), Suzanne Jill Levine (1991), Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood (1991), Douglas Hofstadter (1997), Robert Wechsler (1998), Clive Scott (2000) and Jin Di (2003). Collections like those compiled by Biguenet & Schulte (1989), Warren (1989), Weissbort (1989) and Boase-Beier & Holman (1999) feature shorter statements. The expositions fit old patterns. Much of the historical discourse on translation shows translators rationalising their own practice, more often than not in self defence. Some testimonies are more combative than others and slide from legitimising a particular mode of translating to legislating for all translation; Nabokov's vitriolic attacks on all styles of translating except his own are a case in point (Nabokov, 1955). Mostly, however, the shoptalk is concerned with concrete particulars; it is detailed, retrospective, introspective and experiential. As diagrams of the communication model hold theoreticians in their thrall, Clive Scott (2000: 248–9), for example, questions the received academic wisdom that translation is driven by communicative intent. Instead, he insists that reading and translating are intensely personal acts of self-discovery and self-expression. Robert Bly's (1983) eight stages of translation, as exemplified by poetry, adopt the form of a masterclass. Having (1) scribbled a literal version, the translator (2) establishes the poem's overall meaning, (3) rewrites the crib in an acceptable linguistic form and adjusts the text to (4) a particular idiom and to (5) the poem's mood and (6) its sound pattern, before (7) checking the draft with native speakers and (8) preparing the final version. Typically, however, Bly's account makes no mention of working conditions or of the social functioning of literary texts. Indeed many translators who would be part of literature's symbolic economy also buy into its public agenda of privileging artistic integrity over either economic or ideological considerations. The exceptions tend to be those who have followed academe's growing interest in the social condi-

tioning and effects of literature; this applies to gender-conscious and postcolonial translators and to their fellow travellers (de Lotbinière-Harwood, 1991; Spivak, 1993; Venuti, 1995).

The historical prominence of translators' discourses about their art and craft lives on in the tendency, evident in several branches of translation studies, to approach translation from the translator's point of view. Jiří Levý's influential article (1967) on translating as constant decision-making, for example, depicts the process from the translator's angle, as does Gideon Toury's account of the operation of translation norms, which builds directly on Levý (Toury, 1995: 53–69). In the hermeneutic camp, George Steiner's so-called fourfold motion of initiative trust, invasive aggression, tentative incorporation and eventual restitution (Steiner, 1975/1998: 312ff.) seeks to portray the successive mental stages of the translator at work. In the same way Antoine Berman's call (1992) for an ethics of centrifugal rather than ethnocentric translation is primarily an appeal to translators to allow the foreignness of the foreign text to remain visible.

The other line emanating from the translation workshop found one of its earliest and finest illustrations in Reuben Brower's essay 'Seven Agamemnon's':

When a writer sets out to translate – say, the *Agamemnon* – what happens? Much, naturally, that we can never hope to analyze. But what we can see quite clearly is that he makes the poetry of the past into poetry of his particular present. Translations are the most obvious examples of works which, in Valéry's words, are 'as it were created by their public.' (Brower, 1959b: 173)

The detailed comparison of texts, the workshop's strongest suit, here extends from aligning original and translation to inspecting serial translations. With this move from the pair to the series, the goal of the exercise also shifted from judgemental criticism to the historical embedding of texts. Brower's essay broke new ground in exploring seven English versions of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* produced over several hundred years and reading each in relation to the dominant poetics of its time. The study of translation, for Brower, yielded insight into changing concepts of literature. The chronologically plotted renderings of a single original 'show in the baldest form the assumptions about poetry shared by readers and poets' (Brower, 1959b: 175).

Brower's essay accords translations symptomatic value: because they conspicuously reflect a period style, they supply the researcher with a handy key to the larger picture. Rewarding as this view of translation was at a time when serious attention to literary translations needed justification

in academic circles, it reinforced the perception of translation as merely reflecting prevailing conventions. Why translation should be so passive, Brower did not explain. More recent researchers have attempted explanations, and they have involved much broader categories. André Lefevere downplayed the importance of linguistic aspects of translation and highlighted instead the role of poetics and of ideological factors and institutional control. Recognising that translation means importing texts (containing potentially subversive elements) from outside a particular sphere, Lefevere stressed the desire of those in power to regulate translation. Because they mostly succeed, most translation offers 'an unflinching barometer of literary fashions' (Lefevere, 1991: 129). Arguing from a gender position, Lori Chamberlain (1992: 66–7) has claimed that translation is over-regulated because 'it threatens to erase the difference between production and reproduction which is essential to the establishment of power'. By analogy with Michel Foucault's (1986) 'author function', Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz (1985) and Karin Littau (1997) have brought up the notion of a 'translator function' to identify the ideological figure that restricts the dispersal of meaning and locks translation in both a legal system and a hierarchical symbolic order that privileges original work over secondary work.

