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MOTHER COURAGE'S CUCUMBERS

Text, system and refraction in a theory of literature

TRANSLATION STUDIES CAN hardly be said to have occupied a central position in much theoretical thinking about literature. Indeed, the very possibility of their relevance to literary theory has often been denied since the heyday of the first generation of German Romantic theorists and translators. This article will try to show how a certain approach to translation studies can make a significant contribution to literary theory as a whole and how translations or, to use a more general term, refractions, play a very important part in the evolution of literatures.

H.R.Hays, the first American translator of Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder,* translates "Da ist ein ganzes Messbuch dabei, aus Altötting, zum Einschlagen von Gurken" as "There's a whole ledger from Altötting to the storming of Gurken" (B26/H5), in which the prayerbook Mother Courage uses to wrap her cucumbers becomes transformed into a ledger, and the innocent cucumbers themselves grow into an imaginary town, Gurken, supposedly the point at which the last transaction was entered into that particular ledger. Eric Bentley, whose translation of *Mother Courage* has been the most widely read so far, translates: "Jetzt kanns bis morgen abend dauern, bis ich irgendwo was Warmes in Magen krieg" as "May it last until tomorrow evening, so I can get something in my belly" (B128/B65), whereas Brecht means something like "I may have to wait until tomorrow evening before I get something hot to eat." Both Hays and Bentley painfully miss the point when they translate "wenn einer nicht hat frei werden wollen, hat der König keinen Spass gekannt" as "if there had been nobody who needed freeing, the king wouldn't have had any sport" (B58/H25) and "if no one had *wanted* to be free, the king wouldn't have had any fun" (B58/B25) respectively. The German means something bitterly ironical like

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"the king did not treat lightly any attempts to resist being liberated". Even the Manheim translation nods occasionally, as when "die Weiber reissen sich uni dich" (the women fight over you) is translated as "the women tear each other's hair out over you" (B37/ M143). This brief enumeration could easily be supplemented by a number of other howlers, some quite amusing, such as Hays' "if you sell your shot to buy rags" for "Ihr verkaufts die Kugeln, ihr Lumpen" (you are selling your bullets, you fools—in which Lumpen is also listed in the dictionary as rags (B51/H19). I have no desire, however, to write a traditional "Brecht in English" type of translation-studies paper, which would pursue this strategy to the bitter end. Such a strategy would inevitably lead to two stereotyped conclusions: either the writer decides that laughter cannot go on masking tears indefinitely, recoils in horror from so many misrepresentations, damns all translations and translators, and advocates reading literature in the original only, as if that were possible. Or he administers himself a few congratulatory pats on the back (after all, he has been able to spot the mistakes), regrets that even good translators are often caught napping in this way, and suggests that "we" must train "better and better" translators if we want to have "better and better" translations. And there an end.

Or a beginning, for translations can be used in other, more constructive ways. The situation changes dramatically if we stop lamenting the fact that "the Brechtian 'era' in England stood under the aegis not of Brecht himself but of various second-hand ideas and concepts *about* Brecht, an image of Brecht created from misunderstandings and misconceptions"[1] and, quite simply, accept it as a fact of literature—or even life. How many lives, after all, have been deeply affected by translations of the Bible and the *Capital*?

A writer's work gains exposure and achieves influence mainly through "misunderstandings and misconceptions," or, to use a more neutral term, refractions. Writers and their work are always understood and conceived against a certain background or, if you will, are refracted through a certain spectrum, just as their work itself can refract previous works through a certain spectrum.

An approach to literature which has its roots in the poetics of Romanticism, and which is still very much with us, will not be able to admit this rather obvious fact without undermining its own foundations. It rests on a number of assumptions, among them, the assumption of the genius and originality of the author who creates *ex nihilo* as opposed to an author like Brecht, who is described in the 1969 edition of the *Britannica* as "a restless piecer together of ideas not always his own."[2] As if Shakespeare didn't have "sources," and as if there had not been some writing on the Faust theme before Goethe. Also assumed is the sacred character of the text, which is not to be tampered with—hence the horror with which "bad" translations are rejected. Another widespread assumption is the belief in the possibility of recovering the author's true intentions, and the concomitant belief that works of literature should be judged on their intrinsic merit only: "Brecht's ultimate rank will fall to be reconsidered when the true quality of his plays can be assessed independently of political affiliations,"[3] as if that were possible.

A systemic approach to literature, on the other hand, tends not to suffer from such assumptions. Translations, texts produced on the borderline between two systems, provide an ideal introduction to a systems approach to literature.

