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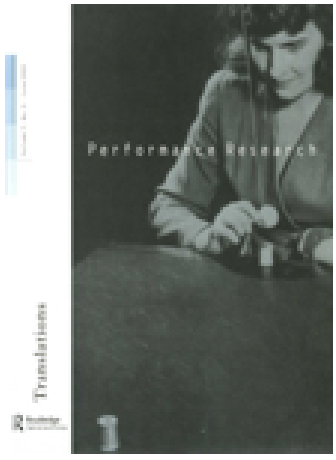

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Translating Humour

Equivalence, Compensation, Discourse

Lawrence Venuti

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In what follows I aim to formulate methods of analyzing and evaluating literary translations. To achieve this aim, it is essential to approach a translation *as a translation*, as a text that is relatively autonomous from the foreign text because it communicates that text with a domestic difference, a difference that reflects the receiving language and culture. This idea doesn't constitute a new departure in translation studies, where since the 1970s it has been developed by theorists who emphasize such constraints on the translating process as 'target norms' and the 'skopos' or goal that the translator intends the translation to realize (see Toury 1995; Vermeer 2000). Yet unlike these theorists I want to describe the relative autonomy of a translation without losing sight of its decisive relation to the foreign text: this relation is decisive because it helps to define a translation as a translation, distinct from other kinds of derivative texts. The relative autonomy is more clearly seen, I want to argue, if we return to the concept of equivalence and rethink it on the basis of particular translations in various literary forms and genres. I will draw my examples mainly from poetry, narrative, and satirical prose, making an effort to give theoretical concepts the formal and generic specificity that will enable them to be applied productively to different kinds of literary translations.

By considering particular translations in detail, I want to question the value of any argument or research project that restricts itself primarily to developing the most general theoretical concepts or seeks to validate such concepts by engaging primarily with other theories. But I also want to question empirically oriented projects that collect data without submitting their theoretical assumptions to a searching critique. Translating is a linguistic and cultural practice, and like every practice it is distinguished by specific kinds of materials (linguistic and cultural, foreign and domestic) and specific methods of transforming them (the full gamut of discursive strategies that might be employed in a translation). No practice can develop without an interrogative reflection on the theoretical concepts that make it possible, that inform its selection of materials and its transformative methods. By the same token, however, no theory can develop without the proof of practice, of the specific case. In the end, my rethinking of basic concepts through examples will result not only in a more nuanced theory of equivalence, but in a theory of translating a specific literary form: the literature of humour.

1. EQUIVALENCE AND THE DOMESTIC REMAINDER

Equivalence can be useful in analyzing and evaluating translations only if we avoid understanding it as a one-to-one or univocal correspondence between the foreign and translated texts. This sort of correspondence is seldom possible because the translating process usually involves a simultaneous loss and gain. It is in fact this loss and gain that defines the peculiar second-order status of a translation, its relative autonomy. The loss occurs because translating is radically decontextualizing.

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Translating detaches a foreign literary text from the literary traditions, the network of intertextual connections, that invest that text with significance for readers of the foreign language who have read widely in it. The foreign context is irrevocably lost: an entire foreign literature is never translated into a particular language, so that readers of a translation have no or limited access to the traditions that inform the literature. Even more fundamentally, translating dismantles the linguistic and literary context – a context with varying degrees of subtlety and complexity – that was created within the foreign text and can be said to constitute it, its texture (see Berman 1985). The signifying process of the foreign text often cannot be reconstructed because languages signify in different ways. Translating always effects a loss of the foreign text at various levels: a loss of form and meaning, syntax and lexicon, sound and meter, allusion and intertextuality.

At the same time, however, a gain occurs because translating is radically recontextualizing, actually exorbitant in its creation of another context. It adds formal and semantic features to the foreign text simply by rewriting it in another language with different linguistic structures and different literary traditions. Languages differ, sometimes markedly, in syntax and lexicon. Contrastive linguistics shows that English demands greater precision and cohesiveness than Romance languages like French, Spanish, and Italian (see, for example, Guillemin-Flescher 1981). Thus, the Italian preposition 'da' is rendered more precisely by diverse English words and phrases in diverse contexts: 'by', 'with', 'from', 'through', 'to', 'for', 'at the home of', among other possibilities. Further, different literary traditions take shape within languages: different in the sense of possessing distinctive styles, discourses, and genres, but also different in the sense of following distinctive modes and speeds of development and establishing unique affiliations with foreign and domestic literatures. Translating, especially in the case of a literary text, always effects a linguistic and cultural gain that exceeds the foreign text and signifies primarily in the receiving culture, evoking domestic forms, traditions, and values.

