Recreating writing: A consideration of translated literature

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RECREATING WRITING:
A CONSIDERATION OF TRANSLATED LITERATURE

A Thesis
Presented to the
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University, San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
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by
Rabea Jan
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ABSTRACT

The process through which a good literary translation is produced is similar to the process through which literature itself comes into being. Literary translation becomes literature only when the "inner depth" of a literary work of art leaves one body of textuality and contextuality for another. The problem is "how?"

In the first two chapters, this thesis examines some of the answers to this question as well as the theoretical assumptions underlying them. The question of the literary text as "container of great meaning" is held out for special focus in order to point out how this view has led to the Prague approach to translation. This approach requires the translator to go beyond the exteriority of a text and fully understand its interior structure.

The problem with the Prague "interior" approach to literary translation is that it neglects the reader and focuses on the translator as recreator of meaning. But as literature is the product of the cooperation between writer and reader, literary translation should be the product of the cooperation between translator and reader.

To deal with the problem of translator-reader relationship, I propose an approach that combines the principles of reader-response criticism and the literary polysystem theory. In chapter III, I connect Wolfgang Iser's phenomenology of reading (particularly, his concept
of "holes" in the text) with translation theory. I also use Stanley Fish's concept of "interpretive communities" in order to determine what a good literary translation is, and what is good for translation.

Chapter IV gives a brief account of the polysystem theory. This theory has its roots in the writings of the Russian Formalists, and it is inherent in most Marxist and social criticism, but it has received its seminal formulation in the work of the Low Countries circle. In the polysystem theory, literature is part of an ideological milieu that shapes the expectations and sensibilities of a given audience. As a polysystem itself, literature is not monolithic, but a collocation of different, often antagonistic, trends, dominated by canonized literary works. I use the polysystem theory to elaborate on Stanley Fish's conclusion: the authority of interpretive communities.

By incorporating the principles of reader-response criticism into the polysystem theory, this thesis develops a method for approaching literary translation and translation studies, and points out, in chapter V, new directions for future research.
INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPMENT OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

There is little agreement among historians about the origin of translation. Some, like Jacobsen (1958), and Steiner (1975) claim that the Romans, especially Cicero and Horace, were the first translators. However, the first documented piece of material evidence proves that the Egyptians 5000 years ago did translate. Inscriptions in three languages were found in Egypt, and that piece known as the Rosetta stone was the only clue that made possible the deciphering of hieroglyphic writing. It was translation that made the writing of the oldest civilization accessible to historians. The Rosetta stone is an important indication that translation is as old as writing.

Given these facts about the history of translation, the title of this section becomes too promising, and the task hopeless. Therefore, under the constraints of time and space limitations, this section will not attempt to review all phases of translation history, but will attempt to deal specifically with opinions explicitly stated by translators, writers, and critics about the translation of literature. The one contribution I hope to make in this case is to look at the motif behind the approach. The period covered begins with Cicero's remarks, and extends to the present time focusing primarily on the Western literary tradition with some reference to the Arabic school of translation in the eighth and ninth centuries.
The Roman Approach

It was probably Cicero who first drew a distinction between two kinds of translation: "word for word" and "sense for sense." The "sense" Cicero refers to in his remarks about translation is what moral critics call the "what" of meaning, an element easily identifiable and interpreted by the literary practice of Roman writers. In their moral approach to literature, the Romans followed their Greek models to whom the usefulness of poetry was of equal value to its music, and to whom beauty was truth and truth, beauty. This agreement between source literature and target literature on what constituted the "content" of an original text resulted in an ideal relationship between translator and audience. And to make the translators' task even easier, we find that they were writing for informed readers who knew both languages, read the original text, and were extremely receptive to Greek sophistication. The problem Cicero is concerned with is form: for he knew that language structures were very different. In his De Optimo Genere Oratorum he writes, "And I did not translate . . . as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or . . . the 'figures' of thought."¹ One of Cicero's goals in translating was to preserve "the general

style and force of the language." So the style, the form, the figures of thought, and the ideas of the exalted Greek text were not to be tampered with. Consequently, "this meant bending Latin to express to the full his [Cicero's] insight into the matter and manner of the original." The "bending of Latin" Kelly refers to is, as I see it, also a kind of linguistic and stylistic enrichment that resulted in coining new phrases and introducing new words. I would venture to say that enriching Latin as a language was the goal of translating from Greek, for as I mentioned above, almost all cultivated Roman readers knew and read Greek. Making a text accessible was by no means a goal of Roman translation. It is interesting to note here how later Latin dominated the whole learned world; until beyond the Renaissance, students were not called educated unless they could read and write Latin, and no learned work could hope to be widely read unless it was written in Latin.

Horace agrees with Cicero that word-for-word translation is the product of only "a slavish translator." He adds that translation is imitating another writer, but he warns

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2Ibid.


translators against plunging themselves into difficulties that prevent them from concealing themselves. Imitation is another extension of the Greek concept of mimesis in literature. By imitating the canonized writers of the past, translation became an innovative element in the Roman concept of literary production. Translators are not slaves. By translating they enrich their language, and they learn how to produce literature. In this approach to translation, translators recognize the source literature as more prestigious and try to emulate it. In Greek-Roman translation this recognition was a truism generally shared by readers and translators. Translation was a success if it conveyed the sense of a source text, and enriched the form of the target language.

The Ciceronian sense-for-sense approach found its way into Bible translation in the work of Saint Jerome (dating from about 384). But translating the word of God invited challenges far beyond the mere frowning of the church at any adaptations, however partial they may be. In the Roman tradition, we noted how the Romans regarded Greek sophistication with reverence. With the Bible, it was not only reverence. Humans were necessarily inferior for God is the author of truth, and thus very few questions could be raised about the relationship between meaning (sense) and language (word). Moreover, the commonly shared grounds between
translator and audience in the Roman tradition did not exist. The audience for a biblical translation is simply everybody.

So biblical translation confronted a special stumbling block, communicating the message while not tampering with God's word. Yet, in spite of all obstacles, attempts to translate the Bible were relentless. The mission took on an evangelistic cause; no human should be deprived of salvation by the curse of Babel. The moral and didactic goal of biblical translation was not to be achieved except by creating a vernacular text intelligible to everybody. St. Jerome was aware of this problem and took a cautious step towards a vernacular translation though recognizing the argument that one does not tamper with the word of God. Jerome's consolation was that his Vulgate style was similar to that of the Septuagint. In a letter to Pammachius, he uses a quotation from Mark v. 41 to demonstrate how a legitimate attempt to penetrate into the sense of a statement is appropriate. When Christ raises the daughter of Jairus, the command in Aramaic is talitha kumi (Damsel, get up). Jerome notes that Mark renders that command into Greek as "Damsel, I say to you, get up" in order to convey the sense of urgency in Christ's command. Jerome's argument in his few adaptations is based on the way the Septuagint—which is adopted by the church—has been rendered from Jewish Scriptures. This similarity, in
addition to the fact that Pope Damasus himself was Jerome's patron, helped silence some of the voices that were raised against the translation.