First of all, let us accept that refractions—the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work—have always been with us in literature. Refractions are to be found in the obvious form of translation, or in the less obvious forms of criticism (the wholesale allegorization of the literature of Antiquity by the Church Fathers, e.g.), commentary, historiography (of the plot summary of famous works cum evaluation type, in which the evaluation is unabashedly based on the current concept of what "good" literature should be), teaching, the collection of works in anthologies, the production of plays. These refractions have been extremely influential in establishing the reputation of a writer and his or her work. Brecht, e.g. achieved his breakthrough in England posthumously with the 1965 Berliner Ensemble's London production of *Arturo Ui,* when "the British critics began to rave about the precision, the passion, acrobatic prowess and general excellence of it all. Mercifully, as none of them understands German, they could not be put off by the actual content of this play."[4]

It is a fact that the great majority of readers and theatre-goers in the Anglo-Saxon world do not have access to the "original" Brecht (who has been rather assiduously refracted in both Germanies anyway, and in German). They have to approach him through refractions that run the whole gamut described above, a fact occasionally pointed out within the Romanticism-based approaches to literature, but hardly ever allowed to upset things: "a large measure of credit for the wider recognition of Brecht in the United States is due to the drama critic Eric Bentley, who translated several of Brecht's plays and has written several sound critical appreciations of him."[5] It is admitted that Brecht has reached Anglo-Saxon audiences vicariously, with all the misunderstandings and misconceptions this implies, and not through some kind of osmosis which ensures that genius always triumphs in the end. But no further questions are asked, such as: "how does refraction really operate? and what implications could it have for a theory of literature, once its existence is admitted?"

Refractions, then, exist, and they are influential, but they have not been much studied. At best their existence has been lamented (after all, they are unfaithful to the original), at worst it has been ignored within the Romanticism-based approaches, on the very obvious grounds that what should not be cannot be, even though it is. Refractions have certainly not been analysed in any way that does justice to the immense part they play, not just in the dissemination of a certain author's work, but also in the development of a certain literature. My contention is that they have not been studied because there has not been a framework that could make analysis of refractions relevant within the wider context of an alternative theory. That framework exists if refractions are thought of as part of a system, if the spectrum that refracts them is described.

The heuristic model a systems approach to literature makes use of, rests on the following assumptions: (a) literature is a system, embedded in the environment of a culture or society. It is a contrived system, i.e. it consists of both objects (texts) and people who write, refract, distribute, read those texts. It is a stochastic system, i.e. one that is relatively indeterminate and only admits of predictions that have a certain degree of probability, without being absolute. It is possible (and General Systems Theory has done this, as have some others who have been trying to apply

a systems approach to literature) to present systems in an abstract, formalized way, but very little would be gained by such a strategy in the present state of literary studies, while much unnecessary aversion would be created, since Romanticism-based approaches to literature have always resolutely rejected any kind of notation that leaves natural language too far behind.

The literary system possesses a regulatory body: the person, persons, institutions (Maecenas, the Chinese and Indian Emperors, the Sultan, various prelates, noblemen, provincial governors, mandarins, the Church, the Court, the Fascist or Communist Party) who or which extend(s) patronage to it. Patronage consists of at least three components: an ideological one (literature should not be allowed to get too far out of step with the other systems in a given society), an economic one (the patron assures the writer's livelihood) and a status component (the writer achieves a certain position in society). Patrons rarely influence the literary system directly; critics will do that for them, as writers of essays, teachers, members of academies. Patronage can be undifferentiated—in situations in which it is extended by a single person, group, institution characterized by the same ideology—or differentiated, in a situation in which different patrons represent different, conflicting ideologies. Differentiation of patronage occurs in the type of society in which the ideological and the economic component of patronage are no longer necessarily linked (the Enlightenment State, e.g., as opposed to various absolutist monarchies, where the same institution dispensed "pensions" and kept writers more or less in step). In societies with differentiated patronage, economic factors such as the profit motive are liable to achieve the status of an ideology themselves, dominating all other considerations. Hence, *Variety,* reviewing the 1963 Broadway production of *Mother Courage* (in Bentley's translation), can ask without compunction: "Why should anyone think it might meet the popular requirements of Broadway—that is, be commercial?"[6]

The literary system also possesses a kind of code of behaviour, a poetics. This poetics consists of both an inventory component (genre, certain symbols, characters, prototypical situations) and a "functional" component, an idea of how literature has to, or may be allowed to, function in society. In systems with undifferentiated patronage the critical establishment will be able to enforce the poetics. In systems with differentiated patronage various poetics will compete, each trying to dominate the system as a whole, and each will have its own critical establishment, applauding work that has been produced on the basis of its own poetics and decrying what the competition has to offer, relegating it to the limbo of "low" literature, while claiming the high ground for itself. The gap between "high" and "low" widens as commercialization increases. Literature produced for obviously commercial reasons (the Harlequin series) will tend to be as conservative, in terms of poetics, as literature produced for obviously ideological reasons (propaganda). Yet economic success does not necessarily bring status in its wake: one can be highly successful as a commercial writer (Harold Robbins) and be held in contempt by the highbrows at the same time.

