

## Chapter 1

# Literature in Translation: Altering the Perspective

Lear: I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.  
<sup>F</sup>Gloucester: Well, my good lord, I have informed them so.  
Lear: Informed them!? Dost thou understand me, man?<sup>F</sup>  
(2.2.287-8)

Lear's failure as a father and sovereign often overshadows yet another facet of his tragedy: Lear loses his language. One of his most throbbing experiences is the recognition of the ineffectiveness of his speech. With royal authority gone, the familiar words neither threaten nor appeal, and lose their basic causative power. Postponing his anagnorisis, Lear stubbornly clings to the worn-out forms of orders and curses, but his interlocutors remain insolent or indifferent. Finally, unable to establish dialogue, Lear retreats into madness where the response of those who listen is no longer essential. Thus, towards the end of the play, Lear's rich, connotative language becomes understandable largely within its own frame of reference.

The nature of Lear's predicament resembles in many ways the pitfalls of translation. Thus, it is also the translators who strive to find their way between employing the same words and securing equivalent effect. While reproducing the form promotes the surface, the search

for meaning and, even more so, reconstruction of the function calls for a broad socio-cultural survey of both the source and the receiving culture. The alternative solutions multiply, with their choice hinging on vastly differing circumstances, ranging from the translator's linguistic competence to aesthetic preferences shaping the reception of translated literature. The challenge of translation further intensifies with works bearing strong marks of their time-and-place-bound literariness, and well-tuned to the expectations of their immediate receiving audience. Viewed by a translator, such texts resemble nebulae of formal, semantic and functional correspondences, which compete and rule out each other in translation. In consequence, the target text becomes a mutation of the original, shaped by the pressure of the hosting system, and varied by the subjective inferences of the translator.

Despite the enormous share of translation in the cultural traffic, Translation Studies has emerged only recently, and continues to reassert its position against linguistics and comparative literature.<sup>1</sup> Withdrawing from traditional alliances proves difficult, especially if the new discipline borrows methodologies and annexes areas of research others thought their own. And yet Translation Studies refuses to be devoured by its well-established rivals, and clearly profiles itself as an alternative to other approaches. Accordingly, linguistic studies of translation have been customarily preoccupied with the practical aspects of translating and interpreting, and therefore, centred around the concept of equivalence, whereas literary studies have reached readily for traditional devices of literary analysis for the description and assessment of translated texts. Both linguistics-oriented and literature-oriented translation theories are said to have been, somewhat naturally, mainly prescriptive, and therefore, bent on drawing a line between appropriate and inappropriate renderings of the source text.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The scope of the discipline has been outlined, e.g., by André Lefevere (1978: 23), Susan Bassnett (1980: 7-8), Gideon Toury (1995: 10), Mary Snell-Hornby (1995: 19), and defined by Mark Shuttleworth and Moira Cowie (1997: 183-4), and embraces all aspects of translating and interpreting, including, but not limited to, relevant areas of linguistics, literature and affiliated disciplines such as history, philosophy and semiotics.

<sup>2</sup> A well-known enumeration of the apparent sins of the literary and linguistic approaches to translation, along with the characteristics of the new paradigm can be

Furthermore, the predominant normative approaches favoured the synchronic analysis of the source vs. target text, and often underestimated, or deemed negative the shaping impact of the receiving culture. The contempt for translations displaying excessive compliance with the preferences of their immediate audiences for the price of departures from the original, led also to downgrading or stigmatising translation practices which set as their priority compliance with current aesthetic conventions, along with all the necessary courage, sensitivity and inventiveness such practices involve. On the material level, the normative attitudes would relegate to the fringes of scholarly interest various forms of abridgements, secondary translations or translations based on unknown source texts. Significantly enough, it is in particular the theatrical reception of drama which often licensed free borrowings and daring adaptations of the foreign repertoire, and thus somewhat naturally privileged the demands of the contemporary stage over linguistic accuracy.

Additionally, the disciplinary bias was also projected onto the research profile, and forged the preference for either literary or non-literary texts. The dependence on traditional methodological tools, combined with the unnatural split within the area of research, could not but hinder the development of translation theory. Consequently, at the end of the twentieth century the postulates for the establishment of an independent discipline for the study of translation were articulated with particular insistence and urgency. However, the absence of comprehensive theories of translation resulted not only from the indebtedness to, or interference of adjacent fields. The methodological dilemmas stemmed also from the empirical nature of the proposed

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found in the *locus classicus* of early Translation Studies, i.e. Theo Hermans' introduction to *The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation*, often seen as a manifesto of the new discipline. Distancing itself from the aforementioned normative and evaluative bias of the former methodologies, Hermans insisted on "a view of literature as a complex and dynamic system; a conviction that there should be a continual interplay between theoretical models and practical case studies; an approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-oriented, functional and systemic; and an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translation and other types of text processing, and in the place and role of translations both within a given literature and in the interaction between literatures" (1985: 10-1).

