

I have to admit that I sit here feeling that I am a fraud on several counts; indeed, not just feeling it: I *am* a fraud. I have never studied the theory of translation—not, of course, that that has prevented me from forming theories of my own, but they have derived from practice rather than academic discipline, for the simple reason that translation studies didn't exist when I was an undergraduate. I might not have made a beeline for them anyway, since I never intended to be a translator and became one by pure accident, and my degree isn't even in modern languages but in English. There was a course here at Oxford where you could study the history of the development of the language, and that was what I wanted to do. In this course Milton was the cut-off line for literature, but that was all right, since I would be reading later English and American literature for pleasure anyway (and in the same way, naturally, I went on reading French and German books), but here was my one chance to study a highly non-vocational subject just for the fun of it. Charles Clarke, our present minister of education who is on record as considering even mediaeval history a useless discipline, would not have approved of Course 2 in the English degree at Oxford in my time.

But the chief reason for my fraudulence in opening this conference is that when Brenda Garvey kindly asked me to give the opening paper today, and sent me

the conference's statement of intent concerning the visibility of the act of translation, I had to say I couldn't do it because I didn't agree with the proposition.² I might as well tell you at once that in any debate between visible and invisible translation I am an unrepentant, unreconstructed adherent of the school of invisible translation, and I cannot change an honestly held opinion because it is out of fashion. I have called these remarks "Translation as Illusion" because, all my professional life, I have felt that translators are in the business of spinning an illusion: the illusion is that the reader is reading not a translation but the real thing. Of course this is an impossible ideal to achieve. I have two large panes of

certainly hopes to get that pleasure of intensive reading from her work as she goes along. Furthermore, I cannot resist quoting Umberto Eco, in his recent

been written in English in the first place if I hadn't feared it might be taken the wrong way.

In suggesting that to create an illusion is part of the translator's job I'm not saying, of course, that I think readers should be deprived of the foreign element in a translated text, far from it—only that I like a translation to read as easily as if it had been originally written in English. I will add, in my own defence, that I am not alone in that view: I was fortunate enough to be awarded the Schlegel-Tieck prize for translation from the German last year, for Karen Duve's novel *Die Fremde*,⁷ in English *The Stranger*, and the judges' citation said that they thought, of the various works of fiction entered, this was the one that read most like an English novel. They did not mean that it appeared to be similar to something set in London or the Home Counties, say, since its specific background is the underworld of Hamburg and a dismal and extremely damp rural district of former East Germany.

But to return to this conference's statement of intent, the point with which I would really take issue is the idea that the reader should be *forced* to confront the otherness of the foreign culture. The fact is, there are commercial considerations to be taken into account; many of my best friends are publishers, and I have every sympathy with a publisher's desire not to lose too much money on a book. I imagine, too, that translated authors would like their books to sell, and won't mind at all if they read naturally in English. It does not appear to me conducive to this aim to *force* readers confront the otherness of the foreign culture. I would hope, rather, to seduce

translation. I hope I am not entirely a Philistine, but I see the point of good entertainment as well as high literature, and many of us are happy to translate both.

We are looking today not at the process but at the product of translation. However, as the product is the outcome of the process I don't know that I can entirely keep off that subject. Very briefly, then, a translator has very often also acted as the publisher's reader for a book—not always, but very frequently. In terms of wordage, I must have written about the equivalent of five full-length novels in reports for publishers in my time. To a great extent, publishers have to rely on the judgement of their readers, and a reader really needs to feel very enthusiastic about a book before recommending it, knowing that the publishers are taking a risk. As a reader, you are asking them to put their money where your mouth is. Coleridge says somewhere that we tend to overvalue a book read in a foreign language because we are secretly proud of being able to read it at all. Not if we are reading for publishers, we don't. Because of the notorious disproportion of literature translated into and out of English, publishers and their readers need to feel sure that a foreign book is worth the extra trouble and expense of translation.

This brings me to the first of the two questions asked in the statement of intent—and again, I can look at them only from a practical as opposed to a theoretical viewpoint. What is the role of the translated text in Britain today? (We might say in the English-speaking world as a whole, because it is very frequent for the same translation to be published on both sides of the Atlantic, with a greater or lesser degree of americanization or, if it has passed the other way, of anglicization.) I could say simply, though I realise this is a wilful

when asked in a television interview how she saw the future replied, “As very short.” We all know that by comparison with other languages, the role of translated literature in English is very small. One ought to be able to say that the classics of past centuries are the exception, but even here, the recent Big Read television series contained only [redacted] in the final twenty-one books. I suppose the British reluctance to learn foreign languages is one of the reasons why so comparatively few translations are published. I’ve just been reading Boris Akunin’s [redacted], in its excellent translation by Andrew Bromfield,⁸ and I found that every tiny scrap of French and a few scraps of German were translated in footnotes, which I suspect is symptomatic of the present dire state of modern-language teaching in this country. By comparison, the well-educated Germans seldom bother to translate their quotations from English. In a German reading copy of a Dutch book, I was interested to see that translations into German of Dutch quotations of poetry were given, but not of English quotations. Similarly, a century ago Freud assumed that the readers of his German texts would understand his French quotations, but in the recently published re-translations of those works in the New Penguin Freud series it was thought advisable to add English translations of the French passages.

All the same, I am happy to say that I do think the market for translations is definitely growing. Perhaps our minds are genuinely opening up—to the literature of other European countries at least; translations from other European languages far

attention; because you have done a great deal when you have brought him to have entertainment from a book. He'll get better books afterwards." We may forgive Johnson, in his period, for specifying boys only; by better books, I suspect he meant the Greek and Latin literature that an educated person of his time would read. The equivalent today might be the major classics of modern literature from at least other European languages. And how better to make young people receptive to those classics than by introducing them to books from other countries while they are still young?