A final constraint operating within the system is that of the natural language in which a work of literature is written, both the formal side of that language (what is in grammars) and its pragmatic side, the way in which language reflects culture. This latter aspect is often most troublesome to translators. Since different languages

reflect different cultures, translations will nearly always contain attempts to "naturalize" the different culture, to make it conform more to what the reader of the translation is used to. Bentley, e.g., translates "Käs aufs Weissbrot" as "Cheese on pumpernickel" (B23/B3), rather than the more literal "cheese on white bread," on the assumption that an American audience would expect Germans to eat their cheese on pumpernickel, since Germany is where pumpernickel came from. Similarly "in dem schönen Flandern" becomes the much more familiar "in Flanders fields" (B52/B22), linking the Thirty Years' War of the seventeenth century with World War I, as does Bentley's use of "Kaiser," which he leaves untranslated throughout. In the same way, Hays changes "Tillys Sieg bei Magdeburg" to "Tilly's Victory at Leipsic" (B94/H44), on the assumption that the Anglo-American audience will be more familiar with Leipzig than with Magdeburg. It is obvious that these changes have nothing at all to do with the translator's knowledge of the language he is translating. The changes definitely point to the existence of another kind of constraint, and they also show that the translators are fully aware of its existence; there would be no earthly reason to change the text otherwise. Translations are produced under constraints that go far beyond those of natural language—in fact, other constraints are often much more influential in the shaping of the translation than are the semantic or linguistic ones.

A refraction (whether it is translation, criticism, historiography) which tries to carry a work of literature over from one system into another, represents a compromise between two systems and is, as such, the perfect indicator of the dominant constraints in both systems. The gap between the two hierarchies of constraints explains why certain works do not "take," or enjoy at best an ambiguous position in the system they are imported into.

The degree of compromise in a refraction will depend on the reputation of the writer being translated within the system from which the translation is made. When Hays translated Brecht in 1941, Brecht was a little-known German immigrant, certainly not among the canonized writers of the Germany of his time (which had burnt his books eight years before). He did not enjoy the canonized status of a Thomas Mann. By the time Bentley translates Brecht, the situation has changed: Brecht is not yet canonized in the West, but at least he is talked about. When Manheim and Willett start bringing out Brecht's collected works in English, they are translating a canonized author, who is now translated more on his own terms (according to his own poetics) than on those of the receiving system. A historiographical refraction in the receiving system appearing in 1976 grants that Brecht "unquestionably can be regarded, with justice, as one of the 'classic authors' of the twentieth century."[7]

The degree to which the foreign writer is accepted into the native system will, on the other hand, be determined by the need that native system has of him in a certain phase of its evolution. The need for Brecht was greater in England than in the US. The enthusiastic reception of the Berliner Ensemble by a large segment of the British audience in 1956, should also be seen in terms of the impact it made on the debate as to whether or not a state subsidized National Theater should be set up in England. The opposition to a National Theater could "at last be effectively silenced by pointing to the Berliner Ensemble, led by a great artist, consisting of young, vigorous and anti-establishment actors and actresses, wholly experimental, overflowing with

ideas—and state-subsidized to the hilt."[8] Where the "need" for the foreign writer is felt, the critical establishment will be seen to split more easily. That is, part of the establishment will become receptive to the foreign model, or even positively champion it: "Tynan became drama critic of the London *Observer* in 1954, and very soon made the name of Brecht his trademark, his yardstick of values."[9] In the US, that role was filled by Eric Bentley, but he did have to tread lightly for a while. His 1951 anthology, *The Play,* does not contain any work by Brecht; he also states in the introduction that "undue preoccupation with content, with theme, has been characteristic of Marxist critics."[10] In 1966, on the other hand, Series Three of *From the Modern Repertoire,* edited by Eric Bentley, is "dedicated to the memory of Bertolt Brecht."[11] All this is not to imply any moral judgment. It just serves to point out the very real existence of ideological constraints in the production and dissemination of refractions.

Refractions of Brecht's work available to the Anglo-Saxon reader who needs them are mainly of three kinds: translation, criticism, and historiography. I have looked at a representative sample of the last two kinds, and restricted translation analysis to *Mother Courage*. Brecht is not represented at all in thirteen of the introductory drama anthologies published between 1951 (which is not all that surprising) and 1975 (which is). These anthologies, used to introduce the student to drama, do play an important part in the American literary system. In effect, they determine which authors are to be canonized. The student entering the field, or the educated layman, will tend to accept the selections, offered in these anthologies as "classics," without questioning the ideological, economic, and aesthetic constraints which have influenced the selections. As a result, the plays frequently anthologized achieve a position of relative hegemony. The very notion of an alternative listing is no longer an option for the lay reader. Thus, formal education perpetuates the canonization of certain works of literature, and school and college anthologies play an immensely important part in this essentially conservative movement within the literary system.

When Brecht is represented in anthologies of the type just described, the play chosen is more likely to be either *The Good Woman of Sezuan or The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. From the prefaces to the anthologies it is obvious that a certain kind of poetics, which cannot be receptive to Brecht, can still command the allegiance of a substantial group of refractors within the American system. Here are a few samples, each of which is diametrically opposed to the poetics Brecht himself tried to elaborate: "the story must come to an inevitable end; it does not just stop, but it comes to a completion."[12] Open-ended plays, such as *Mother Courage,* will obviously not fit in. Soliloquy and aside are admitted to the inventory component of the drama's poetics, but with reservations: "both of these devices can be used very effectively in the theater, but they interrupt the action and must therefore be used sparingly"[13]—which does, of course, rule out the alienation effect. "The amount of story presented is foreshortened in a play: the action is initiated as close as possible to the final issue. The incidents are of high tension to start with, and the tension increases rapidly"[14]—which precludes the very possibility of epic drama. The important point here is that these statements are passed off as describing "the" drama as such, from a position of total authority. This poetics also pervades the 1969 *Britannica* entry on Brecht, which

states quite logically and consistently that "he was often bad at creating living characters or at giving his plays tension and scope."[15]

