VALUES, STANDARDS AND NORMS IN TRANSLATION

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I

This paper is first and last concerned with the values of truth, morality and aesthetics in translation. The concept of value has a straight equivalent in most European languages (*Wert, valore, valeur, tsennost, valor* –Sp and P–, *hodnota*) all with a material semantic origin, which is variously modified by economic (value for money), physical (valour), emotional (vale, farewell) and finally moral and universal implications, with both personal and altruistic connotations, which are idealistic and like Tawney's equality can never be fully attained. In discussing translation, the primary value is traditionally considered to be fidelity, (often traduced as servility) but now only provided that the source language text, which is more often non-literary than literary, is throughout trustworthy and acceptably written. Whilst language can be such a slippery, protean and fuzzy substance that no single judgement about translation equivalence can be definitive, we should not assume the opposite to be the case, i.e. that all value-judgements are ephemeral, throwaway and subjective. If this skill, or art, or craft (translation is a bit of all three, with a dash of taste thrown in, demonstrating that it is never ideal, finished or perfect) is to be useful, then it has to be assessed, if as a product one text is preferred to another.

II

I assume in this paper that when I write or read a translation in parallel with a serious original I sooner or later submit it to some kind of axiology, that is a system of values. I evaluate its quality in relation to its truth or falseness, goodness or badness, elegance or ponderousness, always within a human rather than a formal or abstract context; thus I make value-judgement, which I attempt to keep clear of my attempt to objectively characterise the features of the translation and its original. I think it is the job of the translation critic to evaluate as well as to describe, to keep the two activities separate in the way that a journalist is enjoined to separate fact from opinion, news from features – «comment is free, but facts are sacred» (C. P. Scott).

The reverse of a value-directed or value-driven approach –in contrast to the «loaded» term «value-laden»– is the culturally relative and wholly descriptive approach to translation. Thus translation is supposed to have a function only within a temporal and geographical space, and the question of its quality whether truthful, moral, aesthetic or logical is of no interest. «Beauty is in the eye of the beholder», like ugliness or wrong or mediocrity or sublimity and the concept of aesthetics is dismissed as though the famous quotation were a line from Keats instead of from the unread Mar-

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garet Hungerford's unread novel *Molly Bawn* written in the late 19th Century. According to the cultural relativist, everything is a matter of opinion, and one opinion is only valued for its divergence from another. Such value-free statements indicate a lack of connection between languages and the world outside it; T. S. Eliot's «objective correlative», where a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events is the formula of a particular emotion, so that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is evoked - this correlative between a situation and its linguistic expression simply does not exist. But in fact, far from *Hamlet*, the original subject of the «objective correlative», being written merely to suit a certain time and a certain place, far from presupposing a time when it is no longer relevant (Terry Eagleton), *Hamlet,* being an artistic masterpiece, since it is grounded in and comments upon the particulars of universal human behaviour, feelings and experience, though in a necessary well-observed cultural setting, grows continuously in popularity in time and in the world, being transmitted by continual performances, reprints and the more or less powerful medium of translation.

III

Alexander Tytler in his great book, written in 1790, *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, (p. 12) acknowledged that Dr George Campbell, the Principal of Marischal College Aberdeen, and a translator of the Gospels, was right in stating that there are certain words in others language that «but imperfectly» correspond to any of the words in other languages; these are most of the terms relating «to morals, to the passions, to matters of sentiment, or to the objects of the reflex and internal senses», therefore the important human values which linguistically are at the opposite pole of the material objects; they are abstract, key-words which are meaningful when context-free, though within a context they may have quite a different material sense (of element, spirit, justification, architecture). Campbell illustrates with three sets of Classical Greek, Latin and English words: *arete / virtus* / virtue; sophrosune / temperantia / «temperance»; eleos / misericordia / «mercy». All these «correspondences» differ in meaning, becoming more general or more concrete. Later Nietzsche, the reverser (rather than revaluer) of all values, made strenuous attempts to demean and cheapen the meaning of mercy *(Mitleid)*. And now, in modern English it is not difficult to indicate a long series of words of value (rather than value-laden words) whose Romance, and occasionally Germanic equivalents differ considerably in meaning, and are therefore difficult and often inexact to translate, thus: loyal, sincere, scabrous, scurrilous (G.), useful, brutal, copious, fatal, trivial, colossal, adequate, massive. Note that words of value are qualities, are basically adjectives; English grecolatinisms which are actions, represented by verbs or verb-nouns, and which are vastly more numerous, remain more commonly close, almost identical in meaning to their French, and since the linguistic deluge from 1945 onwards in Germany, their German correspondences (establishment, ambition, disorder, deprivation, etc.)

