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DANIEL WEISSBORT

Postface

Since this collection provides, as needed, a historical background to translation in the English tradition, it seems appropriate to provide an account of its own genealogy. We have drawn on a very large number of related works, as the apparatus indicates. Nevertheless, it was the lack specifically of a textbook (a selection of primary texts) which might function as an introduction to the field that prompted us to undertake this task. That the book has been so long in the making has much to do with the fact that the discipline itself was evolving, even as we tried to get it into perspective.

For the present writer it all began with the magazine Modern Poetry in Translation (MPT), co-founded with Ted Hughes in 1965. From the start the journal had the support of the British Arts Council, and of a number of poets interested in translation (e.g. Michael Hamburger, Nathaniel Tarn, Anselm Hollo, Peter Redgrove). Like the Penguin Modern European Poets series (General Editor A. Alvarez), MPT was initially a response to a growing awareness of the writings, particularly the poetry, emanating from “the other Europe”, Eastern Europe, in the period after Stalin’s death in 1953. The aim was to publish work by contemporary poets, in translations that tended towards the literal, as we understood the term. Early issues of the journal contained a minimum of comment, although this changed somewhat as we became more aware of current debates on translation and of the work of such individuals as James S Holmes (see entry on Holmes) and others. But MPT (“at least a novelty”, as a Times Literary Supplement editorial called it), was not alone in the field. The idea for such a publication had occurred to Ted Hughes when he and Sylvia Plath were living in the USA (late 50’s) and there was, even at that time, at least one other similar project, edited by the American poet, translator, critic Willis Barnstone, this eventuating, however, in a landmark anthology, rather than in several issues of a journal: Modern European Poetry, ed. Willis Barnstone, New York, Bantam Books (1966).

In 1972/3 I was invited by Paul Engle, one of the earliest subscribers to MPT, to the University of Iowa, as a member of the International Writing Program, which, with his wife Hualing Nieh, he had founded in 1967. Paul Engle is renowned, among other things, for having developed the Iowan Creative Writing Program, of which he became Director in 1942, and for including among its offerings an “invention” of his, the Translation Workshop, this being the first such course in the English-speaking world.

Like most of my English contemporaries, I was uneasy about the notion of Creative Writing Workshops, and I didn’t really know what to make of a Translation Workshop. It seems that, when he was Director of the Iowa Writers Workshop, Paul Engle, in 1963, had invited Edmund (Mike) Keeley, fiction writer and translator of Greek poetry (Cavafis, Seferis, among others) to try out a Translation Workshop. This project was a natural enough outcome of Engle’s interest in the larger world. He had for some years accepted foreign student-writers in the Iowa Creative Writing Program. Translation became a preoccupation, although his personal interest in it predated the Workshop, since he had translated modern German poetry, including Rilke.

As Keeley explained,¹ there was at that time no public forum for translators, no publication devoted primarily to translation, no association of translators: “Evidence of an imminent turning point was the second revelation of my year in Iowa, namely that there were students of writing eager to learn about the craft of translation.” Keeley was given a free hand, the guiding principle being that English was the language into which translation was to be made.

When I arrived in Iowa (1973/4), Gayatri Spivak, chairperson of Comparative Literature, was herself working on a translation of Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (1967), *On Grammatology* (1976; see entry on Spivak). She was interested in introducing a translation program, taking advantage of the favourable situation in Iowa. This initiative led swiftly enough to the establishment of an MFA Program in Translation, in Comparative Literature, and it was agreed that this new program would also have a theoretical/historical component, which called for a course in the history and theory of translation. It was Paul Engle, in fact, who had been particularly adamant about the need for such a course, having in mind a historically focused rather than theory-based one. The teaching of this course inevitably fell to me, the course concerning itself, above all, with the history of theory in the English tradition, from its roots in Classical writings (Cicero, Horace, Quintilian etc) up to, say, Ezra Pound. I attempted to carry on beyond EP, but found contemporary translation theory, especially that which drew on French critical theory (Derrida, for instance) rather daunting. Our primary interest was in the production of translated texts, rather than in the consideration of the theoretical dimension of translation. Somewhat prior to these developments at Iowa, James S Holmes (1924-1986), like Paul Engle a native Iowan, was at work, at the University of Amsterdam, identifying texts and assembling bibliographies which might render feasible the teaching of a course on historical translation theory. It was Holmes, incidentally, who first used the term "Translation Studies"² and certainly it was he who did most to define the scope of the emerging discipline (see entry on Holmes). I met Holmes in Bratislava at a FIT, (International Federation of Translators, a UNESCO-affiliated body) conference, in 1968, and he contributed translations of Dutch poetry and articles on historical translation theory to *MPT*, also regularly visiting Iowa where he kept an avuncular eye on the Translation Workshop. Holmes made the bibliographies he was compiling "for the use of students doing graduate work in translation studies at the University of Amsterdam" available to me and these lists enabled me to begin assembling a course pack for the course in the history of translation theory.