Brecht "did not make refraction any easier," by insisting on his own poetics, which challenged traditional assumptions about drama. Refractors who do have a receptive attitude towards Brecht find themselves in the unenviable position of dealing with a poetics alien to the system they are operating in. There are a number of strategies for dealing with this. One can recognize the value of the plays themselves, while dismissing the poetics out of hand: "the theory of alienation was only so much nonsense, disproved by the sheer theatricality of all his better works."[16] One can also go in for the psychological cop-out, according to which Brecht's poetics can be dismissed as a rationalization of essentially irrational factors: "theory does not concern me. I am convinced that Brecht writes as he does, not so much from a predetermined calculation based on what he believes to be the correct goals for the present revolutionary age, as from the dictates of temperament."[17] A third strategy for adapting a refraction to the native system is to integrate the new poetics into the old one by translating its concepts into the more familiar terminology of the old poetics: "if there is *anagnorisis* (italics mine) in *Mother Courage,* it doesn't take place on stage, as in the Aristotelian tradition, but in the auditorium of Brecht's epic theatre."[18] The final strategy is to explain the new poetics and to show that the system can, in fact, accommodate it, and can allow it to enter into the inventory and functional components of its poetics, without necessarily going to pieces: "some critics have interpreted alienation to mean that the audience should be in a constant state of emotional detachment, but in actuality Brecht manipulated esthetic distance to involve the spectator emotionally and then jar him out of his emphatic response so that he may judge critically what he has experienced."[19]

The same strategies surface again in interpretations of *Mother Courage* itself: (i) *Variety*'s review of the 1963 Broadway production: "sophomorically obvious, cynical, selfconsciously drab and tiresome (ii)."[20] "His imagination and his own love of life created a work that transcends any thesis… He could not take away Mother Courage's humanity; even rigidly Marxist critics still saw her as human (iii)"[21]

> The Zürich audience of 1941 may have come away with only sympathy for Courage the Mother who, like Niobe, sees her children destroyed by more powerful forces but struggles on regardless. But to see the play solely in these terms is to turn a blind eye to at least half the text, and involves complete disregard for Brecht's methods of characterization.[22]

"Mother Courage learns nothing and follows the troops. The theme, in lesser hands, might well have led to an idealisation of the poor and the ignorant. Brecht made no concessions, showing Mother Courage for nothing better than she is, cunning, stubborn, bawdy (iv)."[23]

Of the three translations, Manheim's is situated between iii and iv. Both Hays and Bentley weave in and out of ii and iii. The main problem seems to be to accommodate Brecht's directness of diction to the poetics of the Broadway stage.

Hence the tendency in both Hays and Bentley to "make clear" to the spectator or reader what Brecht wanted that reader or spectator to piece together for himself. Brecht's stage direction: "Die stumme Kattrin springt vom Wagen und stösst rauhe Laute aus" is rendered by Hays as "Dumb Kattrin makes a hoarse outcry *because she notices the abduction*" (B37/H12—Italics mine). Mother Courage's words to Kattrin: "Du bist selber ein Kreuz: du hast ein gutes Herz" are translated by Hays as "You're a cross yourself. *What sort of a help to me are you? And all the same* what a good heart you have" (B34/H11) and by Manheim as "you're a cross yourself *because* you have a good heart" (B34/M142)—what is italicized is not in the German. Bentley tries to solve the problem of making Brecht completely "lucid" by means of excessive use of hyphens and italics: "Wer seid ihr?" becomes "Who'd you think *you* are?" instead of plain "Who are you?" (B25/B4). "Aber zu fressen haben wir auch nix" is turned into "A fat lot of difference that makes, *we* haven't got anything to eat either" (B39/B13), instead of "we don't have anything to eat either" and "der Feldhauptmann wird Ihnen den Kopf abreissen, wenn nix aufm Tisch steht" is rendered as "I know your problem: if you don't find something to eat and quick, the Chief will-cut-your-fat-head-off" (B40/B14) instead of "the captain will tear your head off if there's nothing on the table."

Hays and Bentley also do their best to integrate the songs fully into the play, approximating the model of the musical. For example, Bentley adds "transitional lines" between the spoken text and the song in "Das Lied vom Weib und dem Soldaten," thus, also, giving the song more of a musical flavor:

> To a soldier lad comes an old fishwife
> and this old fishwife says she (B45/B18).

