Does the Translator Exist? A critique of the status of the translator throughout history with reference to Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility.*

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Introduction

Maurice Cranston in his *Sunday Times* review of the second edition of George Steiner's *After Babel* claimed that: "Translation…has long needed a champion, and at last in George Steiner it has found a scholar who is a match for the task." (Steiner: back cover, 1992) Recently, another critic, Lawrence Venuti, has taken up that flag and is championing the underdog, the translator who serves the reader quietly in the shadows and is rarely acknowledged for the debt our culture owes to him and to other languages. But for Venuti, it is not simply a question of chastising our Anglo-American readers for marginalising the translator. Venuti begins with a critique of the ideals adopted by translators themselves in our countries. For he argues that they themselves adopt their place in the shadows and actually contrive to present the translation as an original by seeking to efface themselves in the act of conveying the text they translate. This certainly seems to be the ideal adopted by Norman Shapiro: The Translator should confine himself to transparency. He should hide.

> I see translation (says Shapiro) as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that it's there when there are little imperfections - scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn't be any. It should never call attention to itself. (Venuti: 1995, 1)

In his book, *The Translator's Invisibility: A history of translation*, published in 1995, Venuti takes readers and translators alike to task for reading translations as though they were the original texts themselves. Venuti's is a curious book which makes a series of rather surprising proposals about the way we should translate and the ways in which translation can be used to disrupt the literary canon. In borrowing the robes that Cranston donned Steiner with, and in coming to the defence of translation and translators, Venuti advocates a disruptive poetics of translation. Clearly, for him, the best form of defence is attack. The cross-fertilisation of cultures by translation has been redefined by Venuti in terms of a battlefield of dissenters and defenders struggling against inward-focused, nationalistic ethnocentricity. Venuti's ideas have gained considerable currency in recent years, a fact which is affirmed by Routledge's decision to ask him to edit their *Translation Studies Reader* published in 2000 (and reedited in 2002). Venuti is quoted often in discussions on translation in Europe and his works are on the syllabus of many Master's programs in France. It is for this reason that we must proceed with caution to ascertain exactly what needs to be cut aside and what poetics of translation will be allowed to grow in its place if we adopt Venuti's ideas, concepts and ideals.

Uses and Abuses of Translation

To understand the thrust of Venuti's argument, we must first understand that he conceives translation to be a potential "locus of difference"(Venuti: 1995, back cover) in our Western culture which invariably seeks to absorb and dominate all other cultures of the world. However, translators can, according to Venuti, only preserve the difference of other cultures if they resist the implicit attempt of Western culture to dominate other cultures, an attempt that has, according to Venuti, throughout history perverted the translation process by transforming what should be an encounter with otherness into a reassuring presentation, representation, of a text which can be immediately assimilated into our own codes of ethics and aesthetics. In the west, Venuti claims:

> The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognisable, even the familiar, and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text. (Venuti: 1995,18)

The first, and certainly most reprehensible, step towards this assimilation that Venuti calls "domestication", is the pretence that we keep up (and that both translators and editors seek to foster) that the translation is not actually a translation, but in fact the real McCoy, the original. For this reason, the name of the translator rarely appears on the front cover of the book. Venuti is rightly indignant. Already, before the reader opens the first page, domestication has begun and the translator is invited to collude in maintaining the illusion.

> A translation (says Venuti, 1995, 1) is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text - the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the "original."

Translation becomes impersonation; the translator becomes, or at least strives to become, an impostor. Of course, he must not be caught out, and if he is, he will be censured. And Venuti traces the kinds of criticisms and condemnations of translators who have failed to maintain the illusion (1995, 2-4). Whether it be George Steiner, a major thinker in the field of translation, or the Times Literary Supplement, most critics seem to favour texts which read as if they were originals and they disparage what has come to be called "translationese", a language which does not appear to be sufficiently English, a bastardised off-spring carved from a syntax and shaded by a vocabulary which retains a foreign quality. Venuti claims that:

> over the past fifty years the comments are amazingly consistent in praising fluent discourse while damning deviations from it, even when the most diverse range of foreign texts is considered. (Venuti: 2)

Certainly, Venuti is right in identifying this collusion to maintain the illusion and justified in trying to unmask it. Perhaps he is often justified in believing that:

> The translator's invisibility is symptomatic of a complacency in Anglo-American relations with cultural others, a complacency that can be

> described - without too much exaggeration - as imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home. (Venuti: 17)

One of the most striking examples can be seen in the way the Anglo-American culture has attempted to assimilate the Jewish Bible. The aim of translators of the Bible is to translate it not only into other words, but to forge once more *The Word of the Lord*. This is an understandable religious imperative. However, the internationally renowned beauty and the great success of *The King James Version* is such that many readers have come to consider it as the definitive Bible. The cultural weight of this edition has even contributed to the shaping of a religious discourse which is anchored in the linguistic style of the époque in which *The King James Version* was written, i.e. the beginning of the seventeenth century. So great has its influence been that many translators seem to be labouring under its weight when they refashion the words of other religious texts in a similar style. So, in Juan Mascaro's otherwise beautiful translation of *The Bhagavad Gita,* we hear Arjuna address Krishna in the following terms:

> I see **thee** without beginning, middle, or end; I **behold thy** infinite power, the power of **thy** innumerable arms. I see **thine** eyes as the sun and the moon. And I see **thy** face as a sacred fire that gives light and life to the whole universe in the splendour of a vast offering.