The Middle Ages

In the Medieval period, translating into the vernacular became more frequent. The goal was not only educative but also political. King Alfred the Great (849 - 899)—(reign 871 - 899)—translated from Latin into the vernacular, "the language that we can all understand,"\(^5\) with a political goal explicitly stated: recovery from the consequences of the Danish invasion, and the revival of learning to effect unity in a devastatingly divided kingdom.

The emergence of a middle class rich enough to buy manuscripts and ready to do without Latin helped perpetuate translating into the vernacular of both literary texts and the Scriptures. But in the meantime, some voices were raised against translation simply on the grounds that it was impossible. One was Roger Bacon (1214? - 1294) who probably was the first to advocate untranslatability because he claimed the intellectual content of words could never match. Another was Dante (1265 - 1321), who in his *Convivio*

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condemns translation which he thinks destroys the form and music of the original composition.

Medieval translation into the vernacular was characterized by free adaptation. The father of English poetry, Geoffrey Chaucer (1340? - 1400), founded an English poetic tradition based on free adaptations. He adapted Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. And given the fact that 14th century English was considered barbarous in Western Europe, we find a recurrence of the Roman model of linguistic enrichment through translation. This model was, later in the fifteenth century, encouraged and perpetuated by the European Academies in Italy, Germany, and then France as a result of the emergence of nationalistic literatures in those countries with little written heritage of their own.

As far as biblical translation is concerned, between 1380 and 1384, John Wycliffe (1330 - 1384) produced the first complete English translation of the Bible. Wycliffe's argument was that the Bible was intended for everybody. Thus humans should gain access to the word of God in the language they can easily understand, in the vernacular. William Tyndale (1494 - 1536) followed Wycliffe's theory and declared "the layman" as his audience. Condemned as a heretic for his unauthorized, vernacular translation of the
New Testament from Greek, Tyndale was executed by being burned at the stake in 1536. His translation, however, became the basis of the King James Version of the Bible.

The pressures on translators were great throughout the Middle Ages. The punishment for "mistranslating" could be as serious as execution. A single word could be the difference between faith and heresy, life and death. One question sums up the argument against any work of translation, the question of accuracy. In medieval translation, "accuracy" is a truism that was considered so evident, ephemeral, and universally accepted that it was not accurately defined. But, generally speaking, "accuracy" meant translating the accepted interpretation of a certain text. So if a translation gave way to or even allowed an interpretation different from that allotted to the original, then the translation lacked preciseness. This was the Ciceronian sense-for-sense approach with a vengeance. The result was driving translators—especially those of the Bible—to try to subdue any ambiguities in the text, and to offer a metatext that fitted the interpretation of the original. Ironically, this approach became a recourse to literalism. A good example is Arias Montanus' translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin in the Antwerp Polyglot (1551). He did not hesitate to violate the canons of Latin usage for the
sake of accuracy. For example, in Genesis I:20, his accurate rendering *reptificent aquae reptile* is not any better than the English, "Let the waters reptilify the reptile."

Going back a few centuries in the Middle Ages, we find a completely different concept of translation in the tradition of Arab learning in the eighth and ninth centuries. While translators in Europe worked risking accusations of heresy and execution, it is said of Hunayn Ibn Isaac—a famous translator—that the caliph Almamoon paid him the weight of the books he translated into Arabic in gold. Bagdad was a school of translation where the works of Aristotle, Plato, Euclid, Galen, Hippocrates, and many others were translated into Arabic. With translation receiving so much royal interest, and with translators being extravagantly rewarded, it is unfortunate that the literary (i.e. belles lettres) heritage of the ancient Greeks was not translated. The Arabs were occupied primarily with the writings of the Greek philosophers and scientists. It would have been very interesting if Homer or Euripides had been translated into Arabic. Yet the work of Arab translators is very important for two reasons. First, the languages and cultures involved in the practice are radically different. Secondly, the Arabic translations found their way back to Europe in the eleventh century through the translation schools of Toledo and Cordoba in Spain when the Arabic
translations of Greek were translated back into Latin. Therefore, when Aristotle or Euclid were referred to in the twelfth century, the reference quite likely was to a Latin translation of the Arabic translation of the Greek texts. For the purpose of this essay, however, the importance of the work of early Arab translators lies in their approach and how they dealt with the problem of translation.

The medieval Arab translator, Hunayn Ibn Isaac (cited above), recognizes two problems: keeping the style of the original intact, and choosing words with the same connotation for the reader of the translation as for the reader of the original text. Of course, both problems were complex, the first due to the structural difference between Greek and Arabic, and the second due to the divergence of the two cultures using those languages. When Ibn Isaac started to work, there did not exist an Arabic terminology equivalent to that of Greek philosophy. Therefore, he himself had to create a terminology. Arabic owes Ibn Isaac a whole system of philosophical vocabulary that provided an all-new form of expression for Arabic scholarship. He used two methods to coin new phrases. The first was to use a derivation similar to the Greek. The Arabic word for logic, mantiq, is derived from the verb "to speak" just as in Greek. The second method was to incorporate the Greek term in the Arabic declension system. Philosophy became falsafa in Arabic. Ibn Isaac's approach is described by the fourteenth century
scholar Alsafady in his book Alqaith Almusajam. He says that Ibn Isaac looks at the whole sentence and tries to grasp its meaning, and he then substitutes for it a corresponding sentence with the same meaning in the other language without bothering as to whether the words correspond with each other as such.

So after dealing with the problems of structure and terminology, the Arab translators focused upon sense-for-sense translation. Fidelity to the word order of the original text simply did not matter. Who would have cared anyway? The goal was the transmission of whatever knowledge that was available. Probably it was this goal of early Arabic translation that caused some Arab scholars to describe the process as laying the ground for Arab learning and scholarship rather than paying tribute to the Greeks.