In the translation there is a tendency towards the vague, the abstract, the cliché. The need to rhyme, moreover, leads to excessive padding, where the original is jarring and concrete, as in

> Ihr Hauptleut, eure Leut marschieren
> Euch ohne Wurst nicht in den Tod
> Lasst die Courage sie erst kurieren
> Mit Wein von Leib und Geistesnot
>
> (Commanders, your men
> won't march to their death without sausage
> Let Courage heal them first
> with wine of the pains of body and soul),

which Hays translates as

> Bonebare this land and picked of meat
> The fame is yours but where's the bread?
> So here I bring you food to eat
> And wine to slake and soothe your dread (B25/4)

Bentley also makes the text of the songs themselves conform more to the style and the register of the musical. The lapidary, and therefore final

In einer trüben Früh
Begann mein Qual und Müh
Das Regiment stand im Geviert
Dann ward getrommelt, wies der Brauch
Dann ist der Feind, mein Liebster auch
Aus unsrer Stadt marschiert

(one drab morning
my pain and sorrow began
the regiment stood in the square
then they beat the drums, as is the custom
Then the enemy, my beloved too
marched out of our town)

is padded out with a string of clichés into

The springtime's soft amour
Through summer may endure
But swiftly comes the fall
And winter ends it all
December came. All of the men
Filed past the trees where once we hid
Then quickly marched away and did
Not come back again (B55/B23).

Little of Brecht is left, but the seasons and the sad reminiscence, so often *de rigueur* for Broadway, are certainly in evidence. The musical takes over completely when Bentley translates

ein Schnaps, Wirt, sei g'scheit
Ein Reiter hat keine Zeit
Muss für sein Kaiser streiten

(A schnapps, mine host, be quick
A soldier on horseback has no time
he has to fight for his emperor)

as

One schnapps, mine host, be quick, make haste!
A soldier's got no time to waste
He must be shooting, shooting, shooting
His Kaiser's enemies uprooting (B101/B49).

Other refrain lines in the song are treated with great consistency: "Er muss gen Mähren reiten" becomes

> He must be hating, hating, hating
> he cannot keep his Kaiser waiting

instead of the more prosaic "he has to go fight in Moravia," which is in the German text, while "Er muss fürn Kaiser sterben" is turned into

> He must be dying, dying, dying
> His Kaiser's greatness glorifying (B101/B50),

whereas the German merely means "he has to die for his emperor." The least that can charitably be said is that Bentley obviously works to a different poetics than Brecht; he must have believed that this difference would make Brecht more acceptable than a straight translation. These examples again make it clear that the problem lies not with the dictionary, that it is not one of semantic equivalence, but rather one of a compromise between two kinds of poetics, in which the poetics of the receiving system plays the dominant part.

The terse, episodic structure of Brecht's play and the stage directions designed to give some hint as to the way actors should act are two more features of the Brechtian poetics not seen as easily transferable from one system to another. Hays therefore redivides Brecht's text into acts and scenes, in accordance with the norms of receiving poetics. Bentley keeps Brecht's scenes, while giving each of them a title, which turns out to be the first line of Brecht's text. Both turn a lapidary stage direction like "Wenn der Koch kommt, sieht er verdutzt sein Zeug" (when the cook enters, he starts as he sees his things) into something more elaborate, more familiar to a generation of actors brought up on Stanislavsky: "Then the Cook returns, still eating. He stares in astonishment at his belongings" and "A gust of wind. Enter the Cook, still chewing. He sees his things" (B192/H72/B72). Even Manheim does not always trust Brecht on his own: when Kattrin is dead, Mother Courage says: "Vielleicht schlaft sie." The translation reads: "Maybe I can get her to sleep." Mother Courage then sings the lullaby and adds "Now she's asleep" (B153/M209)—the addition is not in the original. Similarly, when Mother Courage decides not to complain to the captain after all, but simply to get up and leave, thereby ending the scene, Bentley adds a stage direction: "The scrivener looks after her, shaking his head" (B90/B44).

Brechtian dialogue is another problem. It must be made to flow more if it is to fit in with the poetics of the receiving system. As a result, lines are redistributed: actors should obviously not be allowed to stand around for too long, without anything to say. Consequently:

> Yvette: Dann Können wir ja suchen gehn, ich geh gern herum und such mir was aus, ich geh gern mit dir herum, Poldi, das ist ein Vergnügen, nicht? Und wenns zwei wochen dauert?
>
> (Then we can go look, I love walking about and looking for things, I love walking about with you, Poldi, it's so nice, isn't it? Even if it takes two weeks?)

becomes

> Yvette: Yes, we can certainly look around for something. I love going around looking, I love going around with you, Poldy…
> The Colonel: Really? Do you?
> Yvette: Oh, it's lovely. I could take two weeks of it!
> The Colonel: Really? Could you? (B76/B36).

In the same way a little emotion is added where emotion is too patently lacking, and never mind Brecht's poetics. Yvette's denunciation of the Cook: "das ist der schlimmste, wo an der ganzen flandrischen Küste herumgelaufen ist. An jedem Finger eine, die er ins Unglück gebracht hat" becomes "he's a bad lot. You won't find a worse on the whole coast of Flanders. He got more girls in trouble than… *(concentrating on the cook)* Miserable cur! Damnable whore hunter! Inveterate seducer!" (B125/B63). The stage direction and what follows it have been added.