Similarly, Muslims might be surprised to hear that Allah speaks in a strangely archaic English reminiscent of the Authorised Version, as we can hear in the following quotation from N.J.Dawood's translation of *The Koran*, first published in 1956:

> **Woe betide** the unbelievers, for they shall be sternly punished! **Woe betide** those who love this life more than the life to come; who debar others from the path of God and seek to make it crooked. They have strayed far into error. (Dawood: 179)

Though these are my own examples, they do tend to support the claim made by Venuti that English speaking countries attempt to absorb foreign works and pass them off as English originals. As we shall see, however, for Venuti it is the attempt to assimilate foreign texts by rewriting them in fluent natural English that is to be condemned, and he is not adverse to the use of archaic language.

Venuti sees translation as a battleground upon which a struggle against what he calls the "ethnocentric violence" (310) of *domesticization* can be waged. Rather than succumbing to the pressure from both readers and editors to serve up a translation ready for consumption, a translation suited to the public's demands, the translator can choose to take up a position of resistance and thereby defend the alterity of cultural difference.

[1] For some reason both Confucius and Lao Tzu seem to escape this rewriting into seventeenth century English.

> The point (Venuti argues, 23) is rather to develop a theory and practice of translation that resists dominant target-language cultural values so as to signify the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text.

Such a practice is called *resistancy* by Venuti because it avoids fluency and challenges the target language culture (24).

This point will be taken up later, but it is worth pointing out here that, for Venuti, the way to counter the illusion of the translation-as-original is to avoid that “natural fluency” usually demanded of a translation. In opposition to the dominant practice of *domesticization,* Venuti calls for a "foreignizing method of translation", (29) in which the essential otherness of the text will be signalled by a discourse which refuses to allow itself to be easily grasped.

Venuti does not claim that we can wholly preserve the difference of the foreign text:

> The ethnocentric violence of translation is inevitable (Venuti points out): in the translating process, foreign languages, texts, and cultures will always undergo some degree and form of reduction, exclusion, inscription. Yet the domestic work on foreign cultures can be a foreignizing intervention, pitched to question existing canons at home. (310)

Venuti's final chapter, entitled "Call to Action" mingles radical rhetoric with more tempered optimism and ends on an upbeat note. His approach, he claims:

> assumes a utopian faith in the power of translation to make a difference, not only at home, in the emergence of new cultural forms, but also abroad, in the emergence of new cultural relations. To recognise the translator's invisibility is at once to critique the current situation and to hope for a future more hospitable to the differences that the translator must negotiate. (313)

A change will be needed as Venuti points out: “A change in contemporary thinking about translation finally requires a change in the practice of reading, reviewing and teaching translations.” (sic. 312)

And part of this change will include selecting texts for translation which do not correspond to ethical and aesthetic codes that dominate in the target culture. This runs counter to the dominant trend in which, as Venuti rightly argues, editors carefully select texts which can be readily assimilated into our culture either as familiar texts or familiar stereotypes. These cultural stereotypes do indeed impose strict limits and serve to make the introduction into our culture of a text which does not conform to them very difficult. Among such Anglo-American stereotypes we might list the following: The French are intellectual. Asians are other-worldly. Arabs are religious. Czechs are humorous. Such stereotypes make it very difficult to promote, sell, and therefore finance the publication of a serious Czech author, an Arab uninterested in religious questions. Sartre is guaranteed a future on the shelves of the American

bookstore. So is Lao Tzu, though both owe their place to the exclusion of books that do not conform to these prevailing stereotypes.