I have been fortunate enough to be awarded the Austrian State Prize for Literary Translation for 2003, and was particularly pleased to hear from the President of IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People, that he regarded the award as a recognition of translated children's literature. As it happens the specifically Austrian books I have translated include a number of other titles, one in the New Penguin Freud series, two novellas by Stefan Zweig, a long and ingenious novel by Lilian Faschinger, but I am very happy to be thought of as a translator of children's books, for the reasons I have just mentioned. It is encouraging to realise that I have probably translated more of them in the last two or three years than for the two preceding decades.

So let me give my short answer to Question A: the role of the translated text is to expand experience, broaden the mind, and obviously to give access to literature that one could not otherwise read. To my great regret, I know no Slavonic languages, but would be sorry to have had no chance of reading the great Russian novelists in translation.

As for Question B, how does the role of the translated text differ from the role of the English-language text? Well, as I have indicated, in my opinion it ought not to differ in readability, only in offering an extra dimension of experience. There are, of

Goscinny was still alive. I used to take one of these stories about to translation workshops: it had been published in an album in France, but never translated into English, and I asked one set of postgraduate students on an MA course in translation how they would render one line, I was answered at once by a proudly beaming young man who gave me the of the French, but did not offer any translation to fit the context—a battle between the little allegorical figures of winter and spring—and didn't seem to feel that anything more than the sense of the French was necessary. What you had to translate, transfer, carry across (in the literal sense) is the joke here. I have been absolutely amazed to find that some people—perfectly intelligent and well-educated people—didn't actually realise that *Astérix* was translated from French. I remember one secondary school headmistress, who said she'd had no idea that it was not originally in English. You'd have thought it had THIS IS FRENCH written all over it, and indeed for that very reason it was only ten years after the publication of the first French albums that an English publisher was brave enough to venture on the series, after several other firms had said it was too specifically French ever to cross the Channel. In my view it's European in general, but that's another story.

Difficulty is in fact welcome. It was a challenge and a great pleasure to translate the late Max Sebald's ,¹³ trying to retain something of the flavour of his classical German style. In translating Max one rediscovers the pleasures of the long sentence and the subordinate clause. I have greatly enjoyed translating two novellas by Stefan Zweig for Pushkin Press. When I mentioned one of them to my Danish daughter-in-law she drew a sharp breath and said, “Oh, difficult!”—and he is; on the surface all appears limpid, but he really makes a translator think about every term, every word, every sentence.

I am at the moment faced with a very intriguing commission: the translation of a French novel by Gilles Rozier¹⁴ set in occupied France in the war; the name and more significantly the sex of the first-person narrator is never actually made explicitly clear, and while that narrator marries someone called Claude—a very convenient unisex name in French—Claude’s sex is never explicitly mentioned either. We are told of the wedding that “the bride wore white, the bridegroom a morning suit,” but not who was bride and who was groom. It is in fact obvious from the context and period that the narrator, a French teacher of German, is a gay man who has never understood his inclinations until he saves a young Polish Jew from the occupying forces and the Vichy authorities and hides him in the cellar of the family home for two years, during the course of which the narrator and the Pole fall in love. The narrator does not consummate the marriage with Claude, sitting up all night with a book instead. The tease is kept up throughout: there is never any pronoun for Claude, and of course in French the possessive agrees in gender with the object possessed and not the person possessing it. , his or her father, his or her mother. The German translator of the book Claudia Steinitz, whom I know, has had the same problem as I have in English: the possessive works the other way, agreeing in gender as well as number with the person or persons doing the possessing. (As I return to this paper later in 2004, having completed the translation, I can add that it took some ingenuity and I had to be very free here and there

illusion again comes in. You may think the need for a translator to be able to write good English was self-evident, but not always. And there is the question of what to do when the author's style is not, frankly, very good. This seldom arises, but for reasons of historical interest it can happen that a book not intrinsically of great distinction is translated. The late Ralph Manheim translated . Someone had to do it, and who better, although his widow has told me that having to get inside Hitler's mind did sometimes depress him. In a manner not quite comparable, but along the same lines, I recently translated the memoirs of Hitler's youngest secretary Traudl Junge who was in the Berlin bunker at the end of the war, edited by Melissa Müller.¹⁶ I agreed to take the translation on with some hesitation, because of Junge's cliché-ridden style. Melissa herself, having persuaded her, by then an old lady, to let her full memoir be published, told me she was rather taken aback by the naïveté of the writing. Junge described herself repeatedly, for instance, as being a captive in a gilded

copy editors, both in-house and freelance, people who raise the right questions and, in bringing a fresh eye to the text, make a really valuable contribution. But I have encountered some copy editors who seem to believe it their business to change wording for the mere sake of change—from “at last” to “eventually,” for instance—and to add bad grammar and unusual punctuation. When, in a novel based on the real-life memories of Eva Braun’s cousin¹⁷, I found that the copy editor had changed a phrase, “as my hairstyle suggested,” to “as my hairstyle inferred,” I had to write a note to the effect that a hairstyle was not a sentient being and could not infer anything; she was probably aiming for “implied.” At least this attempted change immediately alerted me to the necessity for watching every mark she had made, sometimes obviously for the sake of change. There seems to be a copy editor’s law saying that while the sea has a shore, a river has banks, and a lake can usually have either a shore or banks, whichever of those two words a translator has used for the land on the edge of a lake must be changed. You cannot second-guess the copy editor on that one. In this case, when my “banks” were changed to “shore,” I had in fact found a picture and description of the lake where Eva

¹⁷ Sibylle Knauss,