Attempts at Theory

In his brief treatise, La maniere de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre (1540), the French humanist, Etienne Dolet (1509 - 1546) draws an outline of translation in an attempt to formulate a theory. This theory is summarized in his five tenets which in a way summarize the practice of translation from Cicero to the end of the Middle Ages.

Dolet's five tenets are as follows:

1. A translator should understand the meaning of the original, and strive to clarify obscurities.
2. A translator should be master of both languages.
3. A translator should avoid word-for-word renderings.
4. A translator should use the vernacular in common use.
5. A translator should produce the tone of the original by carefully choosing the appropriate word order.

Etienne Dolet was tried for heresy after translating one of Plato's dialogues. The translation implied disbelief in immortality; and Dolet, condemned as an atheist, was executed in 1546. His body was burned with copies of his books.

In Elizabethan England, George Chapman (1559 - 1634), the great translator of Homer, prescribes principles similar to those of Dolet. In his dedication of the Seven books (1598) Chapman says that a translator ought to "observe the sentences, figures and formes of speech proposed in his author, his true sence and height, and to adorne them with
figures and forms of oration fitted to the originall in the same tongue to which they are translated." In his "Epistle to the Reader" of his translation of The Iliad, Chapman asserts, probably for the first time in the history of translation theory, that the translator should attempt to reach the "spirit" of the original. The spirit Chapman refers to is, I think, a classical notion where divine inspiration is the force behind literature. For Chapman, translation cannot succeed except through an "incarnation" of the spirit of the original in the process of translation. Thus the translator has to be as inspired as the original writer.

To be inspired is to be free. The translator and the original writer become equals. Thus a "free" translator can free the spirit of literature from its form, and by the divine power of inspiration can achieve an "incarnation" of the spirit in a different form, in a different language. Such a concept of the work of the translator is explicitly described by Sir John Denham (1615 - 1699). In his "Preface" to his translation of The Destruction of Troy (1656), Denham thinks that the translator should not create a death's head ("caput mortuum") but a living literature; he should not translate Language into Language, but Poesie into Poesie; and Poesie is of so subtile a spirit, that in pouring out of one Language into another, it will
all evaporate; and if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a Caput mortuum.

A contemporary of Denham's, Abraham Cowley (1618 - 1667) uses the same approach in his Pindarique Odes (1656). In his "Preface" he says, "I have in these two odes of Pindar taken, left out, and added what I please; nor made it so much my aim to let the reader know precisely what he spoke, as what was his way of speaking." In Cowley's approach, the translator has to go through a process similar to that of the original writer. The particular words in the text are not important. Of course, such an approach was outside the realm of what was considered "Translation." Cowley did not care much about the name.

John Dryden (1631 - 1700) addresses the controversy between fidelity and freedom in his "Preface" to Ovid's Epistles (1680) by distinguishing three kinds of translation:

1. metaphrase, or word for word;
2. paraphrase, or sense for sense;
3. imitation, where the translator assumes authority as independent as that of the original author.

Dryden, whose notions about translation were adopted by Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744), considers the second type
(paraphrase) as the most appropriate kind of translation. The goal is mimesis. "When a painter copies from the life, I suppose he has no privilege to alter features and lineaments, under the pretence that his picture will look better . . . 'tis his business to make it resemble the original" (Essays, I, 142). The analogy of the translator as painter, and translating as painting keeps reappearing throughout the eighteenth century. As a painter copies nature to give an accurate representation, so does a translator copy an original text. Of course, today when we consider this Neoclassical view of the translator's work and its equation with "accurate" painting, we wonder why painting was not outdated by the invention of photography. (I will return to this point later when I discuss machine translation.) For Dryden and Pope, however, the translator is entitled to one license: the license to use a form that agrees with the aesthetic canons of the form of the target language.

The last important statement on translation in 18th century England is Alexander Fraser Tytler's dissertation

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on the principles of translation. Tytler offers three principles:

1. The translation should give a complete transcript of the idea of the original work.
2. The style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
3. The translation should have all the ease of the original composition.

Tytler reiterates what has already been established by Dryden and Pope. The translator has a moral duty to the original writer and to the readers. The first step is to understand the "idea." The second step is to imitate the style. And the third is to have all the ease of the original. Nevertheless, as an interpreter, the translator should make the message clear. According to Tytler, "To imitate the obscurity or ambiguity of the original is a fault and it is still a greater one to give more than one meaning" (p. 28). In the eighteenth century translation was interpretive mimesis.

In translation theory, from Dolet to Tytler, questions evolve around the old dichotomy, form and content. Dolet insists on an ideal balance, the meaning and tone of the

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original are to be achieved through use of the form and word order of the target language. Chapman advocates preserving the form of the original, and adding to it forms and figures in the target literature to recreate what he calls the "spirit" of the original. Denham goes one step towards a notion of the dominance of content over form for the sake of producing a living literature. Cowley goes another step further to dismiss the form of the original completely and present the content in a form suited to the conventions of the target literature. Dryden and Pope view translation as a true, accurate copy while granting the translator the license to use the aesthetic form in the target language. Finally, Tytler tries to restore the same balance advocated by Dolet. According to Tytler, the purpose of translation is to give the idea, imitate the style, and have all the ease of the original. The question these critics and scholars ask is "how to best present the content of a literary text in a translation?" It is the obsession with this question—which inevitably required a determination of the sententious content of the original—that resulted in a very strong bond between translation and interpretive criticism. After all, who is better qualified than a literary critic or scholar to determine the original content of the original text? Who is better qualified to discover treason?
The allegiance between literary criticism and literary translation presents us with a relatively coherent body of theory that was strengthened by the rationalistic, moral, and even empirical practice of literary criticism in the eighteenth century.

With the advent of English Romanticism in the first third of the nineteenth century, approaches to translation changed with the change of attitudes of the literary community. The pillars of Neoclassicism, "order," "common sense," and "controlled reason" were replaced by "vitality," "powerful emotion," and "limitless ideas." The "fire" of literature no longer lies in the words, but between the lines. And therefore, "nothing worth translating can be translated." ⁹ Coleridge (1772 - 1834), in his Biographia Literaria (1817) describes the process as "painful copying," and the product as "masks only; not forms breathing life." Shelley (1792 - 1822) in The Defence of Poesy (1820) considers it impossible to

transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring from its seed, or it will bear no flower— and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.

With the belief that poetry is an entity independent from language, Romanticism was moving towards a notion of untranslatability. The Victorians could avert this situation by declaring translation as a minority interest for a select audience: those who knew what they were looking for in a translated text, or, in other words, those who were more than familiar with the original.