discipline and the resulting epistemological implications. In fact, the dilemmas facing Translation Studies were signalled already in the inquiries of James Holmes, usually credited with having given the impetus to establish the new discipline.<sup>3</sup>

James Holmes, essentially a structuralist scholar, postulated that Translation Studies should be an empirical science, proceeding from the analysis of facts, through explanations, to the formulation of the principles of translation (Holmes 1988). Given the absence of translation theory, the direction of research, at least initially, was to proceed from an accumulation of descriptions and facts to the formulation of translation theory. However, contemporary epistemology shows much distrust towards empirical disciplines which, departing from the examination of facts, aspire to make claims of absolute objectivity and universality.<sup>4</sup> These reservations were perhaps best formalised by Luis Prieto:

The truth of a concept is measured not on the basis of its adequacy to the object, but its adequacy to the point of view from which the object is considered, and from which its pertinence derives. This means that a concept is more or less true according to how it approximates to the ideal that consists of retaining all that is pertinent to the object from the point of view on which this concept is founded and only what is pertinent from this point of view. (Prieto 1975: 124, quoted after de Marinis 1993: 9)

A similar note of distrust concerning the selection of research criteria resounds in Umberto Eco's idea of "ideological fallacy":

In the human sciences one often finds an 'ideological fallacy' common to many scientific approaches, which consists in believing that one's own ap-

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<sup>3</sup> The role of James Holmes in the establishment of Translation Studies has been acknowledged relatively recently. In 1995 Gideon Toury, for example, listed more than 20 reference books from which Holmes' name was missing (1995: 3). Nowadays Holmes' significance for the establishment of the field remains unquestionable (cf. Snell-Hornby 2006: 40-6).

<sup>4</sup> The discussion of epistemological limits of an empirical discipline is patterned after de Marinis (1993: 9-10). De Marinis aims at the establishment of a research methodology for theatre semiotics, yet his emphasis on the pertinence of research criteria shows relevance to translation analysis, even more so within the context of this book.

*Literature in Translation: Altering the Perspective*

proach is not ideological because it succeeds in being 'objective' and 'mental'. (1976: 29)

The risk of ideological fallacy further increases when research aims precisely at identifying a variety of cultural circumstances which affect the process of the mediation of meaning like, for example, in translation. And yet the emphasis on the subjectivity of the researcher's inferences and on the cunning pressure of ideology should be understood as a request for caution, rather than a call to abandon all efforts. While discussing the epistemological limits of analyses conducted within the framework of humanities Marco de Marinis, an Italian semiotician, stipulates:

The 'correctness' of an analysis is assessed by the *criteria of validity*. This correctness means, on one hand, its functionality and efficiency (*adequacy*), verifiable through empirical proofs of verification and falsification, and, on the other hand, its *internal coherence*, resulting from the correct application of verification procedures. (1993: 10)

Thus, the hearts of an adequate and internally coherent analysis lies in the carefully selected and empirically verifiable criteria. Indeed it is precisely the absence of established criteria which have proved to be the greatest obstacle in the development of Translation Studies. With a vast area of research on one hand, and considerable critical energy on the other, the birth of the discipline led to the proliferation of unrelated, and somewhat incompatible case studies, frequently further isolated by linguistic barriers. Significantly enough, it was already Holmes who strongly argued for the necessity of establishing a methodological framework for translation analysis, and thereby ordering its epistemological dimension.

Working on the assumption that it is impossible to reproduce the original text entirely, Holmes pictured translation as a mixture of structuralist principles and cartographic imagery. Accordingly, the process of translation was viewed by Holmes as involving the establishment of two maps, of which the first consisted of features abstracted by the translator from the source text, whereas the second was the translator's mental vision of the features to be preserved in translation. In consequence, the target text was seen as reflecting the

order of priorities established by the translator while deciding which features of the original should take precedence over the others. Such an idea of translation as a structural exercise in decomposing and recomposing the original text has been echoed in other writings located in the field of Translation Studies, most notably in Gideon Toury's concept of translational norms (1985, 1995). Viewing translation as a decision-making process Holmes insisted on a non-evaluative approach to translated texts, and argued that the proper task of a descriptive analyst was to reconstruct the whole process of translation, i.e. to derive a list of distinctive features from both texts (the source text and the target text) and to reconstruct the hierarchy of correspondences.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, the theoretical reconstruction of the translator's mental maps appears to be a task of highly speculative nature. Similarly tricky and deceptive may be an attempt at abstracting the hierarchy of correspondences from the existing translation. Hence, the translated text reflects all decisions taken by the translator, and therefore it is easier said than done to deduce which decisions had been taken first and determined the remaining choices. Sensing a trap, Holmes eventually recognized that the descriptive analysis of the translation, if pertinent and reliable, should be based on some independent, external criteria, devised possibly for translation analysis in general. This led him to the idea of a repertory of features to be compared in the original texts and their translations. Holmes wrote:

The task of working out such a repertory would be enormous. But if scholars were to arrive at a consensus regarding it, in the way, for instance, the botanists since Linnaeus have arrived at a consensus regarding systematic methods for the description of plants, it would then become possible, for the first time, to provide descriptions of original and translated texts, of their respective maps, and of correspondence networks, rules, and hierarchies that would be mutually comparable. And only on the basis of mutually comparable descriptions can we go on to produce well-founded studies to a larger scope: comparative studies of the translations on one author or one translator, or – a greater leap – period, genre, one-language (or one-culture), or general translation histories. (1978: 81)

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<sup>5</sup> Holmes' methodological guidelines have been outlined in his essay "Describing Literary Translations and Methods", cf. Holmes (1978).

Notwithstanding Holmes' prophetic enthusiasm, the model for a descriptive analysis of translation was missing for the next two decades, even though the discipline as such, if measured by the sheer weight of critical studies, was swiftly developing and taking, as it was later described, its cultural turn. In fact the interest in culture soon became the trademark of the so-called Manipulation School which, with all its thought-provoking contributions to the study of translation phenomena, often explored the well-trodden paths of comparative studies.<sup>6</sup> Significantly enough, Gideon Toury, while diagnosing the state of Translation Studies in 1995, clearly echoed the early postulates of James Holmes:

What is missing is ... a systematic branch proceeding from clear assumptions and armed with a methodology and research techniques made as explicit as possible and justified within TS itself. Only a branch of this kind can ensure that the findings of individual studies will be intersubjectively testable and comparable, and the studies themselves replicable, at least in principle, thus facilitating an ordered accumulation of knowledge. (1995: 3)

However, the two decades separating the insights of Holmes and Toury were hardly time lost. Even though a methodology for the analysis of individual translations was still underdeveloped, the discipline produced a significant amount of critical studies which cast light on the translated literature as a separate class of texts. Tracing the nomadic movements of authors and genres, Translation Studies has exposed the share of translation in the mutual shaping of cultures. The findings helped in understanding the wide-scale mechanisms underlining the choice, and the subsequent assimilation of the translated

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<sup>6</sup> The term Manipulation School has come to be associated with the group linked with Theo Hermans' publication of 1985 who shared the belief that "all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose" (Hermans 1985: 11). The group soon diversified. While Gideon Toury focused on devising a methodology for Descriptive Translation Studies, André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett initiated the cultural turn in Translation Studies (1990: 1). Given the clearly theoretical bent of Toury's inquiries, it is Lefevere and Bassnett who are often seen as continuators of the Manipulation School. Despite their radical methodological assumptions concerning the new field, the group was unmercifully and rather unjustly perceived as a branch of comparative literature, pursuing "exercises in literary history" (cf. Snell-Hornby 1988: 26).

literature into the literary canons of the target systems. Achieving and pursuing this macro perspective was to a large extent facilitated by the methodological assumptions borrowed from the Polysystem Theory, the only theoretical framework readily incorporated into the early manifesto of the Manipulation School. Elaborated by Itamar Even-Zohar, a semiotician of culture, the Polysystem Theory clearly built on the inquiries of Russian Formalism.<sup>7</sup> The theory stressed the necessity of examining the interaction of cultural phenomena of varying types and status, including literature, as well as the mechanisms of literary evolution where the translation of foreign literature often triggers change. The division of the literary polysystem into the privileged centre and the underscored periphery, and literature into primary (innovative) and secondary (conservative) proved instrumental for the newly established discipline which thereby placed systemic thinking at the heart of its methodology. Thus, following 1985, the Polysystem Theory became a necessary trademark of Translation Studies and a natural framework for a multitude of case studies.

Significantly enough, most of the scholars associated with the new discipline saw the greatest contribution of the Polysystem Theory in abolishing the static concept of literature, and thereby advancing the view of the intensely negotiable, and at all times tentative canon(s). The recognition of the internal tensions and alliances (as well as vacuums) within the realm of literature offered a great explanatory power as regards the acquisition of foreign works. However, by stressing the decisive role of the target system, it somewhat obliterated the role of the translator as an individual. Thus, the rhetoric of teasingly reversed research principles, signaled a radical break with the source-oriented approach and the habit of stigmatizing shifts and