Since equivalence can never be a bi–univocal correspondence, the relations between the foreign text and the translation can take many different forms, and these relations will vary historically and geographically. Some periods, such as the 17th and 18th centuries in England, have been dominated by a preference for free translation, if not simply by an erasure of the distinction that we draw today between translation and adaptation (see Venuti 1995). A typical example is Alexander Pope's version of the *Iliad*, which recast the Homeric hexameter into the heroic couplet and displaced ancient Greek values with those specific to Hanoverian Britain.

Other periods are dominated by a greater demand for linguistic precision or an adequacy to the foreign text. Today, the prevailing expectation in the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as many other countries worldwide, is that a translation will be adequate to the foreign text by containing roughly the same number of words or pages. Although contemporary translators often depart from foreign syntactical constructions, they nonetheless try to maintain a semantic equivalence based on current dictionary definitions, or in other words a lexicographical equivalence. And in maintaining this basic equivalence, they also try to reproduce various formal aspects of a foreign literary text, its plot, characterization, and narrative point of view, its pattern of figurative language and stanzaic structure, its use of stylistic devices like irony. Despite these efforts, translators can never entirely escape the loss that the translating process inflicts on the foreign text, on its meanings and structures, figures and traditions. And they cannot obviate the gain in their translating, the construction of different meanings, structures, figures, and traditions and thereby the creation of textual effects that go far beyond the establishment of a lexicographical equivalence to signify primarily in the terms of the translating language and culture. Translating creates effects that vary to some extent the semantic and formal dimensions of a foreign text. I shall call these effects the domestic

'remainder' in a translation because they exceed the communication of a univocal meaning and reflect the linguistic and cultural conditions of the receptors (cf. Lecercle 1990). The remainder is the most visible sign of the domesticating process that always functions in translating, the assimilation of the foreign text to intelligibilities and interests that define the domestic cultural situation.

Consider, for example, the American translator Allen Mandelbaum's 1958 version of a text by the Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti:

Lontano	**Distantly**
Lontano lontano	Distantly distantly
come un cieco	like a blind man
m'hanno portato per mano	by the hand they led me

Mandelbaum's translation maintains a lexicographical equivalence with Ungaretti's poem while giving special attention to reproducing its line breaks and sound effects. The English version imitates the echo in the Italian text (the repetition of the long vowel 'o' and the rhyme on '-ano') by creating a rhyme (the long 'e' in 'distantly'/'me') and assonance (the short 'a' in 'man'/'hand'). Consequently, the last line of the translation resorts to a syntactical inversion ('by the hand they led me') that deviates from the straightforward, rather ordinary syntax of the Italian line. This deviation, moreover, releases an English remainder: such a syntactical inversion is archaic in English, indicative of older poetries, Elizabethan or Victorian, where it was already seen as a poeticism. Yet it was in fact poetical diction that Ungaretti sought to abandon in his poetry, preferring instead plain, precise Italian that rejected the rhetorical ornamentation favoured by predecessors such as Giosue Carducci and Gabriele D'Annunzio, Giovanni Pascoli and Guido Gozzano. In releasing a distinctively English remainder, Mandelbaum's translation detaches Ungaretti's poem from its moment in Italian literary history and links it to contrasting poetic discourses and traditions in English literature.

2. COMPENSATION AND THE ETHICS OF TRANSLATION

Because of the irreducible differences between languages and cultural traditions, translators often resort to various strategies to compensate for the losses that result from translation. A typical compensation is the insertion of a brief explanation for terms and allusions that are unfamiliar to the readership of the translation, especially those that are deeply rooted in the foreign culture. Compensations may also include free renderings or substitutions designed to produce an effect that the translator could not produce in the translation at precisely the same place that it occurs in the foreign text (see Harvey 1995).