In "On Translating Homer," Matthew Arnold (1822 - 1868) goes through a process of elimination in order to determine the audience for a translation:

Let not the translator, then, trust to his notions of what the ancient Greeks would have thought of him; he will lose himself in the vague. Let him not trust to what the ordinary English reader thinks of him; he will be taking the blind for his guide. Let him not trust to his own judgement of his own work; he may be misled by individual caprices.

According to Matthew Arnold, a translator should ask "how his work affects those who both know Greek and can appreciate poetry." In this approach, translation moves away from interpretation. The reader is brought to the text which is tested—if we follow Arnold's prescription—as medicine is. You have to monitor the effect of the medication on the
patients--that is of course if you select the right patients. Arnold carefully selects his:

Whether to read it [translation] gives the Provost of Eton, or Professor Thompson at Cambridge, or Professor Jowett here in Oxford, at all the same feeling which to read the original gives them . . . He [the translator] is trying to satisfy scholars, because scholars alone have the means of really judging him.

We can thus see that the pedantry and supersophistication of 19th century learning put translation in an atmosphere of exclusivism which ironically devalued translation. Arnold who tried to translate Homer into English hexameter had to present his work to a select audience--readers who read a translation with the original in mind. Translating for such an audience is as absurd as translating for oneself. The process resulted in more or less literal translation. And thus, we have come full cycle since Cicero and Horace.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 - 1881) discussing his translation of Dante states:

It is exactly what Dante says, and not what . . . he might have said if he had been an Englishman.

The business of a translator is to report what the
author says, not to explain what he means; that is the work of a commentator. What an author says and how he says it, that is the problem of the translator.

By making no "concessions" to his readers, Longfellow takes Arnold's approach to the extreme of literal translation. Longfellow advocates a mechanical process leading to a necessarily inferior composition. His *Divina Comedia* in blank verse is a good example of a translation aimed at a minority. Such an attitude prevailed through the first third of the twentieth century with emphasis continuing to be laid on the original composition. This emphasis was, as I mentioned above, the result of the Romantics' vitalist assumptions as they viewed literature to be the manifestation of the writers' natural powers and individual view of the world, the uniqueness of the art of writing and the freedom of the creative force. In this Romantic view, the writer is the sole creator of great meaning. The translator is only an objective mediator, an intermediary between literatures. The paradox here is that the Romantics, who place the intended meaning of an original author between the lines, wanted a translator to convey objectively that meaning in a translated text that resembled the original in matter and manner. (Some examples are Thomas Carlyle's
Goethe in German-like English, and Robert Browning's version of *The Agamemnon* of Aeschylus loaded with artificial, peculiar archaisms.)

The Romantic legacy left the translator lost in the self-sufficiency of intuition and value judgment, waiting eagerly for the development of an extra-literary "objective" criterion suited to the supposedly objective act of translating. The rapidly expanding studies and theories of language were carrying high hopes of objectivity to critics and translators—hopes of accomplishing translation objectively and independently by focusing on the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text.
Structuralism

Structural linguistics had an instantaneous appeal to translation theorists and researchers—an appeal that was by no means unjustifiable. Not only did structuralism confine "meaning" to the text, but it also gave the hope of providing a model for the production of that meaning. By its doctrinaire allegiance with structural linguistics, translation was thought to be on the verge of becoming a science, for once the "models" were worked out, translation could even be trusted to machines.

To clarify the notion of the "model" in structural linguistics, I will discuss in brief Saussure's theory, not so much to present a critical review of structuralism, but rather to point out the effect that theory had on translation. In his famous "Course in General Linguistics" (1916), Ferdinand de Saussure "decomposes" language--as an object for analysis--into two parts: *Langue*, and *parole*. *Langue* is the system of linguistic conventions, those rules which constitute meaning in any verbal communication. *Parole* is the actual use of that system by individuals. To become a science, linguistics--according to Saussure--has to

\[1\] Translated by Wade Baskin, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Reidlinger (London, Peter Owen, 1974).
concentrate on **langue** as its main field of study; and to attend to the various discernible elements which, when functioning together, produce a totality of meaning. The material element for analysis is the linguistic sign which consists of a sound image which Saussure calls "signifier," and a concept which he calls "signified." The associative bond between the signifier and the signified, namely the "signifying practice" forms a psychological entity. Meaning is produced by the systems of structure that underlie any signifying practice. Those systems of structure allow linguistic elements to function as signs, and therefore make communication possible. To Saussure, the relationship between signifier and signified is as arbitrary as the relationship between name and thing; it is therefore possible to discover the general laws that produce meaning. It is even possible to produce a model for creating meaning, for those general laws are assumed to constitute a principle, an autonomous whole of parts that affect each other. (A famous attempt to apply this method of analysis to literature with the aim of producing a model is Roland Barthes' attempt in 1966 to find out a principle of narrative.)

However, structural linguistics soon admitted such a model was unattainable. So did Barthes. Yet some notions survived and gained relative strength. One is the assumption

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that signification is synonymous with meaning which is already in place within the territorial integrity of the text, and that this meaning can be "scientifically" extracted. This scientific extraction of meaning entailed a segmentation of structure into the smallest meaningful units, which consequently led to drawing a distinction between units which served the function of arranging information, and units which carried autonomous information. The former were called morphemes and the latter lexemes. Let us remember here that all this research is focused on *langue* only because it offered relative consistency.

For translation, the application involved the same segmentation of original texts, studying the structures, and looking for similar structures in the target language which are capable of allowing the minimal units to function as signs. This approach was based (as I mentioned above) on Saussure's most important contribution to linguistics: that language is structured (i.e., rule governed). Perhaps, if we can derive rules for the structure of a language, we can as well devise rules for the transposition of the structure of one language to another. This formula—which sounds appealing to the linguists' common sense—did not lead to a linguistic theory of literary translation. To Robert de Beaugrande,\(^3\) the following are the most important reasons:

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Translating involves two language systems, while descriptive linguistics was concerned with single systems.

Translating cannot be investigated with purely formal analysis such as the identification of distinctive features and their distribution.

The study of meaning [semantics] was postponed too long.

Translating cannot be captured as a set of strict procedures at the systemic level, but must rather admit the influence of numerous variables.

I might add here that translating surpasses the material elements of language because the meaning of a literary text as a whole by all means exceeds the meaning of the language elements of that text. But linguistics identified the problems to be in the "literary" structures involved, not in the approach. We are left wondering how and/or what constituted communication in literature.