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<sup>7</sup> The indebtedness to Russian Formalism pertained in particular to the work of Jurij Tynjanov and his concept of literariness. Tynjanov stipulated the existence of structural laws which govern the evolution of literary systems. These norms defamiliarize language and contribute to the emergence of new literary patterns in non-literary domains. The trademark of Tynjanov's concept was the belief in literature as a system, whereas Even-Zohar used the term "polysystem" to emphasize the extension of the term to include culture as a whole and to underscore its dynamics. For the concept of the polysystem and the formalist heritage cf. Even-Zohar (1985: 188-90), (1990: 9-13). For an overview of the Polysystem Theory see also Baker (1998: 176-9), and Gentzler (1993: 111-3).

alterations. This is how radically Gideon Toury, by far the most vocal and faithful advocate of the Polysystem Theory, interpreted the translator's loyalty in 1985, in an essay published next to the overview of Even-Zohar's theory:

Translating as a teleological activity *par excellence* is to a large extent conditioned by the goals it is designed to serve, and these goals are set in, and by, the prospective receptor system(s). Consequently, translators operate first and foremost in the interest of the culture *into* which they are translating, and not in the interest of the source text, let alone the source culture. (Hermans 1985: 19)

Also the studies thriving in the wake of the aforesaid cultural turn in Translation Studies reflected mainly the interest in the shaping mechanisms operating in the hosting system. Accordingly, the extensive analyses of various forms of patronage, of the sway held by target poetics, and of the pressure of the dominant ideology helped to anatomize cultural processes hitherto vaguely visible in the traditional studies in reception or comparative literature.<sup>8</sup>

Given the scale of the resonance, what exactly was the share of the Polysystem Theory in overcoming the traditional approach to translation practices, and what specific methodological inspirations were offered by Even-Zohar? First, by replacing the formalist notion of system with the somewhat tautological, if unnerving, concept of polysystem, Even-Zohar underscored his belief in the evolution of literature which was dependent not only on the evolution of the form, but also on culture, economic conditions, historical factors as well as various institutionalised media such as publishing houses, journals, etc. Interesting enough, with time it is precisely these extraliterary pressures which gained an overriding importance in the evolution of Even-Zohar's own concepts.<sup>9</sup> The diversified and dynamic cultural

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<sup>8</sup> Patronage, poetics and the translator's ideology are all concepts formalized by André Lefevere in the 1980s as an alternative to the nomenclature promoted by the descriptive branch of Translation Studies. Lefevere refused to make "any further contributions to the elaboration of system thinking but rather make use of it as a heuristic construct" (1992: 12), and indeed employed more suggestive language to describe the (ir)regularities of literary translation.

<sup>9</sup> Significantly enough, in 1997 Even-Zohar again stirred debate by publishing his article "The Making of Culture Repertoire and the Role of Transfer". The new

landscape provided more space and flexibility for tracing the movements of corpuses of literature in translation. It encouraged also the analysis of various interdependencies which made the entry of the foreign texts possible, along with the conditions which govern such acquisitions. Viewed from the specific angle of literary translation, the approach channeled critical energy to inquiries aimed at figuring out the answer of why we reach for the foreign, rather than investigating how much the translations differ from their sources. The heterogeneity of the framework could be seen as an advantage also from the point of view of drama translation as it naturally welcomed inquiries extending beyond a single domain, a compulsive requirement in the case of the literary and theatrical reception of plays.

Another aspect of Even-Zohar's theory, again rooted in the formalist thought, was the emphasis placed on the tension between canonized literature, occupying a prominent position in the centre of the system, and non-canonized literature, downgraded by the literary milieu on aesthetic grounds, and yet striving to progress from the periphery of the system towards its canonized core. Thus, the model took into account the extended temporal perspective, and the shifts in the composition of the literarily canons motivated by the change of aesthetic and ideological preferences. In consequence, the literary canon was seen as a negotiable set of preferred readings, subject to modifications and tensions which, in fact, contributed to its vitality and relevance. The theory upheld also Tynjanov's distinction between primary and secondary literature, based on the degree of inventiveness (Even-Zohar 1985: 119). Accordingly, primary literature was seen as

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theoretical proposal passed over the Polysystem Theory, offering instead the concept of culture repertoire, and signalling the author's growing preoccupation with the socio-economic relations conditioning the selection and integration of foreign material and the profile and intensity of the activities of agents effecting cultural exchange. The new proposal confirms Even-Zohar's overall concern with acquisition mechanisms rather than with the analysis of individual texts. Even-Zohar pictures translation as part of an all-inclusive traffic which serves to extend and vary the repertoire which is understood as "the aggregate of options utilized by a group of people, and by the individual members of the group, for the organization of life" (1997: 355). Most crucially, Even-Zohar has come to perceive translation as a form of import, with all the mercantile consequences of trading in foreign commodities. For a discussion of the evolution of Even-Zohar's methodological framework see also Cetera (2007).