Fluency

Venuti embarks on an entire rereading of the history of thought on translation in order to clearly define, as he sees it, the choice that is open to each translator. At the end of the eighteenth century, Venuti suggests:

> A translator could choose the now traditional domesticating method, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to dominant cultural values in English; or a translator could choose a foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text. (81)

It should, by now, be obvious which camp Venuti sides with. Indeed he retraces the origins of the domesticating method to its seventeenth century roots in order to set it up as a background against which he lifts up his model translators who have the courage to defy convention, consensus, and refuse to conform to the values and tastes of the target culture, which, by the end of the eighteenth century, Venuti says were "decidedly bourgeois - liberal and humanist, individualistic and elitist, morally conservative and physically squeamish." (ibid.) Among the heroes that Venuti selects is Dr. John Nott whose translation of the notoriously ribald Catullus offered a shocking contrast to contemporary tastes, as the following extract shows:

> Nor less noted his boy for unnatural lust:
> The hands of the former are ever rapacious,
> The latter's posterior is full as voracious:
> Then, o why don't ye both into banishment go,
> And deservedly wander in deserts of woe?
> Not a soul but the father's mean rapines must tell;
> And thou, son, canst no longer thy hairy breech sell.
> (Nott 1795: quoted by Venuti, 87)

As Venuti points out, Nott's translation deviates from English moral values in several ways, notably by his use of such terms as "unnatural lust" and "posterior" (87). However, it is worth noting that Venuti is no less interested in the way in which Nott's text goes against the grain of literary and stylistic tastes of the time;

> Nott's translation is equally un-English in being no more than intermittently fluent. The text opens with a false rhyme ("first"/"lust"). The twelve-syllable line, a departure from the pentameter standard, is metrically irregular and rather cumbersome, handled effectively only in the second couplet. And the syntax is elliptical, inverted, or convoluted in fully half of the lines. (87)

As Venuti is fully aware, false rhymes, convoluted syntax, elliptical phrases and metrical incompetence are generally censured. Indeed, it is usually upon such criteria that we judge whether the translator of traditional versified poetry masters his art. Curiously, however, such faults endear Nott to Venuti who considers his translation to be a resistance to dominant style. Unsurprisingly,

Nott's contemporaries tended to prefer the translation of Lamb which not only read more smoothly, but also tempered Catullus' vulgarity, dealing with "objectionable expressions" by developing strategies of "omission and amplification" (Lamb: quoted by Venuti, 86). Lamb claimed it was necessary to make "every attempt to veil and soften before entire omission could be justified," (86) but he reserved the right to omit vulgar terms where necessary.

Times have changed, and so have tastes; now there seems to be no contradiction between vulgarity and poetry. Voltaire's scorn for Shakespeare's vulgarity and baseness seems to us absurd today and 1990s French productions of Shakespeare tend to revel in the sex, blood and guts and any references to the body; things that always used to present a problem to the French translator who felt that poetry was concerned with “higher things”. Vulgarity is common currency, and from Philip Larkin to Simon Armitage, poetry has tended to widen its scope to explore all the experiences of human life from the most sublime to the basest and most prosaic.

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Venuti seems still to be in tune with the Zeitgeist of the sixties, when vulgarity and code-breaking were held to be rebellious (and therefore laudable). Consequently, for Venuti, Nott is to be acclaimed for preserving the raw vulgarity of Catullus, and Lamb is to be disparaged for his morally conservative and physically squeamish tastes. Venuti goes on to chastise other translators for similar ethnocentric censorship. But in the list of model translators that Venuti draws up, it soon becomes clear that this ethnocentric censorship is of secondary interest to him. What really motivates Venuti's attack on the canonical domesticating aesthetics is its founding principle of fluency. And inversely, anything which resists fluency, even at the expense of (or perhaps because of) clumsiness is allowed entrance into Venuti's counter-academy of translators.

This is truly a curious position to take up, and in order to understand how Venuti is led to make his stand against fluency we would need to look at his argument in greater detail than this article allows. The essential point that Venuti wants to make is that since the middle of the seventeenth century translators have tended to conform to the style of the English tradition when they import foreign voices into it. The poet translator, Denham, for example, aspired to a kind of translation which would create an English poem from a foreign one. Far from being satisfied with the prose translations that are often offered today, far from accepting those mechanical attempts in which the translator reproduces the meaning of the original and then tries to impose a metrical form upon it, Denham (and later the great poet-translators Dryden and Pope) aimed to produce works which "fit" the foreign text "naturally and easily." (Venuti: 57-8)

> Denham's fluent strategy is most evident (claims Venuti) in his handling of the verse form, the heroic couplet. The revision improved both the coherence and the continuity of the couplets, avoiding metrical irregularities and knotty constructions, placing the caesura to reinforce syntactical connections..." (58)

Venuti offers much more detailed analysis, but a single example of Denham's work will have to suffice to show the elegant ease he clearly strove for and for which he earned considerable acclaim:

> *Lacoon, Neptunes* Priest, upon the day
> Devoted to that God, a Bull did slay,
> When two prodigious serpents were descride,
> Whose circling stroaks the Seas smooth face divide;
> Above the deep they raise their scaly crests,
> And stem the flout with their erected brests,
> Their winding tails advance and steer their course,
> And 'gainst the shore the breaking Billow force.