Communication and Literary Translation

Using answers provided by communication theory to solve problems of literary translation is like seeking a problem for a solution. This practice, which has not been unusual in the twentieth century, usually leads to a severe reduction of the problem in question. In this new tradition, the literary text had to be reduced to a message
encoded by a writer to be decoded by a reader who is often passively labelled: "addressee," "receptor," or at best "decoder." The first lesson to emerge from that formula is the frivolous principle that translators should translate into their native language, which they presumably master.\(^4\)

For decoding is much easier than encoding in the same way it is easier to rip out a sophisticated piece of machinery than to build it. This reductionist view of the literary text accompanied by an oversimplified reading process lies at the core of this particular linguistic discussion of communication, thus enabling translation theorists—who, by the way, proceeded from structuralist assumptions—to introduce a new question. If signification is the object of human communication, how does this communication take place in literature?

In "Linguistics and Poetics,"\(^5\) Roman Jakobson was one of the first linguists to attempt to describe the communication process of the literary text. The question Jakobson starts with is "What makes a verbal message a work of art?" (p. 350). The answer is quite simple:

The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE.

To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT . . .

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seizable by the addressee and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a CODE fully, or at least partially common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and finally, a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between addresser and addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication" (p. 353).

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This linear model enables Jakobson to introduce his concept of the poetic function. "The set (Einstellung) toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language" (p. 356). This function relies on a specific orientation of the reader towards the message, an orientation which is stimulated by specific qualities of that message. It does not come as a surprise thus when, in his "Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Jakobson asserts that full equivalence between messages is impossible because "languages differ essentially in what they must convey" (p. 236). That which must be conveyed is an entity composed of a "cognitive experience ... [which] is conveyable in any existing language" (p. 234).

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The message serves as an interpretation of the alien code units, as "terminology may be qualified and amplified by loan words or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions" (p. 234). The examples Jakobson gives to illustrate how such devices help solve translation problems are a fair justification for the remark that "a translation is like a stewed strawberry."\(^7\)

Considering Jakobson's outline of the problem of translation, his questions, and his proposed solutions, it is quite predictable to find him concluding his article by declaring that

poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible; either intralingual transposition—from one poetic shape into another, or interlingual transposition—from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition—from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting (p. 238).

The limitations of a linguistic approach to literary translation—which Jakobson limits to poetry—are of course applicable to any literary genre. Poetry is singled out

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\(^7\)Quoted by Brower (1959, p. 173).
under the illusion that language structure is the sole producer of meaning; the structure of poetic language is "scientifically" different to the observing eye of the linguist. The difference lies in the myth that when we mean what we say we write prose; we can say what we mean in other words or in another language. Whereas poetry, so the myth goes, is "an ingenious but fundamentally perverse way of distorting ordinary prose." The myth became the problematic in translation theory; Nida (1964, p. 4) asserts that "stylistic restrictions are a particularly important element in the translation of poetry, for so much of the essence of poetry consists in a formal envelope for a meaningful content." Thus whenever language is considered to operate over and above its "normal" communicative function, whenever the form of a linguistic unit takes on "physical" importance, whenever the form is an essential part of the message, translation becomes impossible.

This conclusion puts us right where we were before structuralism and communication theory. We are left with two kinds of meaning between Saussure's langue and Jakobson's communication model. First, there is denotation, or language meaning, the product of a signifying practice, the result of the association of structural units according to the conventions which exist within the language. Such

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meaning does not refer to anything outside of language itself. Second, there is connotation, or message meaning, the meaning of an utterance as it is intended by the writer, as determined by the cultural context, the psychological channel, and the code common to writer and reader. But translators have known this distinction at least since the practice of Roman translation from the Greek. When translators sought insights from structuralism, they were after an autonomous linguistic theory of translation—which many, by the way, still think possible. They wanted to break loose from a romantic literary practice that considered the author the sole creator of meaning which consequently led to "an extraordinary mystique of creativity, in which the artist became somehow a unique if not actually superior species of human being, with qualities of prophet, genius, wise man, and social leader."

We cannot indeed accept the notion that has prevailed throughout the first half of the twentieth century that linguistics has freed translation from what Ivan Olbracht calls "the philological superstitions of the preceding generations." I think structuralism and communication

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10 Northrop Frye, Creation and Recreation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 64.

theory contend, on a theoretical level at least, that they have succeeded in making the sentence—which they declared the largest relevant unit of language—systematically translatable. Yet the examples drawn by structural linguistics and communication theory "represent at best exercises in the application of the structural descriptive method to 'general comparative linguistics' . . ." (De Beaugrande, 1978, p. 11). But since literature (the reference in linguistic discussion is more often to poetry alone) has been enjoying the highest rank of untranslatability, the question then becomes, what is the difference between ordinary language and literary language? The Prague structuralists thought they knew the answer.

**Prague Structuralism**

Nida (1964, p. 21) asserts that "the most creative work in relating linguistics to translation and literary criticism was carried out by the Linguistic Circle of Prague. . . ." Behind such an assertion is the concept of the "aesthetic function" which, according to the Prague Structuralists, differentiates literary texts from non-literary ones, and thus provides a working theory for the translation of literature. To clarify the theory and its application (since that is where the field of translation theory stands today), I will discuss Jan Mukarovsky, and Vladimir Prochazka as representatives of the Circle.
The Prague Structuralists in general consider the literary text as a sign which permits communication between writer and reader. Yet Mukarovsky's work\textsuperscript{12} is important because he attempts to resolve the problem of message and code without having to reduce the message to non-aesthetic materials, or the total absorption of message to code. He begins by drawing a distinction between "artefact" and "aesthetic object." The artefact is the material text: the letters on a page. The aesthetic object is what the artefact represents in the reader's mind. So the creation of the aesthetic object is based on the artefact with the participation of the reader. There are three concepts which constitute the aesthetic object: the aesthetic function, the aesthetic norm, and the aesthetic value. The aesthetic function tends to reduce the text to an autonomous sign (attention is directed towards the sign itself), but is nevertheless actualized in a social context. The aesthetic norm in a literary system extends some of the norms of the past and abandons some by creating new norms. Mukarovsky contends that the existence of a new norm does not mean the disappearance of an old norm; several norms can coexist in a state of competitive relationship. The aesthetic value is brought to the forefront by the aesthetic function, because the question of aesthetic value in judging a text is not

raised whenever the aesthetic function is subordinated to other functions, such as what Mukarovsky calls "practical" or "symbolic" functions. Outside art, he observes, value is dominated by the norm; in art the norm is derived from the value. Aesthetic value in literature is closely connected with non-aesthetic values—ethical values, for example—which are incorporated into the total structure of the text. From the analysis sketched above we learn that there are no texts which by virtue of their essence or organization, would, regardless of time, place, or the person evaluating them, possess an aesthetic function. We also learn that the aesthetic function is a changing and adjustable domain. Mukarovsky's analysis provides a working hypothesis for determining the DOMINANT element in the aesthetic object, be it the aesthetic function, the norm, or the value. Once the dominant has been determined the translation should proceed from there to realize the intended function of the text.