These illustrations of the inconsistency and changing nature of the linguistic substance, the *significants*, of value-words in translation - the attempt to struggle with such

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words as *Arger, Barmherzigkeit, Keuschheit*, show how their expression is affected by cultural or national ideologies; these variations become gradually narrower as national frontiers are transcended and behaviour is recognised as subject to universal standards, whether in Bosnia or Rwanda.

IV

Norms in translation can be set up in contrast to values. They are implicit or explicit prescriptions or guide-lines for the literary styles that acquire consent and legitimacy at a certain period in a single-culture linguistic area. These norms when pursued in a literary text are usually evidence of a translator's weakness or incompetence or eagerness to conform or «desire to win acclaim» (generalised by T. Hermans), unless the original text is a parody of the cliches of the times, as in the plays of Ionesco or Pinter, or the pastiche of Shakespeare (*Love's Labour's Lost*) or Joyce. In such norms it is taken for granted, as it was by Denham, that all literal translation is servile and that a true translation is free – thus Hadrian's:

> Little soul, roving, winsome
> guest and companion of my body
> to what places will you now depart
> Little pale one, stiff little bare one,
> neither will you make jokes, as you are wont

becomes in Matthew Prior's early 18th Century version:

> Poor little pretty fluttering thing
> Must we no longer live together
> And dost thou prune thy trembling wing
> To take thy flight thou knowest not whither

– which, after a quite brilliant start, virtually abandons the original as decisively as Hadrian's soul abandons his body in order to preserve the metre and the trifling courtly trivially poetic tone.

Translation norms are ideological, social and cultural. In the 17th and 18th century, when virtually all English (poetry) translation is from Classical Greek and Latin, apart from Wyatt's Petrarch and the Bible), they reflect the period's concept of literary style and good taste. They are the proper objects of reception theory, but, as objects of translation criticism, they demonstrate the negation of standards of translation: they generalise where a sensitive translator particularises; they pursue usage where a true translator wrestles with meaning; in every age, they are the epitome of smoothness, naturalness, unobtrusiveness, fluency, invisibility ('the translation is a model of good English style'), all the qualities that the brilliant and witty Vladimir Nabokov excoriated so contemptuously in his essays and interviews. Some true and faithful translation (from Dante, Goethe), breaking the norms, only appears in the 19th Century.

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Here too, translation begins to divide into literary and non-literary. In 1813 the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher first discussed business translation as a separate issue. This non-literary translation, used for commercial, scientific and technical and eventually after the decline of Latin, and then French as the diplomatic language, for general political purposes, has eventually considerably exceeded literary translation in its range and quantity. Where literary translation is to a lesser or greater extent influenced by ideological norms, non-literary translation is subject to a large variety of formats, registers and house-styles, and can get much closer to the objective truth. Here apothegms like Matthias Claudius's *Wer übersetzt, untersetzt* (Whoever translates, undertranslates, but the pun is lost), no longer apply. The concept of translators who are traitors, of beautiful and unfaithful women, which were and sometimes even are applied to all translation, are absurd when they are applied to non-literary translation. And I think that this scientific attitude is now influencing literary translators, since important literary works are being retranslated more accurately, from their titles onwards.

Values and standards of literary and non-literary translation have an overarching identity, but differ in many particulars. In my view, the principles of accuracy, elegance and concision (concentration of communicative force) predominate for the target language text, in both types of translation, unless there are factors in the source language text (e.g. an authoritative text that is inaccurate or badly written) that preclude them. Values and standards differ in the first place because non-literary translation attempts to reproduce the material and real words of the original, and therefore standards depend on the exactness and persuasiveness of this reproduction. However in literary translation these worlds may be represented by the writer in abstract, naturalistic symbolical impressionistic expressionistic surrealist symbolical and other modes and are therefore more difficult to determine, since the all-important connotations, sometimes only faintly implicit in the original (an apple as precious, fresh, green, knowledge, discord, bitterness, perpetual youth, which if it is a cultural expression may not exist in the target language) may have to be indicated through compensation as a translation procedure. (I have yet to discover a proper monolingual or indeed bilingual dictionary of general connotations, both of which would be useful, not only to translators). Another view is that there is no outside world in literary texts, and no author's meaning but only various reader's meanings, that is only varieties of language without a referential meaning or connection with the source language text that the translator is reproducing. This excludes all concepts of value. («Language speaks not the author», Barthes.) This is a view that I reject and fiercely oppose.