(Virgil's Aeneid, II. 196-203 translated by Denham: quoted by Venuti, 60)

Denham's translation work was canonised by later writers, as Venuti points out (63) "because his use of the couplet made his poetry and poetry translations read "naturally and easily."" Indeed Dryden and Pope both followed in Denham's footsteps, adopting the idea that the translator should give a free approximation of the original, not only in striving to perfect an eloquent poetical style, but also in adopting the heroic couplet. For most anthologies, the translations of Dryden and Pope remain models. They received considerable praise and went on to influence not only other translators but also other English poets. In this sense, we might commend the translators in having found foreign food to nourish English poetry. This is probably how Ezra Pound or Goethe would have conceived the influence of these translators in the furthering of literature. Venuti, of course, sees things differently. Denham, Dryden and Pope are all branded with the same iron: *Domesticators*. They seek to maintain the illusion of the translation as an original and are therefore guilty, according to him, of ethnocentric violence.

George Steiner in his *After Babel,* and Michel Ballard in his history of translation, *De Cicéron à Benjamin,* offer nothing to contradict Venuti's argument that a fluent style became an essential prerequisite of the seventeenth and eighteenth century mode of translation in both England and France. And though Venuti does a good job of tracing the way this idea of style develops, since both Steiner and Ballard among others have written extensively on the subject, this is hardly the most original aspect of Venuti's work. What is radically new in Venuti is not his diagnosis of transparency but his prognosis: translators should resist transparency and employ all manner of techniques and strategies to resist it in order to disrupt the reading process. All of this is obviously not designed to please Denham and his followers.

Indeed, in order to find supporters for a foreignizing method of translators Venuti is tempted to exit the Anglo-centric world of eighteenth century England in search of foreign and foreignizing ideas. Where will he find them? Not in France. Since the France of the seventeenth century is equally steeped in the idea that an eloquent and natural style is an aesthetic imperative.
As early as 1521, Pierre Fabri was arguing that the process of "amplification" is one of the necessary aspects of the "beau style" (Ballard: 101). Admitedly, Jochaim du Bellay in his celebrated *Défense et Illustration de la Langue*

Française of 1549, felt less assurance in the aesthetics of French prose, however much he aimed to lift the French tongue up in the esteem of contemporary academics. He felt forced to admit that "la langue française n'est pas si riche que la grecque et la latine" (Du Bellay : 206). Du Bellay is also sceptical as to whether the translator can render the original entirely faithfully or with "la même grâce dont l'auteur en a usé" (idem. 211) But already by 1630, we find Antoine Godeau in his *Discours sur les oeuvres de M. Malherbe* defending the art of translation in ambitious terms that are remarkably similar to those Pound will use three hundred years later. The translation, Godeau claims, is not necessarily "moins excellente que l'original." (ibid.)

By the mid seventeenth century we enter a period known as the age of *les Belles Infidèles* in which translators practiced a free adaptation of the original text, trimming it to fit prevailing tastes. The most celebrated among the *Belles Infidèles*, Perrot D'Ablancourt describes his practice as a translator in the following manner:

> Je m'attache donc pas toujours aux paroles ni aux pensées de cet auteur (Lucien), et demeurant dans son but, j'agence les choses à notre air et à notre façon. Les divers temps veulent non seulement des paroles, mais des pensées différentes.
> (D'Ablancourt, 24 (1654): quoted by Ballard, 172)

This would hardly be music to Venuti's ears. But the *Belle Infidèle* goes further:

> J'y ai retranché ce qu'il y avait de plus sale et adouci en quelques endroits ce qui était trop libre...(Ballard : 172)

No less than Denham, D'Ablancourt and his contemporaries sin against the doctrine of translation that Venuti champions. They are domesticators of the first order who see the original as raw material for their creative reproductions. Whatever their stylistic merits (and it is not for nothing they are known as the "*Belles" Infidèles*) they would, without a doubt, be excluded from Venuti's canon and included among the arch-enemies of his foreignizing campaign.

Not surprisingly, Venuti turns his back on France and turns to Germany to find support for his idea that the translator should resist domesticating the original and assimilating it into a ready-made, homespun form. Indeed, he quotes an amusing satirical dialogue written by the German philologist and translator of Shakespeare, A.W.Schlegel, who contrasts what he feels to be the French tradition of tailoring the original to its own tastes and the German open-minded spirit:

> **Frenchman:** The Germans translate every literary Tom, Dick, and Harry. We either do not translate at all, or else we translate according to our own taste.
> **German:** Which is to say you paraphrase and you disguise.