If a text can become literary and be evaluated as literature only in terms of its adequacy to the aesthetic function, this would lead us to ask "what is the function of a translated text?" Vladimir Prochazka\textsuperscript{13} struggles with this question although the answer he gives sounds more like Jakobson's. To Prochazka, "the purpose of a translation is

\textsuperscript{13} "Notes on Translating Technique," in Garvin (1964), pp. 93 – 112.
to transpose a literary work from one language into another in such a manner that the structure of the original work is preserved so far as possible" (p. 94). He goes through a series of instructions that abound in common wisdom and routine affirmation—quite familiar to translators since the dawn of history—as to how a translator should create a work which, both thematically and stylistically, is as close an equivalent to the original as possible. Ironically he gets into difficulty when he attempts to state his principle of equivalence from the standpoint of the reader: the translation should make the same resultant impression on the reader as the original does on its reader. He calls such a formulation doubtful, "because it applies only to foreign works that are perceived to be contemporary or as belonging to the same cultural area" (p. 95). Mukarovsky also reaches the same dead-end paradox as he acknowledges the tremendous diversity of poetic superstructures in different languages which makes formal equivalence simply impossible. Not surprisingly, both Mukarovsky and Prochazka call for what they call dynamic equivalence. Poetry elicits feelings; to elicit similar feelings, a translator should compose another poem, or in Prochazka's words, "topicalize the translation . . . to present it in such a language as

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would be used by the authors themselves if they lived in our days and wrote using our language" (p. 95).

Borrowed from mathematics, the principle of equivalence has been loosely used in translation theory. Unfortunately (or maybe, fortunately?), the questions raised by such appropriation are those which take us nowhere. The problem has been artificially polarized as translation as product vs. translation as process. This polarization of the problem, quite predictably, leads to a polarization of the solution as formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. The distinction between formal (also called "static" or "semantic") equivalence and dynamic (also called "communicative") equivalence is based on the distinction drawn by Czech theorists between form and function (recall Mukarovsky), and leads to a rather disturbing distinction between the meaning of a text and the effect of a text. Nida defines dynamic equivalence as "the closest natural equivalent to the source language message" (Nida, 1964, p. 166). Peter Newmark states that a translation achieving this kind of equivalence "produces the same effect on TL readers as was produced by the original on SL readers."15 Formal equivalence, on the other hand, tilts a translation towards the source language context, producing the precise contextual meaning of the author and achieving as much correspondence between

linguistic units as possible within the syntactic and semantic constraints of the target language. If we deliver both principles from their jargon, at a glance, we can see that there is very little added to Dryden's paraphrase and imitation.

The works of Saussure and his disciples, of communication theorists, and the work of the Prague Linguistic Circle imply, as Georges Mounin\(^{16}\) has shown, that communication through translation is more likely when we are dealing with concrete messages, and that a subjectively unique experience is virtually untranslatable. I might add that comparative linguistics has advanced research in the area of machine translation where greater developments are always hoped for. (After all, we live in an age where we expect machines to do most of the work.) I think we should welcome the development of machine translation, because once this field is developed enough to satisfy the need of an economically oriented publisher, more attention will be paid to the art of translation. I posed a question above when I discussed Dryden's analogy of the translator as painter; I asked why painting was not outdated by the invention of photography if indeed the goal of painting is to present an accurate copy of nature? Now, I realize how the invention of photography has in fact liberated painting

\(^{16}\)Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction (Paris: Galimard, 1963)
from satisfying an audience that asked, "What does this represent or communicate?" The development of machine translation will free translation from a similar audience: those half-bilinguals who want a translation to be a "true copy" which they can use to check on the original.

Dealing with translation as dual transfer of intellectual and aesthetic values (or functions?) is another cycle quite similar to form and content, code and message, signified and signifier. Although insights from the works mentioned above solve, or lead to the solution of many textual problems, yet textuality was never the one and only problem of translation. The Prague functional, interior approach neglects the reader as it concentrates exclusively on the literary text. Consequently, this approach focuses on the translator as recreator of meaning, and requires him/her, for the sake of the celebrated dynamic equivalence, to interpret the source text by modifying and elaborating it for "easier" consumption. Yet by attempting to make a text say more, we actually make it say less if we follow such an approach. It is my contention thus that the problem of textuality has been overemphasized in translation theory; so was the problem of aesthetic function. To move the field forward, we have to regard a literary text as the place where interaction between writer and reader occurs. We need not argue whether or not literature is the product of such interaction; it certainly is. So should be a translated text: a product of the cooperation between translator and
reader. Thus I think it is the translator's task to recreate the writer-reader dialogue, thereby recreating literature. In the following chapter, I will examine the problem of translator-reader relationship in an attempt to formulate an approach that utilizes the best post-structuralist literary theory in a broad view of literature as a polysystem. The translated product of the reader-oriented method I am proposing might not satisfy some readers who still believe that translated literature should be kept away from the center of literary theory, or those who still believe that translation is a low-status activity, or those who still believe a translator is "just a mimic—a 'bookkeeper' who maintains records and summarizes them, rather than the 'executive' who creates the records."17 But it will prove, I hope, on the product level that "a live sparrow is better than a stuffed eagle."18 On the process level, contrary to the old belief that those who can, write; those who cannot, translate, I hope to prove quite the opposite: those who cannot write, can never translate.

POST-STRUCTURALIST LITERARY THEORY: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSLATION

Any discussion of post-structuralism as a unified body of theory is indeed misleading. So is any discussion of critics and theorists who call themselves or have been called "post-structuralists." We can claim a wide range of adherents to post-structuralism: the deconstructionists in France (Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, and Jacques Lacan), the German advocates of Rezeptionsästhetik (Hans Robert Jauss, and Wolfgang Iser), and reader-response critics in the United States (Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, David Bleich, and Robert Crosman), to name a few. Probably the only concept that unites these remarkably interesting critics is the transfer of critical focus from the text, the object of interpretation to reading, the act of interpretation: the text is no longer an autonomous object, available and ready for structural analysis which in its turn reduces the text to a centered, final meaning. Instead, attention is focused on the reader as reproducer or, in Frye's (1980) words, "recreator" of meaning. As a result of this shift, the central question to be asked is not "What does literature mean?" but "What does literature do?" But, although they agree on the question, the different post-structuralists give answers that are, theoretically, as unlimited as human ingenuity itself.
Although examining such answers is beyond the scope of this paper, I think the central issue that unites the different schools of post-structuralist criticism is of great value to translation. I will deal specifically here with the works of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish in an attempt to solve the old-new problematic of the relationship between interpretation and translation.