Whether these explanations of the place and role of translation seem persuasive or not, they show that the debate has moved on. In the same way, the issue of the role of translation as merely conforming to prevailing period tastes or as an active shaping force has been redefined. As early as 1920 T.S. Eliot recognised translation's potential 'vitalising effect', as he put it in 'Euripides and Professor Murray' – in *The Sacred Wood* (Eliot, 1969). Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory would provide a theoretical framework for this potential. Revitalising Russian Formalist ideas, the model envisaged literature as permanent tug of war between conservative and innovative forces, with translation joining now one and now the other side, either consolidating or undermining established modes of discourse (Even-Zohar, 1990). In this way translation was written into the broader scheme of things, along with other hitherto-neglected forms such as popular fiction or children's literature. The scheme of things grew even broader in the 1990s when translation came to be seen as helping to shape cultural identities. The selection of texts for translation and the way in which individual translations construct representations of foreign cultural products (and, metonymically, of foreign cultures as such) would now be read as offering a window on cultural self-definition. This is because domestic values inform both the process of inclusion and exclusion and the



choice of a particular mode of representation (Hermans, 1999a: 58ff; Tymoczko, 1998; Venuti, 1998b: 67ff.).

The workshop approach to literary translation held practice and observation in a precarious balance. However, as the above paragraphs indicate, ideas about translation have developed rapidly as translation studies gained momentum roughly from the 1980s onwards. As a result, new perspectives, approaches and concerns have come to the fore, more or less in step with the evolution of literary theory. In what follows I will discuss the main developments in the study of literary translation, grouping them for convenience under three headings: linguistics, functionalism and interventionism.

### Linguistic Signatures

If Reuben Brower reckoned in 1959 there was much in translation 'that we can never hope to analyse' (Brower, 1959a), linguistic approaches have sought to supply tools to scrutinise the textual make-up of both literary and non-literary translations. The application of linguistic models to the analysis of literary texts had its heyday in 1960s and 1970s, under the impulse of structuralism and transformational grammar (see e.g. Fowler, 1971; Ihwe, 1971–2). The momentum was not subsequently maintained, except in research on style. Linguistic approaches to translation seemed destined for a similar fate, but in recent years have bounced back with renewed vigour.

Early linguistically-inspired studies of literary translation concentrated on the semanticisation of form and on literary form as deviant usage. Richard de Beaugrande (1978) suggested ways in which translators might achieve 'equivalence' by seeking to match in the translation the original's ratio of deviation versus standard usage. The approach slotted comfortably into the theory of text types deriving from Karl Bühler, as mentioned above. Bühler (1934) recognised three main functions of language (to represent, to express and to appeal) and distinguished three text types according to the dominance of one of these functions. Although text-type theory largely bypassed literature, Katharina Reiß classified literature as 'form-focused text' (Reiß, 2000/1971: 31ff). In the same way, text linguistics and pragmatics, which reacted against the decontextualised treatment of language characteristic of structuralism and transformational grammar, turned their attention mostly to non-literary texts.

More recently, however, two lines of linguistic enquiry, corpus studies and critical linguistics, have been making significant inroads into the study of literary translation. Corpus studies interrogate computer-readable texts in a variety of ways, with the intention of tracing patterns and common