V

There are many values that are confined to one rather than the other kind of language, including often even the distinction between the two: in general terms, non-literary texts are denotative, about objects, are third person reports, are about material truth; literary texts are always connotative and allegorical, about individuals, are first and second person dialogues, are about moral and aesthetic truth. (Note that the aes-

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thetic values of elegance and clarity are also comprised in non-literary texts, but normally more transparently.) All true literature, all great art, is a comment on human behaviour, a fact which in the city of the *Fusilamientos* and the in my experience greatest of all the painters strikes the eye; and the literary is the reverse of Verlaine's *Tout le reste est littérature*, the formal, the stuffy, the divorced from life, but on the contrary is vibrant with speech rhythms. Not surprisingly, the literary is idiomatic, colloquial often slangy, where the non literary is, *at best*, informal, addressed directly to the reader, as in a good official notice or instruction. The non-literary excludes the literary, except as quotations; the literary may merge with the non-literary: Stendhal's dry style is often compared to that of a military report. In the enormous amalgam of the English language, the literary with its live speech rhythms and vivid monosyllabic phrasal verbs, is apt to be Germanic, the non-literary of Romance language etymology. (Due to the influence first of innovative writers such as Eliot and Hemingway, and now of the media –television and the *Economist*– the two are coming closer together, but the literary, and in particular the poetic, using all the resources of language, is more packed, concise and more memorable).

I illustrate the distinction from almost any Spanish literary text, giving first a literary and then a non-literary translation of a few words, which are taken from the context of *Bienvenido, Bob* by Juan Carlos Onetti (*Welcome, Bob* translated by Donald L. Shaw (*Penguin Parallel Texts; Spanish Short Stories, Cuentos Hispanicos*, edited by Jean Franco, Penguin Books, 1996: *eligiendo*, picking out (selecting); *la cosa justa*, the very thing (precise); *en medio*, in the mist (middle), *definitivamente*, utterly or absolutely (completely); *plantado*, stuck (planted); *solo*, by himself (alone); *dejé de*, I gave up (ceased); *intentar*, try (attempt to); *veloz*, fleet (rapid); *esforzarse*, strive (make an effort).

Note that in principle, the non-literary words, typical of 'grey' and tedious language, the impersonal language of say economic reports and articles, are close to being literally translated; the literary words have suplementary connotations, and being often monosyllabic, colloquial, idiomatic and figurative, cannot be as accurate as non-literary translation. *Prima facie*, Spanish appears barren in literary language compared with English, but I am not qualified to discuss Spanish; for French, Racine makes unsurpassed connnotative use of his limited vocabulary by creating certain key-words and repeating them everywhere in his work: *fuir, chercher, poursuivre, composer, étonner, toucher, occuper*: here the translator can fortunately create the same effect by repeating these words, as is best practice with almost all key-words.

There may also be a unique scale or linguistic coefficient of intensity, grading the synonims of verbs of action and of adjectives of quality by their degrees of energy and duration, proposed by David Snelling of the University of Trieste in his brilliant book. *Strategies for Simultaneous Interpretation* (Camponotto Udine 1992) which spans non-literary and literary writing; thus, (this my own example) non-literary; touch, *(tocar)*, move, *(mover)*, take unawares, catch unawares, *(coger desprevenido)*, surprise *(sorprender)* precedes literary: startle, *(asustar, sobresaltar)*, astonish, *(asombrar)* amaze, astound, *(pasmar)* stun, stagger, stupefy. In my teaching and correcting practice, I mark a weak or insufficiently forceful expression with a rising, (↑) a too forceful expression with a descending arrow, (↓) . A parallel scale is big; *(grande)*

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large; sizeable, extensive *(extenso);* massive *(masivo);* huge; immense *(inmenso);* enormous; *(enorme)* vast *(vasto)* –here the scale is not so clear-cut, and physical size and emotional emphasis can be blurred. Note that typically Spanish has not such wide ranges as English; literary translation can only be an approximation, where some translation deficit is inevitable, unless as in the case of Baudelaire (Poe) and Rilke (Michelangelo, Louise Labe), the translator is a better poet than the original.