In rendering the Italian writer Antonio Tabucchi's novel *Sostiene Pereira* (1994), the British translator Patrick Creagh inserted some words and phrases that are immediately recognizable to British readers. He turned the expression 'un buon cattolico' into 'a good Roman Catholic', where the inserted word 'Roman' serves as a useful qualification in a country in which the dominant religion is Protestant and Catholics are routinely identified with the city of the Pope's residence. Similarly, the academic expression 'a pieni voti', used to describe the highest grade when a candidate is awarded a university degree, was rendered as 'a First in Philosophy' in accordance with the British university system. In both cases, Creagh's translations compensated for cultural differences and made the text more familiar and comprehensible to British readers. Creagh resorted to similar compensations on the stylistic level. Tabucchi's text mixes standard and colloquial dialects of Italian to endow the narrative with an orality that matches the occasion: it is presented as an official testimony to an unnamed authority. Creagh too mixed comparable English dialects, but he maintained the orality more consistently by inserting colloquialisms and slang expressions where Tabucchi used the standard. Thus, Creagh rendered the Italian colloquialism 'stufo' with the appropriate English phrase 'fed up'. Yet in the case of

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'quotidianamente' Creagh chose the expression 'day in day out', which is more colloquial than the most likely alternative, 'daily'. Sometimes Creagh used more figurative renderings that effectively increase the oral quality of the translation. With the Italian phrase 'non sapeva che fare', he avoided the close rendering 'he didn't know what to do', and instead translated freely, using a visual image that conventionally signifies indecision or anxiety: 'biting his pen'. With the Italian phrase 'si trovava nell'imbarazzo', Creagh again avoided a close if prosaic rendering, 'he found himself in the difficult position,' in favour of a more expressive metaphor: 'he himself was saddled'.

In making the translation more accessible to readers, compensatory strategies necessarily increase the domestic remainder and raise questions regarding how much the translator should assimilate the foreign text to the receiving culture or, in other words, inscribe that text with domestic codes. Translating is fundamentally domesticating: its goal is to rewrite linguistic and cultural differences in terms that are intelligible or even recognizable to readers of the translation. Hence, translating enacts an ethnocentric violence that risks a suppression or erasure of those differences.

British and American cultures, among many others, have long been dominated by domesticating theories and practices that prefer fluent translation, an easy readability that adheres to current usage, the standard dialect, the most familiar language (see Venuti 1995). Fluency, readability, familiarity produce an illusion of transparency whereby the translated text appears to be not in fact a translation, but the 'original'. Consequently, the process of domestication is mystified by an illusory textual effect. At the beginning of the 19th century, however, Friedrich Schleiermacher indicated that the literary translator ('literary' is here used in the broad sense to include literature, philosophy, and the human sciences in general) always exercises a choice in regard to the extent and direction of the violence in his work: the translator can choose between a thoroughly domesticating strategy, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the cultural values in the translating language, or a foreignizing strategy, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text.

This isn't simply a discursive choice between different translation strategies, but an ethical choice between different attitudes toward the foreign text and culture. I agree with Antoine Berman that the translator ought to show respect for the foreign, and that substantially minimizing or removing the foreignness of the foreign text is unethical, especially where the domesticating process is mystified by the illusion of transparency (see Berman 1985). In effect, this sort of domestication constitutes a cultural imperialism in which the foreign is not respected for the linguistic and cultural difference that it represents, but instead is exploited merely to serve domestic interests and agendas.

Nonetheless, I depart from both Berman and Schleiermacher in arguing that foreignizing translation should not be understood as mere literalism or the retention of foreign words in the translated text – even if both methods can be useful in certain situations. No, the foreignness of the foreign text can never be manifested directly, in its own terms, but only indirectly, in the terms of a translation. To signal this foreignness, the translator must vary the translating language and culture, must introduce a difference or set of differences in the selection of a foreign text or in the translation strategy, deviations from the kinds of texts already translated from the foreign literature and from the strategies most frequently used to translate it. Through such deviations, the reader can come to realize that he or she is reading a translation, not to be confused with the foreign text. The 'foreign' element in a foreignizing translation isn't a transparent or unmediated representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text and is valuable in itself, but rather a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current situation in the translating language and culture. Foreignizing translation indicates the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign

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text, but it can do so only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the domestic language. In English, as in many languages, the most striking way to introduce such differences in the translation is through variations of the most familiar linguistic form, the standard dialect or the most widely used colloquial forms. The more heterogeneous the language, conjoined with the foreign themes, the more likely the reader will become aware that the text is a translation, a derivative work.