Brecht's ideology is treated in the same way as his poetics in critical refractions produced in the receiving system. Sometimes it is dismissed in none too subtle ways: "Brecht made changes in the hope of suggesting that things might have been different had Mother Courage acted otherwise" (What could she have done? Established Socialism in seventeenth-century Germany?).[24] Sometimes it is engulfed in psychological speculation: "in a world without God, it was Marx's vision that saved Brecht from nihilistic despair"[25] and "Communist ideology provided Brecht with a rational form of salvation, for it indicated a clearly marked path leading out of social chaos and mass misery. At the same time, Communist discipline provided Brecht's inner life with the moral straitjacket he desperately needed at this time."[26]

Attempts to integrate Brecht into the American value system start by fairly acknowledging the problem: "Brecht's status as a culture hero of Communist East Germany further enhanced his appeal to the left and correspondingly diminished his chances of ever pleasing the artistic and political right wing,"[27] and end by stating the influence that the ideology Brecht subscribed to is supposed to have exerted on his artistic productions: "Nevertheless, Brecht maintains a neutral stance. That is, he pretends not to have any specific remedy in mind, although it is generally agreed that he favored a socialistic or communistic society. But he avoids saying so in his plays and instead declares that the audience must make up its own mind."[28] The multiplication of statements like this last one in recent years indicates a growing acceptance of Brecht in the receiving system. The Manheim translation, chronologically the latest, is easily the "best" of the three translations examined here, since it translates Brecht more on his own terms. But things are not that simple. It would be easy to say—as traditional translation studies have done time and again—that "Manheim is good; Hays and Bentley are both bad." It would be closer to the truth, however, to say that Manheim can afford to be good because Hays, and especially Bentley, translated Brecht before he did. They focused attention on Brecht and, in so doing, they got the debate going. If they had translated Brecht on his own terms to begin with, disregarding the poetics of the receiving system, chances are that the debate would never have got going in the first place—witness the disastrous performance of Brecht's *The*

Mother in 1936. Hays and Bentley established a bridgehead for Brecht in another system; to do so, they had to compromise with the demands of the poetics and the patronage dominant in that system.

This is not to suggest that there is some kind of necessary progression ranging from the less acceptable all the way to the "definitive" translation—that Brecht, in other words, need now no longer be translated. Both the natural language and the politics of the receiving system keep changing; the spectrum through which refractions are made changes in the course of time. It is entirely possible, e.g., that Brecht can be used in the service of a poetics diametrically opposed to his own, as in the Living Theater's production of *Antigone*. To put this briefly in a somewhat wider context, it is good to remember that literary systems are stochastic, not mechanistic. Producers of both refracted and original literature do not operate as automatons under the constraints of their time and location. They devise various strategies to live with these constraints, ranging hypothetically from full acceptance to full defiance. The categories that a systems approach makes use of are formulated in some kind of "inertial frame," similar to the ideal world physicists postulate, in which all experiments take place under optimal conditions, and in which all laws operate unfailingly. Like the laws of physics, the categories of the systems approach have to be applied to individual cases in a flexible manner.

Hays and Bentley treat ideological elements in *Mother Courage* in ways roughly analogous to those used by their fellow refractors, the critics. Translating in 1941, Hays consistently plays down the aggressive pacifism of the play, omitting whole speeches like the bitterly ironical

> Wie alles Gute ist auch der Krieg am Anfang hält schwer zu machen. Wenn er dann erst floriert, ist er auch zäh: dann schrecken die Leute zurück vorm Frieden wie die Würfler vorn Aufhören, weil dann müssens zahlen, was sie verloren haben. Aber zuerst schreckens zurück vorm Krieg. Er ist ihnen was Neues.
>
> (Like all good things, war is not easy in the beginning. But once it gets going, it's hard to get rid of; people become afraid of peace like dice players who don't want to stop, because then they have to pay up. But in the beginning they are afraid of the war. It's new to them.)

Hays also weakens the obvious connection between war and commerce in the person of Mother Courage by omitting lines Brecht gives her, like, "Und jetzt fahren wir weiter, es ist nicht alle Tage Krieg, ich muss tummeln" (and now let's drive on; there isn't a war on every day, I have to get cracking). Bentley, translating after the second world war, nevertheless follows partly the same course:

> Man merkts, hier ist zu lang kein Krieg gewesen. Wo soil da Moral herkommen, frag ich? Frieden, das ist nur Schlamperei, erst der Krieg schafft Ordnung. Die Menschheit schiesst ins Kraut im Frieden.
>
> (You can see there hasn't been a war here for too long. Where do you get your morals from, then, I ask you? Peace is a sloppy business, you need a war to get order. Mankind runs wild in peace.)

simply becomes "what they could do with here is a good war" (B22/B3). In addition, certain war-connected words and phrases are put into a nobler register in translation: "Wir zwei gehn dort ins Feld und tragen die Sach aus unter Männern" (the two of us will go out into that field and settle this business like men) becomes "the two of us will now go and settle the affair on the field of honor" (B30/B8) and "mit Spiessen und Kanonen" (with spears and guns) is rendered as "with fire and sword" (B145/B76). Not surprisingly, Manheim, translating later and in a more Brecht-friendly climate, takes the opposite direction and makes the pacifism more explicit, rendering

> So mancher wollt so manches haben
> Was es für manchen gar nicht gab
> (so many wanted so much
> that was not available for many)

as

> Some people think they'd like to ride out
> The war, leave danger to the brave (B113/M185).