The lack of a suitable textbook had been apparent as early as 1973. Indeed, in a report "On the Place of Translation in Comparative Literature", submitted to the American Comparative Literature Association by Rainer Schulte, himself the originator of the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) in the late '70s, it was stated that: "The Course in History of Translation [...] is one of the most tradition-bound areas of comparative literature, yet [...] almost impossible to teach, since suitable materials for study are shamefully lacking." It continues: "[T]he class is faced with a paucity of available materials, from the translations of bygone ages and a plethora of materials from contemporary (or at least twentieth century) translations."

There was, to be sure, an array of relevant materials, by far the most significant and inspiring being George Steiner's compendious work, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975; see entry on Steiner). Some pre-indication of its scope was given by the same author's *Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*, 1966, which for the first time allowed translators comparable status with source language poets. Steiner's introduction to this anthology is one of the most important contemporary texts on the translation of poetry and on literary translation in general. Scrupulously, he draws attention to the work of a number of other scholars and poets, some associated with the short-lived National Translation Center in Texas (founded in 1968), including, for instance, D.S. Carne-Ross and William Arrowsmith.

In an essay written for *Modern Poetry in Translation: 1983*, Ted Hughes speculates on the reason for the apparent boom in poetry translation in the 60's and early '70s. When *MPT* began, the people consulted included the poet and translator Nathaniel Tarn who, between 1967 and 1969, was General Editor of Cape Editions, published by Jonathan Cape, which made available in English translations, especially from the French, a number of important short texts of literary criticism, linguistics, and anthropology (by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Michel Leiris among others). A noted translator from Spanish (Neruda, in particular), Tarn was an advisory editor of *MPT* and was also involved with the first Poetry International readings in London, in 1967, directed by Ted Hughes and Patrick Garland.

Meanwhile, or shortly before these developments in England, Paul and Hualing Engle, at the University of Iowa, had embarked on a similar if even more ambitious project, namely the publication, through funds raised by them and made available to the University of Iowa Press, of a series of international anthologies. In their General Foreword, the Engles wrote that it was intended to bring together “people with creative talent (who, in some instances, may not even know the language being translated) with a poet native to the language. Together they attempt a version in English which tries to be partly as imaginative as the original.” (See e.g. General Editors’ Introduction to Russian Poetry: The Modern Period, edited by John Glad and Daniel Weissbort, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1978). Paul Engle had pioneered, through the Translation Workshop, this “tandem method” of translating poetry. It is worth recording that later, in the spirit of what the IWP had begun, an attempt was made to formalise the relationship between visiting writers and student-writers in Creative Writing and Translation by setting up a workshop the participants of which consisted of visiting foreign writers and student writers in the Creative Writing Program wanting to collaborate with them on the translation of their work.

The project to assemble a collection of primary texts, with historical notes and commentaries moved forward, but was overtaken by some others, including the late André Lefevere’s Translation/History Culture: A Sourcebook, eventually published in 1992 in the Routledge Translation Studies series, the general editors of which were Lefevere himself, a Belgian scholar from the University of Antwerp, and Susan Bassnett of the University of Warwick. (The Routledge series was actually the second of its kind, the first, less widely available, being “Approaches to Translation Studies”, published by Van Gorcum, Amsterdam, under the editorship of James S Holmes.) Lefevere’s useful short volume, with its thematic rather than chronological arrangement and its emphasis on translation as manipulation, was probably the offshoot of a larger project, under the aegis of the ICLA (International Comparative Literature Association), for a world historical reader in translation studies. I had participated in discussions about this with Holmes and Lefevere.

The University of Iowa supported our efforts to bring to fruition work on a Historical Reader in Translation Studies. My principal collaborator for a while was a doctoral candidate Stephen Welchselblatt. In 1997, Astradur Eysteinnsson, who had earned his doctorate in Comparative Literature at Iowa returned to teach translation courses, and it was around this time that he and I decided to collaborate on the project. In the course of our co-editorship, the project was substantially reshaped. Addi Eysteinnsson supplied the enthusiasm and discipline, the practical experience and theoretical knowledge, that made it possible to complete a far more ambitious project than had originally been envisaged. However, in the spirit of the earlier work, this volume has tried to keep the scope as open as may be, emphasizing the link between theory and practice, as this emerges from a historical survey of historical developments. The primary writers on translation have been the translators themselves, as noted in the general introduction to the present volume. These statements, frequently in the unobtrusive form of prefaces, often reflect differences of opinion regarding for instance the use of blank verse rather than heroic (rhyming) couplets in the translation of the Homeric epic (William Cowper as against Alexander Pope). We have represented some of these specific controversies, although our focus has remained the work of individual translators and their contributions to a more general ongoing general debate. We have also attempted, with the twentieth-century, to represent work of writers who might be described primarily as theorists or critics. Even in these cases, though, the theoretical comments were often drawn from or accompanied by actual translation.