> **Frenchman:** We look on a foreign author as a stranger in our company, who has to dress and behave according to our customs, if he desires to please.
> **German:** How narrow-minded of you to be pleased only by what is native.
> **Frenchman:** Such is our nature and our education. Did the Greeks not hellenize everything as well?
> **German:** In your case it goes back to a narrow-minded nature and a conventional education. In ours education is our nature.
> (A.W. Schlegel, quoted by Venuti: 108)

Certainly, in this contrived confrontation, Schlegel seeks to extol the openness of the Germanic spirit and disparage the conceited pretentiousness of the French who can see no further than their noses. Venuti, of course, is more sympathetic to the Germans. However, the satirical hyperbole of Schlegel in his burlesque portrayal of the French and his opposition between French and German cultures is insensitive to the historical development of the French and the German language-cultures. The French had already undergone a period of massive translation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the influence of foreign languages (largely Latin and Greek) had already made thier impact upon French by the time Schlegel came onto the scene. The openness to outside influence that characterised the French of the sixteenth century was followed by an increasingly closed attitude. As Meschonnic argues in *De la langue française,* this led to a curious inversion of linguistic aesthetics:

> Au XVI siècle en France, la beauté est dans l'accroissement du vocabulaire, l'hellénisation, le néologisme. Au XVII siècle, la beauté passe par l'élimination de ce qu'a fait le XVI siècle. Elle n'est plus quantitative, elle est qualitative, elle est nuance, elle est pureté. (Meschonnic, 1997:144)

As a result, many of the terms introduced to French at the time at which Michel de Montaigne was writing were eradicated by the purists that followed him (a fact which explains why Montaigne is relatively difficult to read for the French today). The French of the seventeenth century evidently felt that their language had by that stage absorbed enough foreign terms and foreign culture to step out of the shadow of the Greco-Latin culture. To claim that the Germans are by nature more open-minded than the French is simply to fail to take into account the different developmental trajectories of the two language-cultures. German had to wait until Luther's translation of the Bible in the early sixteenth century to become established in its modern *hoch Deutsch* form. And it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the Germans began to undergo the phase of cultural openness that Schlegel is anxious to represent.

Nevertheless, for Venuti, who favours openness to the alterity of foreign culture, the Germans of the turn of the nineteenth century were defending a far more intriguing set of principles than the seemingly limited and self-satisfied French. And he is particularly interested in the ideas Friedrich Schleiermacher expressed in his *Ueber die verschieden Methoden des*

Uebersetzens (On the Different Methods of Translating). At first glance, Schleiermacher would seem to be tailor-made for Venuti. After all, not only does he advance ideas similar to Venuti as far as a practice of resisting assimilation into current tastes is concerned, he also speaks of the necessity of enriching the German language and culture through contact with other languages and cultures:

> Just as our soil itself has no doubt become richer and more fertile and our climate milder and more pleasant only after much transplantation of foreign flora, just so we sense that our language, because we exercise it less owing to our Northern sluggishness, can thrive in all its freshness and completely develop its own power only through the most many-sided contacts with what is foreign. (Schleiermacher: quoted by Venuti, 109)

Apart from the curious references to climate, these could have been words used by Ezra Pound who sought to enrich the English language and its literature by allowing it, via translation, to enter into contact with foreign influence. There is, however, one important difference. While Pound was anything but patriotic, Schleiermacher was an ardently nationalistic Prussian. Pound abandoned his home in the US to settle in Italy after long sojourns in London and Paris because he felt that the soil of North America was not sufficiently fertile to bear forth a strong literary tradition. Schleiermacher on the other hand, clearly saw translation as a means of promoting the Prussian nationalist movement by strengthening the German culture. During the years of the Napoleonic wars, Schleiermacher had been developing a theory of translation which aimed to challenge

> the French hegemony not only by enriching German culture, but by contributing to the formation of a liberal public sphere, an area of social life in which private individuals exchange rational discourse and exercise political influence. (Venuti: 109)

But Venuti (who seems uninterested by the geopolitical conflicts that were at work during the Napoleonic era) finds Schleiermacher's nationalism unacceptable, and it does indeed run counter to his policy of openness to otherness which implies cultural relativism. Schleirmacher is anything but relativistic. His is a doctrine which is fiercely competitive. His aim is to recognise the cultural weakness of German and transcend it, ascending to the heights of a strong and vibrant culture which could compete with (or dominate) the French. Such imperialistic pretensions are not to Venuti's taste (109).