In these terms, Creagh's translation of Tabucchi's novel is foreignizing. The mix of standard and colloquial dialects also includes Britishisms, usually slang. The Italian expression 'in ferie' becomes 'on holiday', whereas the American English rendering is 'on vacation'. The phrase 'non voleva più' ('he didn't want [it] any longer') becomes 'he didn't fancy it at all', in which the use of the word 'fancy' as a verb is typically British. Elsewhere 'sono nei guai' ('I'm in trouble') becomes 'I'm in a pickle', 'pensioncina' ('little boarding house') becomes 'little doss-house', and 'parlano' ('they speak') becomes 'natter'. Creagh's polylingual mixture of Englishes, especially the colloquialisms, alters the characterization of Pereira by suggesting that he is less staid and perhaps younger than the elderly journalist presented in the Italian text. Yet the linguistic heterogeneity will also make an important cultural difference to readers of the translation.

Readers' reactions will of course vary according to diverse factors. But in this case the most important factor may be the linguistic standard in the receiving culture. American readers will notice the difference immediately, not only because they generally expect a homogeneous translation discourse that relies on the standard dialect, but because Creagh's translation contains Britishisms, words and expressions from a dialect of English that remains somewhat foreign to Americans. Yet both British and American readers will also notice the difference because of the theme of Tabucchi's novel: *Sostiene Pereira* is a political thriller set in Portugal in 1938 under Salazar's dictatorship. The mix of dialects in Creagh's translation evokes a comparable British novel, Graham Greene's *The Confidential Agent* (1939), which is similarly set during the Spanish Civil War. At the same time, however, the linguistic resemblance between Creagh's translation and Greene's novel highlights the thematic difference between Tabucchi's leftwing opposition to fascism and Greene's more circumspect liberalism. The language of Creagh's translation releases a domestic remainder, a reference to an analogous moment in British narrative traditions, yet this resemblance indicates a cultural difference from the Italian text.

3. HUMOUR IN TRANSLATION

The concept of the remainder enables a more incisive consideration of analyzing and evaluating translations of humorous literature. This concept also sheds light on the problems involved in writing such translations. If the task of translation is to inscribe the foreign text with a domestic remainder that compensates for, and at the same time signals, the linguistic and cultural differences of that text, then in the case of a humorous foreign text the remainder must recreate a particular discourse of humour in a different language and culture.

The prose of the Argentine-Italian writer Juan Rodolfo Wilcock can help to develop this point. Born in Buenos Aires in 1912, Wilcock belonged to the circle of innovative writers that included Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and Silvina Ocampo; during the 1940s and 1950s he wrote poetry and prose in Spanish. Repulsed by Juan Perón's dictatorship (1946–55), he immigrated to Italy where he associated with such writers as Alberto Moravia, Elsa Morante, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. In 1960 he started publishing in Italian and produced some 15 books, fiction, poetry, and drama, as well as many translations from English, French, and Spanish. He died at Lubriano near Viterbo in 1978.

Wilcock's narratives tend to be carnivalesque in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense, suffused with the dark humour that accompanies the collapse or sheer subversion of hallowed truths, official standards, insti-

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tutional authority (see Bakhtin 1968). Jacket copy that Wilcock wrote for one of his books refers to the 'impossibility, in our culture, of severing the tragic from the ridiculous'. Wilcock's hilarotragedy takes the form of incongruous juxtapositions, irony, and parody in the service of social satire.

Sometimes his humour relies on camp, a gay verbal and literary discourse that emphasizes sexuality and is characterized by heterogeneity at every level (for a useful analysis of camp, see Harvey 2000). Camp mixes dialects, registers, styles, and even languages, sometimes using French as an ironic sign of cultural sophistication. Camp also mixes allusions and genres from elite and popular cultures. And it employs such themes as transvestitism, blurring genders, and the theatricalization of experience, blurring the distinction between art and life. The humour of camp issues from its sheer heterogeneity, its frustration of literary and cultural expectations raised by forms and themes as well as its violation of heterosexual norms.

