The Translation of Mass Fiction

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1. High and Low

Despite the enormous amount of mass literature that is translated, little has been written in this area. Robyns (1990) looked at the omissions made in detective novels translated into French, using the *belles infidèles* image; Paizis (1998) finds similar omissions in romances translated into French and Greek; Sohár (1996 & 1997) examines pseudotranslations of science fiction into Hungarian; while Gouvanic (1997) finds French translations of science fiction novels more faithful to the originals. This paper will contrast the translation of mass fiction, to which I give the name of "factory" translation, and whose characteristics I detail at length, with that of literary, philosophical and erudite works, to which I give the name of "aristocratic" translation.

Translation studies have traditionally been an integral part of high culture, dominated by an aristocratic and gentlemanly coterie who have access to foreign languages and literature. One can think of the Royalist aristocrats in the 17th century, many of the names Tytler mentions in his *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, and the many gentlemanly discussions around translations of Homer.

Many literary translations have been aimed at the learned few, the aristocratic, gentlemanly or academic coterie. This can clearly be seen, for example, in the ideas of the German Romantics. More specifically, Lawrence Venuti comments that the kind of

translation that Schleiermacher recommends "aims to preserve the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, but only as it is perceived in the translation by a limited readership, an educated elite" (Venuti 1991:130). So, paradoxically, a translation, which should or could make a work available to all the literate members of a new language group, may be directed to a specific clique or coterie, thereby excluding the great majority of readers.

The rise of democracy, the enfranchisement of the masses in the 19th century produced a resulting cultural reaction in the intellectual elite, worried about the erosion of their privilege and domination. In *La deshumanización del arte*, published in 1925, José Ortega y Gasset sees modernism as a result of this reaction. He contrasts romantic art, which he calls "popular", a child of democracy, with contemporary "anti-popular" art, which many people found difficult to understand, when compared to the emotion and human interest central to romantic art. This contrasts with modern art and literature, where Mallarmé, for example, attempts to divest the poem of all human interest; this is the "dehumanization" of art. In music Debussy performed the same dehumanizing function against the heavily personal and associative themes of Beethoven and Wagner.

Pierre Bourdieu (1986), in *Distinction*, surveys the cultural tastes of different social classes in France in the 1970s. He found that the intellectual classes generally believe more in the form of the representation itself, whether it be the form of the painting, the piece of music or the literary work, than what is actually represented. There is a withdrawal from the concrete. They are able to reach Kant's level of reflection as against the easy pleasure of the senses, whereas popular taste believes in the things themselves - the ethics of the object

are tied in with the aesthetic. In other words, popular taste takes more interest in what is said rather than the way in which it is said. Thus, it will prefer more straightforward situations and more simply drawn figures and will wish to become involved in the lives and moral choices of the characters of the fictional works.

Ortega, in his essay on translation "Misterio y Esplendor de la Traducción", sees translation as a way of escaping from the crowd. It is a mysterious and impossible task in which one can attempt to bring other languages and great authors to affect one's own thought and language, and thus to rise above the cultural levelling of modern society.

I believe that the tradition of the foreignizing translation, with translators emphasizing the reproduction of the aesthetic qualities of the original in the translation is, to a great extent, the product of this strong elitist strain in modernism. Here we find Meschonnic's "poetic translation", Berman's translation which is "pensante, éthique et poétique" (1985), Augusto and Haroldo de Campos' transliteration - they only translate authors who have "revolutionized poetic form". This is also the site of Lawrence Venuti's "resistant strategies that foreground the play of the signifier by cultivating polysemy, neologism, fragmented syntax, discursive heterogeneity" (Venuti 1992:12).

2. Kitsch and Midcult

Leaving aside "highbrow" translation to examine what happens when a translation from high culture is adapted to mass culture, two concepts may be of use. The first is *kitsch* as

described by Umberto Eco and the second is the *midcult* as described by Dwight MacDonald.

The kitsch is the imposition of a fixed effect to be enjoyed by the consumer, who does not have to attempt to understand the more complex patterns of the operations of the artistic work. Yet, by enjoying this effect, the reader or viewer supposes that he/she is experiencing a privileged aesthetic experience. In other words, it is an escape from the responsibilities of art. The emotional reaction of the reader/viewer is all-important, and any kind of reflection on the causes of this reaction is missing (Eco:74-77).