Comprehension of the text in its semantic dimension is not the issue; the changes can be accounted for only in terms of ideology.

Finally, both Hays and Bentley eschew Brecht's profanities in their translations, submitting to the code of the US entertainment industry at the time the translations were written, albeit with sometimes rather droll results: "führt seine Leute in die Scheissgass," e.g., (leads his people up shit creek) becomes "leads his people into the smoke of battle" and "leads his soldiers into a trap" (B45/H17/ B17); and "Du hast mich beschissen" is turned into "A stinking trick!" and "You've fouled me up!" (B33/H9/B9). Even Manheim, years later, goes easy on the swear words: "der gottverdammte Hund von einem Rittmeister" is toned down to "that stinking captain" (B83/M170).

The economic aspect of refraction is touched on in some of the prefaces to the anthologies in which Brecht is not represented, and in some of the reviews of American productions of *Mother Courage.* The economics of inclusion or exclusion obviously have something to do with copyright; it is not all that easy (or cheap) to get permission to reprint Brecht in English, and certain editors just give up—the economic factor in its purest form. Less obvious, but no less powerful, economic considerations are alluded to by Barnet in the introduction to *Classic Theatre,* a collection of plays designed to be the companion volume to PBS' series of the same name, and therefore doubly under economic pressure. First, the order in which the plays are presented

> is nearly chronological: the few exceptions were made to serve the balance of television programming. Thus, because the producers wished the series to begin with a well-known play, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (written about 1605–6) precedes Marlowe's *Edward II* (written in the early 1590's).[29]

It further turns out that two of the "classics" have never been written for the "theatre" at all, but that they were written more or less directly for the series, or certainly for television: "of the thirteen plays in this book, two were written for television, one of these is an adaptation of Voltaire's prose fiction, *Candide,* and the other is a play about the life of the English poet John Milton."[30] It is hard to see what these plays could possibly have to do with either "classic" or "theatre," and there would certainly have been room for Brecht if one or the other of them had been left out. The conclusion must be that Brecht was still, in 1975, considered commercially and poetically too unsafe (and maybe also too expensive) for inclusion in a series on "classic theatre." The same introduction claims that "the most vital theatre in the second half of the twentieth century is a fairly unified body of drama neatly labelled the "Theatre of the Absurd,"[31] hailing Artaud as the most pervasive influence on the modern stage.

The *Variety* review of the 1963 Broadway production of *Mother Courage* asks the million dollar question: "why should anyone think it might meet the popular requirements of Broadway—that is, be commercial," thus pointing with brutal honesty to an important element in American patronage Brecht never managed to get on his side. In 1963, Brecht's patrons could not guarantee a more or less complete production of his work under prevailing economic regulations:

> The original text contains nine songs. I have the impression that several of these have been cut—probably because, if they were retained, the time allowed to sing and play them might exceed twenty four minutes and the Musicians' Union would list the production as a "musical." According to regulations, this classification would entail the employment of twenty-four musicians at heavy cost.[32]

And yet, to the Broadway goer with no German, or even to the Broadway goer with German, who prefers to watch plays rather than to read them, that was Brecht's *Mother Courage.* The refraction, in other words, is the original to the great majority of people who are only tangentially exposed to literature. Indeed, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that this kind of reader is influenced by literature precisely through refractions, and little else. In the US, he or she will tell you that *Moby Dick* is a great novel, one of the masterpieces of American literature. He will tell you so because he has been told so in school, because she has read comic strips and extracts in anthologies, and because captain Ahab will forever look like Gregory Peck as far as he or she is concerned. It is through critical refractions that a text establishes itself inside a given system (from the article in learned magazines to that most avowedly commercial of all criticism, the blurb, which is usually much more effective in selling the book than the former). It is through translations combined with critical refractions (introductions, notes, commentary accompanying the translation, articles on it) that a work of literature produced outside a given system takes its place in that "new" system. It is through refractions in the social system's educational set-up that canonization is achieved and, more importantly, maintained. There is a direct link between college syllabi and paperback publishers' backlists of classics (Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and *Dr. Faustus* rather than *Joseph and His Brothers*).

All this is by no means intended to be moralistic; I am not lamenting an existing state of affairs, I am merely describing it and suggesting that it is eminently worthy of description, since refractions are what keeps a literary system going. They have been ignored by Romanticism-based approaches to literature, but they have been there all along. Their role should not be overestimated, but it should no longer be underestimated either.

Brecht defined his poetics against the dominant poetics of his time in Germany, and he managed to win a certain degree of acceptance for them by the time he died. He had achieved this through a combination of "original work" (the texts of the plays, the theoretical writings) and refractions: productions of his plays, reviews of those productions, translations, the ensuing critical industry. The functional component of his poetics (what the theater is for) was a fairly radical departure from the prevailing poetics of his time (though perhaps not so radical when compared to the poetics of a previous historical manifestation of the system he worked in, namely medieval morality plays), despite the fact that many of the devices he used existed in non-canonized forms of the theater of his time (Valentin's cabaret, e.g.) or in the theater of other cultures (Chinese opera, e.g.).