Since camp is a homosexual discourse, the very decision to translate Wilcock's writing insinuates the difference of a sexual minority. But this decision also signals a cultural difference against a canon of 20th-century Italian writing in English which is dominated by male authors and heterosexual themes. Think of Italo Svevo and Moravia, Ungaretti and Eugenio Montale, Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco. Gay writers who explore homosexual themes, such Pier Vittorio Tondelli and Aldo Busi, have been translated, but they remain marginal, virtually unknown to most readers of contemporary Italian literature in English translation. In addition to the mere choice of Wilcock for translation, a translation strategy can signal the foreignness of his Italian texts by cultivating a camp discourse. As an illustration, I offer my version of an extract from a collection of short texts that Wilcock wrote with a collaborator, Francesco Fantasia. Here camp is frequently used to satirize various mainstream cultural targets, including canonical writers, commercial publishing, and bourgeois sexual morality. Thus a text entitled 'Dante and Philosophy' ('Dante e la filosofia') represents the relation between Dante's poetry and his philosophical themes in an allegorical narrative that is at once culinary and pornographic, parodying Dante's own recourse to allegory in the *Divine Comedy*. Another text, entitled 'Bestsellers' ('I più venduti'), personifies bestselling novels, presenting them as two people engaged in a nonsensical and somewhat obscene conversation. The text I have translated, entitled 'Ask Oscar: A Syndicated Column' ('Posta di Madame, a cura di Oscar Wilde'), features a prudish fiancé who sees his matrimonial courtship as a diabolical masquerade. Typical of camp, the Italian text offers a dense sedimentation of forms: an allusion to an elite literary figure, Oscar Wilde, is combined with a popular genre, a newspaper advice column, while the fiancé's letter itself strongly resembles the repetitive narratives sometimes encountered in jokes.

To maintain the distinctive satiric humour of the Italian text, my translation recreates the camp discourse on various levels (see p. 12).

It contains a heterogeneous lexicon and syntax.

I not only use current standard English, but also introduce noticeable variations, including formal or Latinate diction ('civilities', 'summoned', 'transpired', 'vicinity'), a poetical archaism ('bedight'), and many colloquialisms. Thus, 'Fermo la macchina', which might be rendered closely as 'I stop the car', becomes 'I slammed on the brakes', and 'vedo', or 'I see', becomes 'I spotted'. I occasionally give the fiancé's syntax a punctilious quality by avoiding contractions ('I do not know'), embedding the phrase 'I must confess', and adding the ceremonious 'I can testify'.

The translation also uses language with distinctly sexual connotations.

The recurrent verb 'spogliarsi' is translated more than once as 'stripped', evoking 'striptease'. In line with this sexual resonance, the transvestitism that is subtly suggested in the Italian becomes more explicit in the translation: I expand the feminine

Cara Oscar Wilde,
ieri mi è successo qualcosa di imbarazzante. Premetto che sono del segno della Vergine. La mia fidanzata è Scorpione. Stavo andando in macchina quando la professoressa di francese della mia fidanzata si spoglia nuda e indossa il suo costume da diavolo. Fermo la macchina, scendo e proseguo tranquillamente a piedi. Per strada vedo che pure altre persone si stanno vestendo da diavolo. Arrivo a casa della mia fidanzata e anche lei si spoglia e si traveste da diavola. Devo confessare che lì per lì mi è sembrata un'impertinenza. Entra il padre e le lascio immaginare la scena: anche lui era travestito da diavolo. Scambiati alcuni convenevoli, chiama la madre e questa appena mi vede comincia a spogliersi e infila il suo costume da diavola. Tutto questo avveniva nei pressi dell'università, in via Piero Gobetti. Non so se lei ha mai visto una famiglia vestita da diavoli, è quasi peggio che nuda. Me ne andai confuso e titubante. Ora vorrei chiederle: le pare opportuno che la prossima volta che vado a trovare la mia fidanzata mi metta anch'io il mio costume da diavoletto, che mi sta un po' stretto?

Oscar Wilde risponde: Che posso risponderle? Si affidi all'istinto. Non bisogna lasciarsi trascinare dai luoghi comuni.