Radicals and Conservatives

After explaining the reasons why he finds Schleiermacher's foreignizing strategy to be unsatisfactory, Venuti returns to Victorian England in search of defenders of his cause. The controversy that he chooses to focus upon is a curious one. Venuti hails the translator Francis Newman (1805-1897) as a major defender of foreignizing translation. Newman, it seems, was acquainted with the German tradition of translation and its foreignizing strategies and was part of a small group of Victorian translators who tried to develop something similar. As far as politics and ethics are concerned, Newman appears to be

much closer to us and to Venuti in that he cherished egalitarian ideas, challenged intellectual elites and hoped that education would foster liberal democracy (Venuti: 119). Venuti claims that Newman hoped to enlist translation in a project to further liberal democracy and fight against imperialism, nationalism and class domination. (119-120). Moreover, while Newman clearly saw the prevailing practice of translators to be one which sought to eradicate "whatever has a foreign colour" as something which "is undesirable" and "a grave defect » (Newman, quoted by Venuti, 121), Newman claimed that his own practice was to foreground peculiarity. His aim was:

> to retain every peculiarity of the original, so far as I am able, with the greater care, the more foreign it may happen to be, - whether it be a matter of taste, of intellect, or of morals. (Newman: quoted by Venuti, 121)

Newman and Venuti would seem to be made for each other, and certainly Newman seems to have had a sincere respect for otherness and to have shown a certain courage in braving reviews (predictably negative), in defending his translations and the cultural difference which he sought to make explicit. Venuti does go into a certain amount of detail concerning the ways in which Newman does not fit in with current tastes, but we might be surprised to hear that this defender of difference is no less prudish than his contemporaries. As he himself claims:

> I have striven to make this book (his translation of Horace's *Odes*) admissible to the purest-minded English lady. (Newman: quoted by Venuti, 123)

What makes Newman a suitable champion for Venuti's foreignizing practice of translating? Strangely, it becomes obvious by the amount of time Venuti spends discussing Newman's style, that this, and not his ethics or his defence of cultural difference is what really allows Newman to qualify as an arch-member of his counter canon of translators. If Newman is radical it is not so much because of his politics but rather because of his resistance to fluency.
Newman engages in a number of strategies to challenge the tradition of translating Homer into heroic couplets (a tradition that reached back over a hundred years to Pope). Newman prefers the Ballad meter usually associated with folk poetry. He clearly intended to make a statement about Homer: Homer was a folk poet. Homer belonged to the people. And in the face of condemnations of reviewers who denigrated his attempts, Newman quoted the appreciation of uneducated working people for whom he wanted to translate. The criticisms were, however, predictable. Homer, long associated with the noble, academic, literary tradition bodied forth in the heroic couplet that Pope mastered so well, seemed downgraded and vulgarised to reviewers of Newman's effort. Venuti quotes surprisingly little of Newman's translations, but in the longest extract quoted, the layout on the page of the ballad in seven stress lines (rather than cutting them up into four/three as is usual) tends to obscure the metrical structure and hides the ballad form. The lack of rhyme also undermines the metrical coherence of the stanza, since the ballad is

almost always found in rhymed form. (Rhymes are usually used to heavily mark the end of every second line.) Here is the example quoted by Venuti:

> Chesnut! why bodest death to me? from thee this was not needed.
> Myself right surely know also, that 't is my doom to perish,
> From mother and from father dear apart, in Troy; but never
> Pause will I make of war, until the Trojans be glutted."
> He spake, and yelling, held afront the single-hoofed horses.
> (Newman's Iliad: quoted by Venuti, 133)

In Newman's translation, "bodest", "thee", "'t is" and "spake" are strikingly archaic, and in order to preserve the already precarious metrical beating, "hoofed" in the last line must be pronounced as a disyllabic word usually written with an accent on the final "e". It is difficult to see how such vocabulary fits into Newman's project to make Homer more accessible to the modern working man, and several reviewers chastised him for obscurity. Others called his translations "unlucky burlesque" (Dublin University Magazine 1862: quoted by Venuti, 139) and "unspeakably absurd" (Ballantyne, 1888: Venuti, 141).

Mathew Arnold in his lecture series published as *On Translating Homer* (1861) chose Newman's translation as a model of how Homer should not be translated, and it is ironically due to Arnold's choice that Newman's translation (which received little attention at the time) is still known to us today. Arnold had no time for Newman's archaic vocabulary or his metrical shortcomings. As for the use of the ballad meter, Arnold agreed with contemporary reviewers that it was "'eminently inappropriate" to render "the manner and movement of Homer" which is "always both noble and powerful" (Arnold: quoted by Venuti, 132). As far as he was concerned " the ballad-manner and movement are often either jaunty and smart, so not noble, or jog-trot and humdrum, so not powerful." (132)

Arnold' s solution was not, however, to return to Pope's pentametric heroic couplet. He was not, therefore, conservative (despite what Venuti argues). Arnold favoured the use of a free six beat line that was taken up again by Lattimore in his extremely successful translation almost a century later in 1951. Venuti, though, is less interested in metrics than in meaning and whether it appears clear or is obstructed by the translator. It becomes obvious during his discussion of the debate between Arnold and Newman (which is of considerable importance to his argument) that it is just this refusal to make things clear which endears Newman to him. Newman resists fluency; Arnold embraces it. This conceded, there is only one conclusion that Venuti is willing to draw from the debate. Newman is a radical; Arnold is a conservative.