Dwight Macdonald contrasts masscult, inferior literature which has no pretension of being erudite, with the midcult, which trivializes works of art and, like the kitsch, deliberately attempts to produce certain effects. He lists the characteristics of the midcult (Eco:84): (1) it borrows avantgarde processes and adapts them to make a message which can be enjoyed and understood by all; (2) it uses these processes when they have been known, used and are worn out; (3) it constructs a message as a provocation of effects; (4) it sells them as art; (5) it tranquilizes consumers, convincing them that they have encountered culture, so that they won't feel other worries.

Macdonald gives examples of the *Midcult*: the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, which destroys the King James version, so as to make the text clear; book clubs such as the *Book of the Month Club*; and *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, which uses Brechtian techniques of alienation for consolation and hypnosis. Thus we can see the complexities of the work of art reduced: mass culture makes the classics into products to be consumed rather than works to be contemplated (Arendt in Eco 1993: 41).

Herbert Marcuse regrets this loss of the complexity of classic works:

...Plato and Hegel, Shelley and Baudelaire, Marx and Freud [are found] in the drugstore. [...] the classics have left the mausoleum and come to life again, now that people are just so much more educated. True, but coming to life as classics, they come to life as other than themselves; they are deprived of their antagonistic force, of the estrangement which was the very dimension of their truth. The intent and function of these works have thus fundamentally changed. If they once stood in contradiction to the status quo, this contradiction is now flattened out " (in Bennett 1981:64).

According to Marcuse, the cheapness and ready availability of the "great" canonized works of literature lead to a certain blasé attitude to these "greats". They are taken down from their pedestals to become the cheapest and most available of books.

Marcuse and MacDonald look down with traditional aristocratic condescension towards popular versions. But even if we do not share this snobbery, we must agree with Marcuse that the strangeness, the literary effect, is lost. Complexity is reduced. *Wuthering Heights* and *Pride and Prejudice* become no more than the "love stories" of Catherine and Heathcliff, and Elizabeth and Darcy; *Huckleberry Finn* loses all socio-political and ethical commentaries to become an adventure story for children. *Moby Dick* loses all mythical elements to become merely the fight between Captain Ahab and the whale. Stylistic complexity is lost. Only emotions are foregrounded: love, excitement, fulfillment, or struggle. The classic becomes a soap opera. The reader, believing that he has read the original version, or, at least, a representation of the original version, is content with this encounter with "culture".

These points fit in with my studies of adaptations and condensations of adapted translations in Brazil, especially those of the *Clube do Livro* book club (Milton 1995 and 1996), in which I found the following to be the main changes in the book club adaptations:

(1) No "sub-standard" language was accepted; language was homogenized into standard Portuguese.

(2) Likewise, all polyphonic elements were cut. For example, extracts in French, poems and meta-narratives in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* were cut; the puns, word lists and rhymes go by the board in *Gargantua*.

(3) Sexual references were cut, for example Gulliver playing on the maiden's nipples in the Brobdinag sequences in *Gulliver's Travels*.

(4) Scatological references are also cut, as when Gulliver urinates to put the fire in the palace out.

(5) There was a certain religious censorship: extracts of *Gargantua* which satirized the Catholic Church, for example suggesting that monks and nuns should dress nicely and be allowed to get married, were cut.

(6) The *Clube do Livro* thrived during the years of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-89), in its translation of *Hard Times*, and did not challenge the regime sections which suggest the possibility of mass action are considerably weakened in translation. "The Red House" in *Silas Marner* becomes "The Yellow House" in the *Clube do Livro* version!

(7) The *Clube do Livro* was very paternalistic. Footnotes explained classical references and "difficult" words. Footnotes would also warn against the dangers of drinking alcohol and bad eating habits.

3. Factory Translation

Much of translation theory has worked within the faithful-unfaithful and content-style frameworks. In recent years we have seen attempts to break out of this straitjacket with scholars connecting translation with other areas such as psychoanalysis, deconstruction, philosophy. However, many of these remain within the area of high culture. José Lambert (1994) has written that translation studies must break the boundaries of high culture, that translation is linked to larger series and frames of communication. He also writes about the enormous amount of invisible translation that takes place in every day situations. For example, when we buy a packet of soap powder, the name, the instructions, the advertising, the production manuals will almost certainly have involved a large amount of translation, which is never made obvious.