(Wilcock and Fantasia 1976: 42)

Dear Miss Oscar Wilde,
Yesterday something embarrassing happened to me. First, I must tell you that I am a Virgo; my fiancée's sign is Scorpio. I was driving home my fiancée's French tutor when she suddenly starts to undress. She stripped naked and slipped into a devil's costume, all red leather and spandex. I slammed on the brakes, jumped out, and proceeded on foot as calmly as possible. On the street I spotted many other people dressed like devils. When I arrived at my fiancée's house, she greeted me warmly and immediately started to undress, donning a devil's costume, all red lace and feathers. Then and there, I must confess, it seemed rather impertinent. Her father entered, and just imagine what happened: he too was dressed like a devil, sporting a crimson silk smoking jacket and a black cravat bedight with tiny crimson pitchforks. After we exchanged a few civilities, he summoned mother who on arrival started stripping down. She then wriggled into a strapless scarlet sheath and slid her matching toenails into cloven-heeled pumps. All this transpired in the vicinity of the university, on via Dante Alighieri. I do not know if you have ever glimpsed a family dressed like devils, but I can testify that it is almost worse than seeing them naked. It sent me reeling with perplexity and doubt. Now here is the question that I would like to ask you: When next I meet my fiancée, would it be appropriate for me to wear my devil's costume as well (even if it is a bit tight around the waist)?

Oscar Wilde replies: What can I tell you? Trust in instinct. Don't be enthralled by commonplaces. One must either be a work of art, or wear a work of art.

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salutation, 'Cara Oscar Wilde', to include the word 'Miss'.

Allusions are inserted to join elite and popular forms.

The Italian text already combines two popular genres, a newspaper column and a joke. To these I add elite allusions. The street name, 'via Piero Gobetti', is changed to 'via Dante Alighieri' so as to give a Dantesque twist to the theme of the devil's costume. Oscar Wilde's reply contains an aphorism drawn from Wilde's actual writing: 'One must either be a work of art, or wear a work of art'.

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The translation increases the precision and cohesiveness of the language according to the demands of English.

This strategy ranges from a more specific lexicon to more explicit syntactical connections to the addition of words and phrases that sketch more detailed scenes. Whereas the Italian words that signify putting on or wearing clothing constitute common choices – 'indossa', 'vestendo', 'si traveste' – my renderings tend to be more vivid: 'slipped on', 'wriggled', 'donning', 'sporting'. I also insert exact descriptions of the devil's costumes, including articles of clothing, fabrics, and accessories.

4. THE ETHICS OF A CAMPY TRANSLATION

In releasing such a distinctively English-language remainder, my translation might be judged as unethical according to the very concept of ethics I formulated earlier, an ethics that depends on the reader's recognition of the foreignness of the foreign text in translation. More precisely, to communicate the humour of the Italian text, I exaggerate its camp discourse and risk the charge of domesticating it too much by fashioning a lexicon and syntax that answer to the English demand for specificity and by inserting allusions that are familiar to English-language readers. British readers might even feel that I assimilate the Italian text too closely to a form of humour that is currently popular in the UK. In fact, the London *Times* runs a parody of an advice column called 'Help! The answer to all your problems' (Mary Wardle of the University of Rome La Sapienza kindly brought this column to my attention). Here is a recent example (9 April 2000: 62) that bears a resemblance to the physical themes and heterogeneous language of the translation:

> *Question.* I am on the horns of a dilemma. Today's luxury quilted loo rolls are too fat for my bathroom fittings. I do not wish to be thought a cheapskate, but the only ones that fit are the 'recycled' ones (an unpleasant concept in itself). What do I do to avoid being a social pariah?
>
> *Answer.* For goodness' sake, nothing is more lower-middle-class than 'luxury quilted toilet tissue'. If you want to be posh your bottom must suffer. Throw out that ergonomically moulded seat and get a wooden one that digs into your thighs (and will most likely give you splinters in a few years). Make sure the cistern clanks ominously when you flush. And above all, seek out that shiny disinfected paper with all the absorbency of a bucket of razor blades (and a similar texture, it feels, as it slides over your softer regions).

The humour in this parody comes partly from breaking the social taboo against discussing bodily functions and partly from mixing lexicons and registers to refer to those functions. The language is colloquial ('loo rolls', 'cheapskate', 'posh') and technical ('recycled', 'ergonomically', 'cistern'), politely euphemistic ('bottom', 'softer regions') and even faintly literary ('the horns of a dilemma', 'clanks ominously').