The question, "Is translation interpretation or is it not?" is a very tricky one. For Bassnett-McGuire (1980), such a question is simply "foolish" as she considers interpretation to be synonymous with translation, because if the translator were not to interpret, the translation would be a literal rendering of the original text.\(^1\) Almost all translation theorists explicitly or implicitly agree with this point of view and recall with dismay Longfellow's literal translation of Dante when he declared that his work was to report what Dante says, not interpret what Dante means. We can argue, however, and here I speak mainly for myself, that unless we define what we mean by interpretation, we can never answer the question, "Should a translator interpret or not?" If by interpretation we mean reaching a determinacy of meaning that is stable and

changeless, what Hirsch (1967) calls "an entity which always remains the same from one moment to another," the answer is "no." But if by interpretation we mean the process of reading which leads, through careful analysis, to discover what Fish (1980) calls "the structure of meanings that is obvious and inescapable from the perspective of whatever interpretive assumptions happen to be in force," then the answer is a definite "yes." It is this latter notion of interpretation—which we owe to post-structuralism—that I want to pursue here.

The indeterminacy of the meaning of a literary text and its effect on the reader have been described by Iser (1974) as follows:

The efficacy of a literary text is brought about by the apparent evocation and subsequent negation of the familiar. What at first seemed to be an affirmation of our assumptions leads to our own rejection of them, thus tending to prepare us for a reorientation. . . . As the literary text involves the reader in the formation of the means whereby the illusion is punctured, reading

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3Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. VII.
reflects the process by which we gain experience. Once the reader is entangled, his own preconceptions are continually over-taken, so that the text becomes his "present" while his own ideas fade into the "past"; as soon as this happens he is open to the immediate experience of the text, which was impossible so long as his preconceptions were his "present."\(^4\)

The role of the text in this formulation is that it interferes with an existing world view, and presents the reader with response-inviting structures. To Iser, "the relative indeterminacy of a text allows a spectrum of actualizations."\(^5\) It is the reader who can determine the proper or plausible actualization by resolving the contradictions between the text's perspectives. But how does a text offer a spectrum of actualizations or perspectives? In his attempt to answer this question, Iser has to contradict himself when he keeps shifting the authority from the reader to the text and vice versa. He declares that "asymmetry and the 'nothing' (basis of interpersonal relations which states that no one can experience another person's

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experience) are all different forms of an indeterminate, constitutive blank, which underlies all processes of interaction." The "blank" or what is left unsaid, thus, directs the process of reading and leaves it free at the same time! In spite of this major contradiction in his thinking, I think Iser offers a phenomenology of reading that can help us draw a distinction between translation and interpretation.

Let me begin here by quoting what he perceives to be the proper interaction between reader and text:

Communication in literature, then, is a process set in motion and regulated, not by a given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed, the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light (p. 111).

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The reader proceeds from one explicit revelation of a perspective into another by crossing certain structured blanks, controlling gaps in the text which stimulate the process of reading on terms set by the text. These "blanks" both invite and control the reader's response. So we can no longer talk about a sentence and its specific content because such a view would mean a loss of a dimension, or (as Iser would put it), a loss of a spectrum of dimensions. What is important in a literary text is what it does not say. In this sense, as Pierre Macherey has demonstrated, the most complete work is necessarily incomplete because it is interrogative, because it has an unconscious. For a translator, to interpret in this case means to revise or "correct" a text in accordance with some ideal norm of what it should be; in other words, to refuse the text as it is. Iser's theory can help us avoid this danger as we can show the translator how to differentiate between the act of interpreting and the act of translating. The former requires completing the text, filling in gaps or providing responses. Whereas the latter means leaving all those activities to the reader by preserving the meaning potential of the text.

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If we accept this distinction, we cannot remain contented with the assertion: a translator has to preserve the meaning potential of a text. We have to ask how such potential can or should be preserved? This question is unanswerable unless we are able to answer the question Fish (1970) poses as the concept of critical analysis, "What does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play, poem, do?" The execution of the concept, according to Fish, entails "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time." Professor Fish has struggled with this notion for a decade since he launched it in 1970, and in Is There a Text in This Class? (1980), he finally pins his flag on the mast and declares the "interpretive community" as the ultimate authority: "Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (p. 171). He concludes that what makes "literature" at any period of time is a decision by the community as to what will count as literature. Therefore, literature is not a monolith; nor is there "a single set of operations by which its characteristics are discovered and

9Ibid.
evaluated" (p. 368). If we adopt Fish's theory and hail the interpretive community as the authority that determines what makes "translated literature," we will immediately realize that the final appeal to the interpretive community—though it saves Fish's theory—is unanswerable. We must pursue the way an interpretive community works by going a great deal further to show "what situation, what historical and social configuration, what political interests are concretely entailed by the very existence of interpretive communities." The elaboration suggested by Said—in whose steps I follow—is inescapable, although (ironically enough) if executed, it would make obsolete many pillars of post-structuralism, especially the often-despised context of producing rather than receiving a literary text.

I will discuss the molding forces behind any interpretive community (a literary system is made up of more than one community) in the following chapter. For now, however, I will focus on the notion of interpretive community as defined by Fish to show how such a community can possess the authority to determine not only what a good literary translation is, but also what is good for translation.