It is true that some translation theory has detached itself from the practise of translation, so as to gain a perspective on this rapidly developing discipline. If there is any bias in this volume, then, it is probably towards theory as it effects or is reflected in and reflects practise, this, in its turn, being determined by circumstances. In providing examples where possible of translations by the likes of Dryden, Pope, Pound, as well as by such as Benjamin and others who are not primarily creative writers (to use that problematical but convenient term), we have tried to flesh out the theory. As a rough guide to the translations, we have provided literal or ad-verbatim versions of the source texts. Of course, the very notion of literalism is

problematical; nevertheless, these texts do give some additional purchase on otherwise inaccessible source material. Naturally, if the literal provided was also one used by the translator – assuming he or she needed or made use of such an intermediate version by someone else – this was an additional bonus. As we have seen, Ted Hughes – and he was not alone (see, in particular, entry on W.S. Merwin) – wanted versions that aspired to verbal accuracy rather than to any kind of literariness. His aim when translating was, as far as possible, to preserve the “foreignness”, bringing into English that which could not possibly have been there before. If this seems to accord with post-colonial developments in critical theory, in particular with the advocacy of “foreignizing” translation by such as Lawrence Venuti, it suggests a current of thought flowing both ways between theory and practise.

At the same time, we became increasingly aware that anything to do with human communication can be related to translation, all transactions between human beings, whether from different languages and cultures, within the same language, between social groups, between the sexes, between adults and children and so forth involve translation; the act of writing may itself be regarded as one of translation. And then, there is the business of adaptation, for instance the screen treatment of a work of fiction. There is also the translation oral poetry into written, when the whole social situation or context is obviously pertinent, a question with which those involved in ethnopoetics are very much concerned (see entry on ethnopoetics and *passim*). Translation has been globalized, in so far as its universal implications have been recognized, and the broadening of the field has become conceivable and indeed practical, greatly extending the scope or relevance of literature.

These developments may have somewhat obscured the distinction between original writing and translation. Nevertheless, that there is a distinction is not, we believe, an assumption based wholly on convenience. While, as stated, we have tried to keep the field open, we have also tried not to broaden it to such an extent that it becomes virtually indefinable. As regards the place of translation studies in academia, Professor Susan Bassnett of Warwick University has gone so far as to state that “there are now so many people working in the field of Translation Studies that some of the old assumptions about the marginality of this work have been radically challenged, principle among which is the notion that the study of translation can be relegated to a sub-category of Comparative Literature. The current perspective reverses that assessment and proposes instead that comparative literature be considered a branch of the much wider discipline that is Translation Studies.” (see Preface to the Revised Edition of Translation Studies by Susan Bassnett-McGuire, London and New York, Routledge, 1991, p. xi; First edition, 1980; see also Susan Bassnett’s Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction, 1993).

As editors of this volume, we have felt it incumbent on us to press for inclusiveness, keeping Translation Studies as a whole open, rather than exclusive, fortified by more or less impenetrable jargon. The discipline does, after all, propose a new way of looking at least at one area of scholarship: the study of literature. With the emphasis here on the actual business of writing, of translating, we hope to have been able to preserve the connection at least with literary life in its historical dimension. One thing translation apparently is not – even if it may have seemed so and may still seem so to some of its practitioners – is a purely scribal business, engendering numerous local problems requiring action. At the same time, of course, that is also precisely what it is! These contradictions, dilemmas account for the perennial fascination of translation, as an art, as a practical activity or polemic, and so forth. This fascination, the wide appeal of translation and of any discussion of it, makes it a most effective introduction, as well, to the study of literature (arguably, no reading of a text is closer or more critical than that of its translator). Translation can provide the link, often missing between theory and practise, between writing about writing and writing itself.

The normativeness or ideological nature of much writing about translation has, of course, much to do with the fact that it is, by and large, tied to a consideration of certain practical problems. We hope that the present volume will help readers put the often passionately views of writers on translation into historical perspective, at the same time as relating them to supposedly more enduring aesthetic considerations. In any

case, translation has, for most of its history, been concerned with broadening readerships, making more widely available what has been the accessible only to a privileged few. To that extent, while recognizing the conservative or even reactionary tendencies of society, as it tries to preserve or even roll back the status quo, translation activists do well also to acknowledge the legitimacy of resistance - for instance, among many publishers - to some of the more radical approaches, such as radical foreignization.

There has been in the post-World War Two period and, particularly from the mid-60s, a concerted effort to interrogate the process of translation, as well as to promote the actual business of translation. Consciousness-raising in the academy and generally in the media has inevitably been a slow process. We feel privileged to have been part of this historical movement and fortunate, too, to be in a position to pay tribute to fellow prospectors. This volume is also dedicated to the many individuals who directly or indirectly had a hand in its making, under the peculiarly favourable circumstances that prevailed in certain places in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Notes:

1. See Keeley's Closing Address to the 1980 Symposium of the American Literary Translators Association, "The State of Translation" (Modern Poetry in Translation, No. 41-42, March 1981)
2. See "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies" (1972), included in *Translated!*,
3. For a detailed account of the American translation workshop and its place in the development of the academic discipline of Translation Studies, readers should consult Edwin Gentzler's work (3). This is based on firsthand experience, since Gentzler, as Program Assistant to Paul Engle's International Writing Program in the early 70's, participated in the early Translation Workshops.