This study looks at the classic as an artifact, handled and bought by the masses, used and altered at will by editors, adapters, cartoonists, film makers, the record business, abridgers and CD-ROM makers. To use Walter Benjamin's famous metaphor, the translation will certainly have an afterlife, but this afterlife may take on a very different form to the original.

Let us look at some of the characteristics of this kind of translation:

(1) Rather than being the work of an individual, the condensed or adapted translation, or, for that matter, the dubbed or subtitled film, or the translation made within industry, will be the work of a team. It is a mere part of the assembly line. The "name" of the "translator" may not appear on the work. If it does, it may be a pseudonym: a highbrow translator may not wish to have his name associated with the work, or it may even be an invented name for a team. Jerusa Pires Ferreira, in her study of *O Livro de São Cipriano* (1992), shows how

the "author" of these popular collections of legends, almanacs, spells and fragments is usually a compiler, a copier, a translator, an updater and an inventor. In most cases the "author" was anonymous or used a pseudonym. Historical parallels can be found in medieval translation, where adaptation, omissions, retellings, alterations, etc., were a normal part of what we now call translation.

(2) Standardization, or Fordism, is an important factor in the production of "factory" novels and translations. Different forms of standardization can be found: a) theme: the work is tailored to suit the tastes of the reader; b) language: sub-standard language and dialect is cut out; c) style: the work should not deviate from a strict narrative style; d) size: after 1960 the *Clube do Livro* publications were standardized to 160 pages; e) weight: a low weight to cut postal costs will be an important economic factor in many book clubs.

(3) Commercial production ignores the so-called sacredness of the author. Walter Benjamin's well-known essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1969) emphasizes the fact that the contemporary mechanical possibilities of reproducing the object will change our relationship to the work of art and destroy the ritualistic and magical elements surrounding the original. With film and photography there is never a single "original". The very nature of both arts is essentially reproductive: films and photographs cannot be collected as paintings can. Moreover, the cost of a film is so high that it must be made available to the highest number of people possible. Indeed, the nature of film is highly democratic as it will make all myths and great authors and artists available to cinema goers.

The fragmentation of a film is very different to the unity of a painting or a poem. The director, responsible for the final product, will depend on the expertise of many other different areas, sound, photography, etc., of which he will have only a limited knowledge. He or she will be more of a manager of the final product. Compare this with the painter or novelist, who will have all elements of the work of art under his control. The final result of the film will come about as the result of the combination of a number of very different elements. Though Benjamin's essay concentrates on the reproducible arts of film and photography, his essay also helps us to understand the commercial translation, such as that of the *Clube do Livro*, where the editor will coordinate the work of the translator, sub-editors, illustrator and finance department.

(4) Definite commercial strategies will be used. The translation will be directed to a definite market. There will be markets for different segments of society. Non-condensed, carefully produced translations will be directed towards markets from a higher social class. (Adapted) translations of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Wuthering Heights* are often directed towards a market of female readers. Similarly, *Moby Dick*, *Kidnapped, Huckleberry Finn* and *Gulliver's Travels* are usually directed towards the juvenile market.

(5) Deadlines are all-important. The product must be released on time even though it may have a few flaws, particularly if is not a product which is aimed at an erudite market. Meeting deadlines is much more important that perfectly accurate copy. The monthly deadline meant a minimum of time for proofreading, and errors abound, particularly in the names of authors: Virginia Wol_ff_, Daniel _DeFoe_, Charlotte Bront_é_, George El_li_ot, and K_un_t (sic) Hansun.

A study by Anikó Sohár on translation of mass fiction in Hungary shows the large number of editorial proofreading blunders, including remnants of the translators' own notes and queries remaining in the final version, which shows absolutely no revision took place. (Sóhar 1997:68-69,71,87-88,96,etc.). On one occasion, the translator Örkeny Akjay notes that the original, William Gibson's *Count Zero*, contains an error, when the author calls the character called Ramirez "Rodriguez". He warns the editor by inserting "(!!!error in original!!!). This English language note ended up printed in the Hungarian published version as the publishing company, *Valhalla Páholy*, presumably did not employ a proofreader (Sóhar 1997:59).