features across large amounts of data (Baker, 1995; Laviosa, 1998; Kenny, 2001). For the machine to be able to respond, the questions fired at the corpus need to be formal and exact, and therefore linguistic in nature. One tendency of corpus-based translation studies has been to search for universals. For the time being, this exercise is compromised by the fact that the available translation corpora cover only a limited number of languages, lack a historical dimension and have no way of identifying whether the features encountered are exclusive to translation. Another line of enquiry, closer to traditional literary interests, has turned to stylistic investigation (Baker, 2000). Just as statistical data on individual usage enabled researchers to identify the author (Joe Klein) behind *Primary Colors*, the anonymously published insider novel about Bill Clinton's path from Arkansas to the US presidency, so corpus-based translation studies can pinpoint translators' personal voices across a range of apparently very different translations. The question of the coexistence of different subject positions in translated texts had been around in literary translation studies for some time (Folkart, 1991; Pym, 1992; Hermans, 1996; Schiavi, 1996). While a Bakhtinian emphasis on dialogism and heteroglossia might provide a suitable frame for their discussion, corpus-based studies were able to ask – and answer – much more precise questions, to extend their searches and come up with interesting correlations. For example, Mona Baker (2000) found that, for all their much-vaunted ability to wrap themselves around the style of their authors, translators leave their individual linguistic signature on texts belonging to very different genres and originally written in different languages. Today corpus-based translation studies are in full expansion across a broad spectrum of texts and languages. They work best when a sufficient volume of words can be scanned in and tagged; prose rather than poetry would seem to be their natural habitat.

Critical linguistics builds on pragmatics and discourse analysis, both of which made themselves felt in the study of translation in the 1980s. Indeed as early as 1986 Mary Snell-Hornby announced a 'pragmatic turn' in translation studies, prefiguring the spate of 'cultural' and other turns that would be declared later. In contrast to both structural and transformational models of language, M.A.K. Halliday's functional grammar views language as a social semiotic and has become an effective tool to delve into the way in which ideology is inscribed in the language we produce. Roger Fowler's (1981) *Literature as Social Discourse* demonstrated the relevance of this branch of linguistics for literary criticism. Among the earliest applications of Hallidayan concepts in literary translation studies was Kitty van Leuven-Zwart's model (1989–90) for the analysis of shifts in translated narrative fiction. Van Leuven-Zwart sought to map semantic shifts logged

at the microlevel of original and translated texts onto the macrolevel of narrative structure. To make this transition, she projected the various micro-shifts resulting from her analyses on Halliday's three so-called metafunctions: the ideational (i.e. roughly the way of presenting information), the interpersonal (which establishes the speaker–hearer relation) and the textual (the thematic organisation of a text). From this she came up with discursive profiles that could show differences in point of view, agency, modality and such like across entire texts.

In recent years Jeremy Munday (2002) has proposed combining the Hallidayan model with the potential unleashed by corpus studies to explore linguistic differences between originals and translations and relate them to social and ideological contexts. The three metafunctions are again the essential tools. The precision of linguistic concepts, together with the blanket coverage afforded by computerised searches, allows a type of investigation that is new, detailed and replicable, without seeking to sideline judicious interpretation.

## Functioning Contexts

Functionalist ways of tackling the study of translation began to be mooted in the 1970s and 1980s out of dissatisfaction with the predominantly prescriptive and decontextualised approaches holding sway at the time. Two particular schools of thought emerged, *skopos* theory and descriptivism. *Skopos* theory (*'skopos'* is Greek for 'aim' or 'goal'), which flourished in Germany, is explicitly functionalist in that it views translating as goal-directed action (Nord, 1997). It makes much of the intended functions and likely effects of translations in comparison with the functions and effects of their originals, stressing that as a rule the two communication situations are not parallel. Different translations may be needed to suit different kinds of readers, as indeed Theodore Savory (1957: 58–59) had pointed out 20 years earlier. The translator is meant to assess similarities and differences and act accordingly, bearing in mind the interests and expectations of all concerned. To the extent that institutional constraints and audience expectations figure prominently in the model, *skopos* theory falls in with literary reception studies. If it has had only limited impact on the study of literary translation, this is chiefly because audience expectations are notoriously hard to define in literature.

Descriptive work has focused less on the actual behaviour of translators than on the outcomes of their actions and decisions, less on process than on product. The textual orientation chimes with literary pedigree of most descriptivists. As with other functionalist approaches, the aim is not so

much description as understanding and explanation, even though (especially in the early days) descriptivism flaunted its empirical streak in order to distance itself from the prescriptivism of the applied approaches and of translation criticism. The leading descriptivist questions are historical: who translates what, when, how, for whom, in what context, with what effect, and why? The last question requires delving into the motivation behind the choices made by translators and other actors. How to interpret translators' actions? The answer was found in the concept of a 'translation norm'. If we know the prevailing norm of translation, we can assess whether individual translators' behaviour accords with it, and speculate about their reasons for compliance or defiance. More likely than not, these reasons will bear some meaningful relation to the individual's position in a social environment, as an agent in a network of material and symbolic power relations. With this, translation has lost its philological innocence.