Further, non-literary writing normally has to make linguistic and referential sense and even common sense, which is not always so in fiction. Werner Koller, whose detailed and perceptive comparison of fictional and factual texts in the fourth edition of his *Einführung in die Übersetzungswissenschaft* (1992) is the only (other) one I know, has pointed out that the statue of liberty which faces the hero Karl Rossmann in the first paragraph of *Amerika* is holding a sword instead of a torch; the translator has to assume that any deviation from the fact in a literary text such as this one has a symbolical significance, and personally I think he should point this out to the new readership, though Kafka does not do so to the first one. Further the language of literature is potentially richer, more complex, more polysemous, more layered than the language of reality, which it subsumes. Admittedly this is a general principle, and when a novel like Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* starts: «The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, where for many generations they had lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance», it is indistinguishable from non-literature and there won't be many translation options in any language; this appears as Augustan, as dry and as latinate, as spare and as sparse as any sentence of Camus: *Les phares découpèrent soudain dans la nuit, d'un côté de la route, puis de l'autre, deux baraques de bois couvertes de tôle.* (The search lights picked out suddenly in the night, on one side of the road, and then on the other, two wooden shacks covered with sheet-metal). Wider translation choices only appear with human qualities (gentle, kind, neat, plain, nasty, nice, straight, fine, sultry, hold, *zart, doux,* etc.) none of which have straight translation equivalent. But the basic distinction between literary and non-literary language is in the field of silence and sound, both of which are heightened in poetry, which in all respects is the most concentrated form of literary language. Sound is usually disregarded in non-literary language; alliteration and onomatopeya are normally out of place except in rhetoric and advertisements. In literary language both figures of speech (the term «speech» is significant) come alive, whilst in poetry, the entire sonic sequence is important, and can barely be reproduced in translation. Again there is a contrast between the insignificant «rest» of prose and regular, meaningful and recurrent pauses of poetry, which are usually translated.

VI

I suggest that though translating fiction is typically more complex and more challenging than translating factual or sci-tech- or humanities texts (and usually much worse paid –it is rightly often regarded as a labour of (nothing but) love– the basic standards by which it is evaluated (accuracy, economy, good writing) are the same, but

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not so clear to determine. Finally, whilst there will always be elements of ideological norms in translating literature and the humanities, their significance will diminish with the strengthening of the scientific (non-literary) approach, the apparent collapse of ideology and the growth of a belief in international responsibilities and rights that transcend national and personal frontiers.

VII

In 1886, Oscar Wilde, writing in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, complained that Balzac's English translators did not understand French and produced a page of French and English translation examples (e.g. *écus rebelles* translated as «rebellious lucre» to substantiate his criticism. His appraisal is as valid now as it was at the time. It is useful to describe and evaluate the norms, the small change, the conventional translation equivalents of the past, often to be found in bilingual dictionaries (scrap examples: *or* as 'now', *eventual* as 'possible', *si* as 'if' - even the Oxford-Hachette only gives 'whereas' as the seventh sense, and omits 'although'), but only on the basis of standards that represent theoretical reference-points for the past and realistic values for the future.

Whilst literary translation cannot use reality as a criterion in the way that non-literary translation does, it espouses more closely the substance and meaning of the source text language, and its sense of reality is filtered through the author and then the translator. From Cicero and St Jerome, the question of fidelity, often so lightly dismissed now, has always been posed. Beyond arguments about bias towards the author's words or the translator's sense, the source or the target language, the writer or the reader, there has always been the assumption that if the text is valid and valuable, the translator's task is to reproduce or recreate it as it was intended - translation reflects this oscillation between denotation and connotation, over and undertranslation, literal and figurative – are we to translate *faire la roue (hacer la rueda)* as «spread its tail» (like a peacock) or as «strut» or «swagger» – yes, it depends on the context, but what if both turns make sense, are just as appropriate?

VIII

The new and necessary factor in translation goes beyond the components of the source and target language texts. It supersedes the idea that the translator has no kind of responsibility for the content or even the style of the text she translates. Briefly the translator now may have to intervene, not invisibly but openly, within (using the square brackets or the *sic*) or outside the text, if it is authoritative or historical (a) when the language or the intention of the text contravenes human rights declarations (recently a literary review in the *Sunday Times* pointed out that a translator had failed to draw attention to the violently antisemitic remarks in Robert Schumann's letters, but neither critic nor translator attempted to explain the fact that Schumann's preferred poet for setting his music was the Jew Heinrich Heine) (b) in a non-literary text, when it con-

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tains untrue or illogical statements or is poorly written or structured, or anthropomorphizes countries, nature (the pathetic fallacy) ships or pejoratively animals. (c) rarely when the translator has to replace what the author says with what she thinks he means, perhaps owing to the source language's lack of adequate resources. And all this is only tentative. Like Nietzsche, I write to make you think and perhaps to make you think again, which means to change your thinking.

Translators in the future, both literary and non-literary, are going to be faced with many new tasks, and there will be new modes as well as topics. I believe that much translation in the past, as now, both literary and non-literary, has been poor and misleading. To my knowledge, Albrecht Neubert is the only translation theorist who has stated the same. I think it is the translation theorist's main task, not to describe the norms of the past and the present, but to determine values and propose standards, and to be useful to translators by discussing the hundred or more translation topics in terms of their two-fold instances, and even to emphasise the individual and personal rather than the discursal and social, in writing a translation.

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