Small wonder, then, that a Romanticism-based approach to literature should ask the wretched question "in how far is all this new?" It is a wretched question because nothing is ever new; the new is a combination of various elements from the old, the non-canonized, imports from other systems (at about the same time Brecht was experimenting with adaptations from Chinese opera, the Chinese poet Feng Chi refracted the European sonnet into Chinese) rearranged to suit alternative functional views of literature. This holds true for both the implicit and the explicit concept of a poetics, *and* for individual works of literature which are, to a certain extent, recombinations of generic elements, plots, motifs, symbols, etc.—in fact, essentially the "piecing together of other people's ideas," but in such a way as to give them a novel impact.

The question of originality is also wretched because it prevents so many adherents of Romanticism-based approaches to literature from seeing so many things. Originality can only exist if texts are consistently isolated from the tradition and the environment in which (against which) they were produced. Their freshness and timelessness, their sacred and oracular status are achieved at a price: the loss of history, the continuum of which they are a part and which they help to (re)shape. Literature in general, and individual works, can, in the final analysis, be contemplated, commented on, identified with, applied to life, in a number of essentially subjective ways; and these activities are all refractions designed to influence the way in which the reader receives the work, concertizes it. Present-day refractions usually operate on underlying principles essentially alien to literature and imported into it, such as psychoanalysis and philosophy. In other words, the "natural" framework of investigation that was lost for literary studies when originality became the overriding demand, has to be replaced by frameworks imported from other disciplines, a state of affairs rendered perhaps most glaringly obvious in the very way in which works of literature are presented to students who are beginning the task of studying literature: syllabi, reading lists, anthologies, more often than not offering disparate texts and pieces of texts,

brought together in a more or less arbitrary manner to serve the demands of the imposed framework.

The word, then, can only be said to really create the world, as the Romanticismbased approaches would have it, if it is carefully isolated from the world in which it originates. And that is, in the end, impossible; the word does not create a world *ex nihilo*. Through the grid of tradition it creates a counterworld, one that is fashioned under the constraints of the world the creator lives and works in, and one that can be explained, understood better if these constraints are taken into account. If not, all explanation becomes necessarily reductionistic in character, essentially subservient to the demands of imported frameworks.

A systems approach to literature, emphasizing the role played by refractions, or rather, integrating them, revalidates the concept of literature as something that is made, not in the vacuum of unfettered genius, for genius is never unfettered, but out of the tension between genius and the constraints that genius has to operate under, accepting them or subverting them. A science of literature, a type of activity that tries to devise an "imaginative picture" of the literary phenomenon in all its ramifications, to devise theories that make more sense of more phenomena than their predecessors (that are more or less useful, not more or less true), and that does so on the basis of the methodology that is currently accepted by the consensus of the scientific community, while developing its own specific methods suited to its own specific domain, will also have to study refractions. It will have to study the part they play in the evolution of a literary system, and in the evolution of literary systems as such. It will also have to study the laws governing that evolution: the constraints that help shape the poetics that succeed each other within a given system, and the poetics of different systems as well as individual works produced on the basis of a given poetics, or combination of poetics.

A systems approach does not try to influence the evolution of a given literary system, the way critical refractions and many translations avowedly written in the service of a certain poetics tend to do. It does not try to influence the reader's concretization of a given text in a certain direction. Instead, it aims at giving the reader the most complete set of materials that can help him or her in the concretization of the text, a set of materials he or she is free to accept or reject.

A systems approach to literary studies aims at making literary texts accessible to the reader, by means of description, analysis, historiography, translation, produced not on the basis of a given, transient poetics (which will, of course, take great pains to establish itself as absolute and eternal), but on the basis of that desire to know, which is itself subject to constraints not dissimilar to the ones operating in the literary system, a desire to know not as literature itself knows, but to know the ways in which literature offers its knowledge, which is so important that it should be shared to the greatest possible extent.

Notes

The text of Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* referred to in this article is that published by Aufbau Verlag, Berlin in 1968. H.R.Hays' translation was published by New Directions, New York, in the anthology for the year 1941. It was obviously

based on the first version of *Mother Courage,* and I have taken that into account in my analysis. The Bentley translation I refer to is the one published by Methuen in London in 1967. The Manheim translation is the one published in volume five of the collected plays of Bertolt Brecht, edited by Manheim and John Willet, and published by Vintage Books, New York in 1972.

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5 S.Kunitz., ed., *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement* (New York, 1965), p. 116a.
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24 E.Bentley, ed., *The Great Playwrights* (New York, 1970), p. 2169.
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26 Bédé and Edgerton, *Columbia Dictionary,* p. 114b.
27 Esslin, *Reflections,* p. 77.
28 Brockett, *Perspectives,* p. 125.
29 Barnet, *Classic Theatre,* p. v.
30 Barnet, *Classic Theatre,* p. xvii.
31 Barnet, *Classic Theatre,* p. xviii.
32 H.Clurman, *The Naked Image* (New York, 1966), p. 62.