The set of norms relevant to translation at a certain time amounts to a translation poetics. It determines what will be deemed acceptable as translation in a given culture. Ways of processing texts that fail to meet the criteria regarded as pertinent to translation in a given community may result in the product being called paraphrase, imitation or pastiche, but not translation. In this sense norms police the boundaries of what a culture regards as 'legitimate' translation. Moreover, norms embody social and ideological values. The implication is that translation is not an immanent but a relative concept, culturally constructed and therefore historically contingent. By following lines of thought of this kind, descriptivism reached some fairly radical conclusions. At the same time, it dovetailed with literary research on conventions, historical poetics and interpretive communities (see e.g. Fish, 1980; Mailloux, 1982). And just as literary studies grew sceptical about grand historical narratives and discovered the micro-stories of New Historicism, descriptivists have relished the detail of individual case studies.

While descriptivism helped to legitimise translation as a serious object of literary study, much of the historical work on literary translation fits the descriptive paradigm without being indebted to it. Nevertheless, descriptive researchers have invested much determined effort in literary translation, from comparative methodology (Holmes, 1978; Van Leuven-Zwart, 1989–90; Koster, 2000) and wordplay (Delabastita, 1993, 1997) to translation as a catalyst of cultural and political change (Lambert & Hyun, 1995; Lambert & Lefevere, 1993; Tymoczko, 1999). In the process, a substantial range of aspects, modes and functions of translation in different contexts was documented, mostly with respect to canonical Western literature. The history of Western thought about translation received attention from

André Lefevere (1977), Lieven D'hulst (1990) and others, and bespeaks an ongoing interest, as testified by several international anthologies (Robinson, 1997b/2001; Lafarga, 1996; López García, 1996; Vega, 1994). The roll-call of canonical historical thinkers featured in each one of these readers, incidentally, consists of Cicero, St Jerome, Luther, Vives, Du Bellay, Dryden, Goethe, Schleiermacher, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Mme de Staël and Matthew Arnold. The literary presence is strong.

Descriptivism built on Formalist and Structuralist principles. From an early preoccupation with a taxonomy of shifts between originals and translations (Popovič, 1976, updated in Tötösy, 1998, 221ff.) it graduated to polysystem theory and to Gideon Toury's emphasis on empiricism and strict methodology (Toury, 1995). The attempt to account for translators' choices led first to concepts such as norms and patronage (Lefevere, 1992a) and then, as awareness of the need to bring context into view increased, to a 'cultural turn' (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990). A large amount of detailed historical-descriptive research on literary translation was carried out in the 1980s and 1990s in Göttingen. This was mostly on translations into German but also on such topics as genre, narrative technique and translation anthologies (Essmann, 1992, 1998; Kittel, 1992, 1995, 1998; Kittel & Frank, 1991; Kullmann, 1995; Schultze, 1987). By the 1990s, as descriptivism was being urged into a more self-critical direction (Hermans, 1999b), other, ideologically more committed approaches were making their mark.

## Problematic Others

If the collection *The Manipulation of Literature* (Hermans, 1985b) introduced the descriptive paradigm to Anglophone researchers, it is sobering to reflect that Jacques Derrida's altogether more daring '*Des tours de Babel*' appeared in the same year (Derrida, 1985). While descriptivism was cultivating its structuralist lineage, post-structuralism passed it by.

Perhaps post-structuralism is best seen in this context as a persistent questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions about translation. It raises doubts about the very possibility of translation by calling attention to such things as the instability of meaning, the materiality of language and the performance enacted by multilingual texts. By highlighting the double bind of translation as simultaneously necessary and impossible it also shows up the illusory nature of the attempt to dominate translation by theorising it from outside. Just as post-structuralism remains wary of the distinction between original writing and criticism, it distrusts the division between object-level and meta-level. Derrida's '*Des tours de Babel*' presents itself as a translation – sympathetic, perverse and oblique – of Walter

Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator* of 1923 (published in English in 1970). At once literary and philosophical, post-structuralist writing about translation partakes creatively of translating (Davis, 2001).