This leads Venuti into an enthusiastic celebration of Newman's progressive aesthetics while, Mathew Arnold is increasingly painted as an elitist and narrow-minded racist. Venuti seeks to back up this unlikely claim by pointing out that Arnold does at times use such expressions as "painted savage" and "phlegmatic Dutchman" (131). It remains doubtful whether the translation theoretician is aware of the fact that Arnold, as a school inspector, spent a great part of his life militating for education for all. And it seems he is

unfamiliar with Arnold's famous work, *Culture and Anarchy,* in which the author argued passionately that the small-minded mercantile capitalism of Victorian Britain should open up to culture and open up culture for the people of England.

Why does Arnold fair so badly under the scrutiny of Venuti? Why is Newman (a translator who conforms to contemporary prudish morality) exalted while Arnold is put down? Perhaps simply because Venuti, a self-proclaimed radical, needs a conservative. Like Goethe, Arnold has in recent years been painted as a conservative by parties which would like to see themselves as the innovative forces of progress. That such an opposition between radicals and conservatives demands such a grossly reductive reading of Arnold already makes its basis seem shaky, but it is worth looking more closely at what evidence Venuti offers to justify his radical position. True, Venuti does go against the grain in refusing to adapt the translation to the target-culture - this cannot be taken away from him - but his thought is perhaps less radical than he would like to present it. He claims to defend the ethical difference of the original text and condemns prudishness. Yet he is willing to overlook it so long as the translator resists fluency.

Venuti makes a series of criticisms of translators who impose what he calls a "masculinist" reading upon the texts they translate (197-8, 230-1, 233). This might have passed for radicalism when Simone de Beauvoir wrote her *Deuxième sexe,* back in 1949 but today, in the context of American arts departments where both feminism and gay and lesbian studies flourish, can it be called radical, or even daring? In a literary context in which authors of our grandparents' generation explored sexuality, sexual deviance, in which the very idea of vulgarity is considered today to be a prudish notion from the past, do Venuti's ideas strike us as bold and determined? Do they even seem new? Or do they not sound more like the tastes and attitudes that most liberal-minded democratic teachers share? In that sense, is his stance anything more than a conformity to prevailing values in the sub-society of counter-culture as it stands in university faculties in the West?

Venuti launches his book with a claim that it is "frankly polemical" (preface, ix). Here, it is worth questioning the meaning we attribute to "polemical" and "polemics". Polemics might be defined as a struggle against power. As such, it can be distinguished from critique and criticism. Critique and criticism, in the intellectual use of the terms, signify an attempt to rigorously appraise an argument, to enter into it and see its strategies and the limits which its concepts impose upon us. In this sense, Marx engaged in critique. Politicians engage in polemics; the struggle against one another to gain power. Though the polemicist may defend the underdog to further his own aims, his ultimate desire is to impose silence upon his adversary and impose his view of things upon him.

Is this the case with Venuti? Certainly his radical rhetoric does at times seem out of place when he defends such common-place, modern views concerning the way we speak about sex, but that alone is not enough to justify attributing to him the definition of the polemicist given here. The real test of Venuti's

sincerity will be to see whether he does in fact defend difference for an in itself and is not simply interested in attacking the canon and established practices of translating. What models of contemporary translation does he offer to show that he is a defender of difference? The evidence is slim and rather unconvincing. In his discussion of the translation of Catullus that Louis Zukovsky did with his wife Celia (1958-1969), Venuti offers a modern model of his foreignizing ideal for translation (Venuti: 214-224):

> Below is one of Catullus's brief satiric poems, translated first by Charles Martin, whose fluent version explicitly adopts Dryden's free method, and then by the Zukovskys, whose discourse is marked by abrupt syntactical shifts, polysemy, discontinuous rhythms:
>
> Nulli dicit mulier mea nubere malle
> quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat.
> dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti
> in uento et rapida scribere oportet aqua.
>
> My woman says there is no one she'd rather marry
> than me, not even Jupiter, if he came courting.
> That's what she says - but what a woman says to a passionate lover
> ought to be scribbled on the wind, on running water.
> (Martin 1990: xxiv)
>
> Newly say dickered my love air my own would marry me all
> whom but one, none see say Jupiter if she petted.
> Dickered: said my love air could be o could dickered a man too
> in wind o wet rapid a scribble reported in water.
> (Zukovsky: quoted by Venuti, 215)

The Zukovskys were convinced they were proposing a homophonic translation of Catullus' poem which was more faithful to the original (despite the fact that Louis Zukovsky possessed no Latin) but the two translators did not make a distinction between the sound and accentuation of the Latin language, the accentuation of Latin poetry and the rhythms and sonorous effects specific to Catullus. Hundreds of years of metrical experimentation by English poets who found it was impossible to maintain a discernible (and therefore working) metrical structure in English by directly transposing Latin metrics might have aided the Zukovskys and encouraged them to adopt an English metre to maintain a similar versified organisation within the stanza. But this is hardly the most obvious problem with their translation. The main difficulty comes from the use of obscure vocabulary and incoherent syntax.