Yet 'Ask Oscar: A Syndicated Column' is obviously much more heterogeneous than this newspaper parody, and herein lies its ethical significance as a foreignized translation. More generally, the foreignness of a foreign text can be signalled in translation most forcefully by upsetting the hierarchy of values in the receiving language and culture. An exaggerated camp discourse tampers with this hierarchy through its multi-levelled heterogeneity: the mixture of dialects, registers, styles, and genres runs counter to the English-language reader's expectation that the preferred language for translating is the current standard dialect, the most familiar form of English. The translation is laden with effects that work only in English, in terms of the history and current state of the language, in the incongruity – for example – of a poetical archaism like 'bedight', a foreign borrowing like 'cravat', and fashion-industry jargon like 'spandex'. Even if a British reader should recall the parodic newspaper column when encountering 'Ask Oscar: A Syndicated Column', upon further consideration the resemblance will ultimately indicate a cultural difference: camp is a more complicated discourse of humour than a journalistic parody, and

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homosexuality continues to be a more taboo topic than going to the bathroom.

To perceive my translation as foreignized, the English-language reader must not only keep in mind that it bears two foreign authors' names and a translator's by-line; this reader must also allow the heterogeneous language to play havoc with the linguistic and cultural expectations that today are usually brought to literary translations, especially English translations of Italian literature. For some readers, the language may seem so heterogeneous as to compel them to glance back at the authors' names, incredulously wondering about the cultural identity of the writer who produced the text. Reading a translation as a translation, then, is not to detect an unpleasurable awkwardness of language, otherwise known as 'translationese'. On the contrary, it is to appreciate the writerly qualities of the translation, the textual effects that work primarily in the translating language and culture and distinguish the translation from the foreign text.

To test the effect of my translation, I surveyed the responses of approximately 150 readers, using audiences who subsequently listened to this paper as a lecture. I presented them with two English translations of the Italian text: a very close version and the elaborated version I have reproduced above. And then I asked them to judge which was the more humorous. Although the readers didn't see the Italian, I identified the translations as such and provided the names of the Italian authors as well as the bibliographical data concerning their text. The readers who participated in my experiment were very diverse. They included literary critics and translation scholars as well as translators, undergraduate and postgraduate students at translator training programs, and native English speakers who read only for pleasure. Their native languages, moreover, were extremely wide-ranging: not only British and American English, but Basque, Catalan, Croatian, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish. By far the greatest number of readers, approximately 75 percent, chose the elaborated translation as the more humorous. In unsolicited comments written on the sheet I distributed, as well as in comments voiced after the experiment, many readers referred to the increased specificity of the clothing as a primary source of the humour. This fact, in conjunction with the wide range of native languages, points to a particular conclusion linking humour, language, and translation. The readers evidently brought to the experiment a stylistic expectation for English translations, the knowledge that English demands greater precision and cohesiveness than many of their native languages and therefore the expectation that an English translation of a humorous text will be funny to the degree that it is specific.

Some readers also perceived the foreignness of the foreign text in the translation, although they lacked the terminology I have used here to describe the foreignizing effect. Here is a typical comment from a British reader who teaches English at a translation faculty in Spain:

> the second one is funnier because it is more coherent (where does the tutor appear from in the first version?) and visual (the descriptions of the rubber clothing, etc.). The French tutor is identified as a woman too. The name of the street is more significant (but I haven't read the *Divine Comedy*). And the final epigram is welcome. Both versions contain startling genre mixes. For example, the very colloquial joke formulae (tenses, etc.) which is mixed in with the syndicated column. But then there are some incongruences too. In both texts there is 'impertinent/impertinence', a word that seems too formal and weird in meaning in this context. Similarly exotic is the word 'commonplace' that is in both texts. I didn't know the word 'bedight'.

This reader's use of such descriptions as 'incongruences', 'weird in this context', and 'exotic' indicates that in his reading experience the translation registered a foreignness through its discursive strategies, a departure from typical expectations for English usage, particularly in literary translations. Moreover, the reader could perceive this foreignizing effect without any specialized literary knowledge. He hadn't read

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Dante's major poem, nor did he recognize the English word 'bedight' as a poetical archaism that appears in such poets as Edmund Spenser. Although as an English teacher at a translation faculty he can be considered a professional reader to some extent, he brought popular expectations to the translations, wanting the language to make 'coherent' sense and recognizing familiar genres like the joke and the newspaper column. The perception of foreignizing effects in a translation would thus seem not to be restricted to an elite audience of literary specialists or readers with an extensive knowledge of literary styles and traditions.