The post-structuralist levelling of the groundwork proved productive. Its critique of representation was taken up with a particular emphasis by the two main critical currents of the 1990s, gender and post-colonial theory. Both, in literary as well as in translation studies, have been concerned with the archive, with identity, with commitment and with ethics.

The history of translation has been viewed as an arena of conflict by gender-oriented and post-colonial researchers. They focus on what is excluded as well as on what is included in and for translation, on the hidden as well the declared agendas, the larger power structures underpinning particular events and acts. Following the example of gender studies in literature, translation scholars have dissected the social and educational systems that allowed some women to translate but not to write original work, or at least not in their own names, and to translate certain books and not others. Postcolonial researchers have reconsidered the West's image of other parts of the globe in the light of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and analysed translation as an instrument of domination and of information control: the metaphors speak of complicity and resistance rather than enrichment, of appropriation rather than transmission or transfer. If for the descriptivists the loss of philological innocence was a staging post, here it is the starting point.

Neither gender studies nor post-colonial studies distinguish absolutely between literary and other forms of discourse. All discourses are seen as contributing to the construction of identities and communities. This brings into play the researcher's own person, and the place of his or her discourse. Gender as well as post-colonial researchers emphatically speak from minority positions. The first group speaks as part of a non-masculine community under constant pressure from a predominantly masculine world; the other speaks as part of communities living under the historical aftermath of colonialism, the everyday reality of neocolonialism, or the exercise of other power differentials. The specifically literary forms they have been most involved with are *écriture féminine* and hybrid writing. Both forms challenge translation in that they evoke particular kinds of experience and self-consciously turn the standard medium of expression against itself. *Écriture féminine* invents its own body language outside the reach of male-dominated discourse. In the culturally-hybrid writing of post-colonial authors, the memory of other tongues is always inscribed, whether as the multilingual legacy of colonialism or through the migrant's lost speech. As profoundly displaced forms of writing, they establish not single but

complex, polymorphous, uprooted identities. (See Chamberlain, 1992; Von Flotow, 1997 and Simon, 1996 for introductory texts on gender and translation; Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999; Cheyfitz, 1991; Niranjana, 1992; Kothari, 2003 and Tymoczko, 1999, among others, on postcolonial approaches.)

If the translation of such ideologically committed texts pushes the translator's own allegiance to the fore, so does their analysis. The metalanguage of translation cannot shake itself free of translation. As a result, ethical considerations have come to be applied both to translating and to its academic study. One illustration of this is provided by the work of Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti. Berman sought to counter what he termed the ethnocentric deformation of 'naturalising' translation by a dogged attachment to the letter, to the detriment of the restitution of surface meaning. Such refractory translating, he argued, refashioned the receptor language and made it more receptive to 'the Foreign as Foreign', an ethically desirable goal (Berman in Venuti, 2000: 285–6). Lawrence Venuti is currently the main advocate of this approach in English. While he concedes that all understanding is necessarily positioned and therefore 'domesticating', he remains keen to practise 'minoritising' forms of translation, forms that privilege substandard, marginalised, unorthodox, volatile and sedimented registers, everything, in short, that makes language teeming and heterogeneous. Venuti regards such translating as politically beneficial as well as ethically responsible, despite some paradoxes. It assists global English in appropriating the world's cultural goods even as it works to diversify its expressive stock. It commends a wayward mode of translation in polished academic newspeak. It exhorts economically vulnerable translators from within secure university walls. It is a very literary, almost quixotic undertaking. Even so, it raises fundamental concerns not just about translation but also about discourses about translation.

The interventionist strategies of gender and postcolonial approaches oblige those studying translation to reflect on their own positions, presuppositions, agendas and methodologies. That does not mean the different schools of thought in translation studies are moving closer together. No doubt the interventionist tendencies could learn from critical linguistics how to pinpoint value and ideology in texts with greater accuracy. The descriptivist search for renewal matches the self-reflexive moment in both critical linguistics and the interventionist camp. But the global context of current academic research, like that of contemporary literature, fosters diversity as well as uniformity. For the moment at least, both literary translation and translation studies appear to possess enough pockets of fractious heterogeneity to resist what Derrida, in a different context, called the hegemony of the homogeneous. It is a comforting prospect.