Their version certainly seems to need some justifying and Venuti spends several pages explaining terms such as "dickered" which is supposed (homophonetically) to translate "dicere", to say (215). Since I do not translate Latin, I am not qualified to assess the relative merits of the two translations of Catullus' poem. I am simply interested here in what makes Venuti choose to elevate the Zukovskys' translation to the status of a model translation. Undeterred by the seeming incoherence of their translation, Venuti says:

Although both versions could be considered paraphrases that give a fair estimation of the Latin sense, the Zukovskys' homophonic translation is obviously more opaque, frustratingly difficult to read on its own and only slightly easier if juxtaposed to a transparent version like Martin's. (Venuti: 215-6)

Far from constituting a poem in its own right (as a translation is usually expected to) the Zukovskys' version can hardly be deciphered when put next to another translation. “Foreignizing” would seem to mean making a poem "frustratingly difficult to read". If so, we might be inclined to ask what difference we are protecting or respecting? The cultural difference of Catullus? We might imagine that Catullus would begin by asking that we make him understood rather than wilfully obscuring his thought.

So far we have considered Venuti’ theory and his counter canon of translators, but how does Venuti himself translate? Since I do not translate Italian I am unqualified to judge his translations from this language. What is at stake here though is Venuti's contribution to the theory of translation and it is his explanation of his practice, his manifesto, that should concern us here. Finding a certain "discontinuity" in the poems of De Angelis whom he is translating (290), Venuti opts for resistancy.

> My interpretive translation exceeds the source-language text, supplementing it with research that indicates its contradictory origins and thereby puts into question its status as the original, the perfect and self-consistent expression of authorial meaning of which the translation is always the copy, ultimately imperfect in its failure to capture that self-consistency. (295)

As Venuti himself explains, the result is that even if De Angelis understood English (which is not the case), he would "not recognise his own voice in the translations" (300)

This, then, is Venuti's manifesto for foreignizing translation; a practice of wilful obfuscation which disrupts the reading process to the extent that the author would not recognise himself in the translation. Can this be called a respect for cultural difference?

Conclusion

By now it should be clear that if Venuti is radical it is because he is militating *against* not militating *for;* against fluency, against the canon, against convention, against the bourgeoisie, against censorship. Indeed, Venuti might be said to belong to that category of contemporary critics dubbed by Harold Bloom in his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, as "The School of Resentment"; critics who use literature as a battlefield in which to play out academico-political conflicts, posing men against women in feminist critiques, or class against class in social analyses. All of this has little to do with translation and the canon. All this has very little to do with opening up to foreign culture and allowing it to reshape the way we reflect upon our present lives, as Goethe and Arnold hoped translations would allow us to do.

Venuti can hardly be taken to task for challenging contemporary tastes which constrain the way we translate. His critique of a society that promotes the invisibility of the translator and thereby edits the reality of foreign experience is equally well-founded. He traces the development of the tastes we often take for granted in great detail and with great vigour and conviction.

His diagnosis is not in question here. What is in question is his prognosis. And it is this that sets Venuti against writers so varied as Goethe, Schleiermacher, Pound, Eliot and Steiner. For what does Venuti propose in place of transparent translation? Obscurity. An aesthetics shared by certain post-modernists who search for inspiration in Dada-style celebrations of incoherence, thinkers who champion all that makes the process of making sense problematical. If the translator is usually perceived as a bridge, Venuti makes him into a barrier.

Venuti's concern for the preservation of otherness is laudable and indeed it is difficult to imagine a translator who would not concur with his claim that we should be sensitive to the cultural difference of foreign literatures. Venuti's central question remains a poignant one. As society changes, as texts are translated, and as our tastes and values are altered, what place is there for difference? In every choice he makes, the translator reveals what he understands and thinks both of his author, of his author's language and of his own native culture and language. However invisible he strives to be, the next generation will see him clearly in the vocabulary he uses. His tastes and ethics will be all too visible in the choices he makes to highlight certain aspects of the work while downplaying others. This is why each generation feels dissatisfied with old translations and feels the need to update them. Unlike good wine, linguistic and moral conformity does not age well. Ultimately, the question is: Does the translator see himself, as Godeau, Schleirmacher, Goethe, Arnold and Pound saw him: as someone at the service of culture? Or does he see himself as servant of dissidence in that one very particular brand of counter culture that Venuti defends so devoutly?

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