5. SOME CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing discussion offers several guidelines for analyzing and evaluating literary translations. Since the general expectation today is that translations will be semantically adequate to the foreign texts they translate, the significance and value of any translation hinge, first, on maintaining a lexicographical equivalence – even if the demand for such an equivalence is relaxed at points because of the need to compensate for linguistic and cultural differences. Yet this very need indicates that more must be taken into consideration when approaching literary translations. Because a univocal correspondence between a foreign text and its translation cannot be achieved, especially in the case of literature, a literary translation cannot be analyzed or judged simply by comparing it to the text it translates. It is also necessary to examine the domestic remainder and the diverse relations that it establishes within the receiving language and culture. A translation is always an interpretation of the foreign text which uses and responds to the dialects and registers, discourses and styles, genres and traditions that constitute the culture in which the translation is produced. The translator must release a domestic remainder that doesn't simply approximate the features of the foreign text, but compensates for the irreducible differences between languages and cultures.

Hence, any assessment of compensatory strategies cannot be framed merely in linguistic or literary terms; the involvement of a foreign text and culture requires that a cultural ethics be formulated. Because translation is so weighted toward the receiving language and culture, it includes an ethical choice: the translator must decide how to preserve the foreignness of the foreign text, even though that foreignness can be signalled most powerfully, not through literalisms or foreign borrowings, but through a disarrangement of the hierarchy of domestic values. A foreign text can be chosen to reform the canon of the foreign literature in translation, and a discursive strategy can be developed to challenge the most prevalent translation practices, the most familiar uses of language in translations. Translating is fundamentally domesticating, but a translation can use various domestic means to bring the foreign text into the receiving culture. The translator can assume responsibility for this domestication only by using domestic means that are inventive or experimental, that so depart from dominant values at home as to register a linguistic and cultural difference. This experimentalism must be figured into analyses and evaluations of translations. And, perhaps most importantly, translators themselves ought to call attention to it through prefaces, afterwords, and annotations so as to educate readers who prefer, largely through custom and partly through ignorance, that translations be an invisible form of writing.

Nonetheless, a translator's particular performance may be so distinctive in its choices as to call attention to itself. And this possibility is more likely to occur with literary discourses that require innovative or elaborated strategies to compensate for linguistic and cultural differences. Humour presents such a case. Here the translator's release of the domestic remainder must be calculated to produce humorous effects that both imitate those of the foreign text while maintaining their differences for readerships in the receiving culture. The empirical data presented here, the surveys of reader responses to my translation of Wilcock and Fantasia's text, suggest that humour is far from

universal, that it lacks any basis in an essential human nature, even if the stigma attached to sexual orientations like homosexuality does indeed cross national borders today and lead to sniggers – among other, less amused reactions – in vastly different cultures. Because the universality of humour is questionable or simply nonexistent, a translation that maintains a lexicographical equivalence to a humorous foreign text or closely adheres to its lexical and syntactical features will not necessarily reproduce its humorous effects. Humour can be described not simply as culturally specific, as an effect of the hierarchical arrangement of values in a cultural formation, but also as rooted in the particular languages in which literatures are written, in the subliminal knowledge that users acquire of those languages even when they are non-native speakers. What users learn is that languages are inscribed with different demands for precision and cohesiveness, and these demands create stylistic expectations that shape acts of communication and representation, including the production of literary effects like humour and the effectiveness of humorous discourses like camp.

To write a humorous translation that signals the foreignness of the foreign text, a translator must first choose a text whose humour disrupts the hierarchy of values in the translating culture. In arguing that humour is culturally specific, I don't wish to deny that a reader of a humorous translation might laugh at a passage that in the foreign text evokes the foreign reader's laughter. But I do want to suggest that any notion of common humanity inferred from this shared reaction can only be misleading because the inevitable ratio of loss and gain in the translating process, a ratio that is at once linguistic and cultural, ensures that the basis for our laughter can never be exactly the same. Once a suitably humorous foreign text is selected, then, a translator must work to register its difference: the translating language can be varied to resist any homogeneity that might be imposed by dominant translation practices. Yet still more is necessary. In cultivating a heterogeneous discursive strategy, the translator must also take into account the stylistic expectations inscribed in the translating language, must conform to the degrees of precision and cohesiveness demanded by that language to ensure that the writing produces humorous effects.

Clearly, the kind of translation I am advocating is oppositional, unceasingly critical of the linguistic and cultural materials that the translator has to hand. I draw the urgency for this critical stance from the fundamental paradox of translation itself: the materials that the translator must unavoidably use to receive the foreign always threaten to annul it.

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