(6) The great novel tradition, above all the 19th century novel, is particularly "reusable", in different shapes and guises: condensations, films, cartoons, etc.. Many of the most popular authors - Swift, Dickens, Jane Austen, Scott, George Eliot, the Brontës, Balzac, Melville, Stevenson, were already read by mass audiences. The 19th century realist tradition was much closer to popular taste than modernism. By contrast, the 20th century modernist tradition of the novels of Joyce, Faulkner, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf hardly lend themselves to adaptation. The 19th century texts join other standard "mythical" texts which have been used and reused in a variety of forms: *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*; *Faust*, Shakespeare's tragedies, *Oedipus*, *Don Quijote*, etc.

(7) It may often be cheaper to recycle an already existing translation than to commission a new translation. The same novel, in the same translation, may even be directed towards different markets. Thus we see the same (or slightly modified) translation appearing in different guises. Ediouro published two almost identical condensations of *Pride and*

Prejudice in 1970. The small format edition, "translated" by Nair Lacerda is slightly longer and its language is slightly more formal than the large-format illustrated edition "translated" by Paulo Mendes Campos and aimed more at the juvenile market.

As Viagens de Gulliver a terras desconhecidas was published in a heavily cut version by *Edições Cultura* in 1940, "Portuguese translation" by Henrique Marques Junior, "scrupulously revised and modernized". "Scrupulously revised" is a euphemism for "enormous cuts were made". An identical translation, except for a few uses characteristic of the Portuguese of Portugal which were adapted for Brazil, was published as *Viagens de Gulliver* by *Jackson* in 1957. This time there was a different translator: Cruz Teixeira.

The *Clube do Livro* often relies on previously published translations. Two translations of *Ivanhoe* seem to be heavily calqued on the *Garnier* translation of 1905: the *Clube do Livro* (1953) - here a double edition with smaller print - and the *Edições Cultura* (1943). Similarly, the *Clube do Livro* translation of *Silas Marner* (1973) is a slightly updated version of the *Martins* version (1942). Even the misspelling of the author's name (George Elliot) is copied!

(8) Packaging is enormously important. Adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Dombey and Son* were packaged as Mills & Boon type romances, using photos of North American 1950s glamour girls.

(9) Commercialism is not beyond a few tricks - the reader may not be treated with all that much respect. Translations were generally introduced as "special translations", a euphemism for "contains many cuts".

(10) A common marketing trick is that of introducing an original work as a pseudotranslation. The most famous pseudotranslation is *Don Quijote*, which Cervantes pretended to be a translation from the Arabic. Cervantes had much more freedom to make the satirize the *novelas de caballería* if he pretended it was a translation. Macpherson's *Ossian* was one of the greatest of literary hoaxes. The Scottish poet, James Macpherson, pretended to have discovered and have translated Celtic poems from the 4th Century AD. For a while Macpherson was one of the most celebrated figures in the literary world.

Most frequently, the reason for pseudo-translations is commercial. Anikó Sohár documents the mystery of Wayne Mark Chapman, the name given to the fictitious author of a series of best-selling science fiction novels in Hungary written by a team of authors. In post-communist Eastern Europe, popular fiction from the West has considerable prestige. Science fiction written by Hungarian authors would not be attractive to potential purchasers. Obviously, therefore, it pays to invent the foreign author, the original work, and even give biographical information on him. Wayne Chapman lives in Concord, New Hampshire, and his first books, *Blood Season*, and *Banners*, were published by Pengdragon Publishing Co. Inc., London. Sohár, after a considerable amount of literary detective work, managed to discover that these novels were in fact pseudotranslations and that neither the author or the publishing house existed. In addition, after the series began to be successful, the editors took fewer pains to insist on the fact that these books were originally written in English (Sohár 1996: 2-5).

(11) Such translations are ephemeral, throwaway, not catalogued by libraries and information networks. Jerusa Pires Ferreira had little luck in her search for *O Livro de São*

Cipriano in national libraries (Ferreira:1993). Indeed a librarian in the Bibliothèque National in Paris was annoyed and said that it was unthinkable that this kind of work should be found in the national library of France!

4. Conclusion

This article has examined the characteristics of translations of mass fiction and has criticised the quality of translations such as those of the *Clube do Livro* for their censorship, lack of attention to detail and style and carelessness. In terms of a mere qualitative analysis, such translations will always lose to more carefully made academic translations. Yet such criticism does not take into account the fact that these cheap and accessible translations were able to introduce classic Brazilian and foreign novels to an audience which did not have a book-buying habit, and may have resulted in an interest in literature and further reading, playing a significant part in improving the level of education and world knowledge in Brazil, where educational facilities were, and still are, precarious.

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