A hyperbole often cited in the field of translation is the Italian proverb (or aphorism?), *trditore traduttore*: the translator is a traitor. As cynical as it may sound, this proverb has stood as the paradigm for translation theorizing. The proverb works both ways. It may mean that a translator betrays his/her original author and the literary system that author belongs to. And it may mean that a translator betrays his/her own cultural orbit and mother-tongue literature. With "who betrayed whom?" as the paradigm, research has consequently been limited to the old superficial standbys: the untranslatable, static or dynamic equivalence, the effect of a translation on literary conventions, comparison between original and translation—a popular topic for theses and dissertations--, and the evergreens: fidelity and freedom. The topics I have just listed have dominated much of recent as well as old research on the translation of literature, managing to keep translation on the periphery of literary theory as studies took the form of "X as translator," or "X as translator of Y." Such studies are undeniably important in their own right; they enlighten our understanding of X, Y, or both. But they do not bring us any closer to answering the questions I mentioned above: "What is a good translation?" and "What is translation good for?"
If we consider the implications of Fish's concept of the interpretive community, we can come closer to an answer to those two questions. A translator belongs and translates for a community, one that has developed a coherent set of strategies for writing and reading. The community decides what is literature and what is not. There is then an unwritten law for what will be accepted as literature by that particular community (and by those persuaded by it). A translator's knowledge of the patterns developed by his/her community therefore plays a role in selecting (which is by no means random) a text for translation prior to the act of translating itself. It is appalling how such a simple concept has been overlooked by translation theorists. For example, Bassnett-McGuire (1980, p. 83) states that the "greatest" problem occurs when translating a text from a period remote in time, especially when not only "the poet and his contemporaries are dead, but the significance of the poem in its context is dead." And she cites the pastoral as an obvious example. The question she overlooks is why on earth would a literary system today seek a living translation of a pastoral poem? Without this consideration, it is possible for Bassnett-McGuire to assert that "the genre is dead and no amount of fidelity to the original form, shape or tone will help the rebirth of a new line of communication..." As the problem is wrongly (or at best inadequately) identified, it is not surprising that we cannot reach any solution. It may be seen then that
literary works are not selected at random for translation. And once we examine why a certain work is translated at a certain period of time, the whole problematic of technique can be seen in new light.

After the selection has been made, bearing in mind the conventions of the interpretive community, then the question of what makes a good literary translation comes to the surface. Here lies what I call the danger of interpreting, improving, personalizing which quite probably might make the translation a "better" book according to the patterns of one interpretive community. Let us take Homer, for example. If we look for an English translation of Homer, we can find many translations, each colored by and produced under the constraints of whatever interpretive strategies were in force at that time. "The English reader looking for a translation of Homer can find an exuberant Elizabethan Homer in Chapman, a periwigged Homer in Pope, a Gothic-revival of Homer in the Loeb Classics, a colloquial modern Homer in the Penguins" (Frye, 1980, p. 66). This kind of adaptation is made (sometimes, inevitably) to the standards prevailing in the reception of literature at the time the translation is made; different ages need different adjustments.

Thus adjusting a foreign text to the conventions of a target literature is not a new idea. But the execution has been very different from what I want to propose using Fish's interpretive community. The relation of the text to its
culture has been regarded by translation theorists to be unilaterally inhibiting; it impedes literary communication between text and reader. An example is Albrecht Neubert's\textsuperscript{11} view that Shakespeare's sonnet "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" is untranslatable into languages where summers are unpleasant. This foolish assumption is based on the idea that the reader is totally ignorant of Shakespeare's time, culture, country . . . everything. We can see how absurd this assumption is if we expect an English-speaking, modern reader of Shakespeare to understand Gloucester's\textsuperscript{12} tormented cry "Naughty lady" to mean a sexually comic, slight offense. No one would venture assuming the existence of such an ignorant reader. And if there should exist such a reader, we simply say that reader cannot read Shakespeare. The problem with literary translation is that it is assumed to be for everybody. That belief, I might say, is a result of the tradition of Bible translation, in which a translator is supposed to present the word of God to be understood by all readers. This is especially true in the United States; most translation theorists have been concerned with translating the Bible in the first place. I do not say that translating the Bible is easier. I just want to say that the reader of a biblical translation does not operate under the same circumstances as


\textsuperscript{12}King Lear, Act III sc. VII.
those of the reader of a literary translation. I will leave it at this, because this is an issue I am uniquely unqualified to discuss. As far as the literary reader is concerned, we have to look for a method that would enable us to find out what makes sense (or nonsense) to a group of readers— an interpretive community— at a certain period of time. To answer this question it is necessary to view literature in a very wide context, to show the forces behind interpretive communities, interpretive strategies, how they are "made," or (as Fish would say) "learned."
THE TRANSLATOR AND THE LITERARY POLYSYSTEM THEORY

There is nothing new or revolutionary in dealing with a certain literature as a system or a polysystem. Probably the first scholar to explicitly do so is Jurij Tynjanov who was followed later by some other Russian Formalists like Viktor Shklovskij and Boris Ejkhenbaum. Generally speaking, we can indeed find this view of literature inherent in most Marxist and social criticism; but as a theory, the literary polysystem has received its seminal formulation in the work of the Low Countries circle, some of whose members are Itamar Even-Zohar, André Lefevere, J. S. Holmes, José Lambert, Raymond Van den Broeck, and Gideon Toury. These critics share a common view of literature as part of an ideological milieu that shapes the expectations and sensibilities of a given audience. As a polysystem itself, literature is not considered monolithic, but a collocation of different, often antagonistic trends, dominated by canonized literary works.

For some people, this notion—as sketched above—has a familiar ring and can easily be linked to Oscar Wilde, Hegel, Descartes, Walter Benjamin, or even to Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. But tracing small bits and pieces to the past, and then declaring them to shape a coherent theory that progressed smoothly, can be mere chicanery. (See, for example, how Jane Tompkins (1980) traces reader-response criticism to I. A. Richards, who paradoxically enough is the
precursor of New Criticism.) Therefore, I think, it is more profitable for the purpose of this essay to deal with the polysystem theory in its "present" state, the way it is formulated by the Low Countries group. My purpose of applying this theory to translation is to answer the important question raised--though not answered--by Czech Structuralists: "What is the function of a translation in a national literature?" But before proceeding to deal with this question, let me, for the sake of clarity, point out the most important premise of the polysystem theory in an attempt to make sense of the complex, bewildering variety of phenomena subsumed under the term "polysystem."

When Itamar Even-Zohar forged the term "polysystem" in 1970, his purpose was to deal with language and literature, culture and ideology as a multiple system.¹ By that he meant dealing with those phenomena as a dynamic, heterogeneous and open structure: a system of various systems which intersect with each other, and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole whose members are interdependent. The term "polysystem" thus is not just another terminological

convention, but an emphasis on the multiplicity of intersec-
tions between language and literature on the one hand, and
culture and ideology on the other. This conclusive, encom-
passing view leads to greater complexity of structuredness.
When I say "greater complexity," I mean in comparison to the
artificial distinctions drawn by Saussure (langue and
parole), Jakobson (language meaning and message meaning),
and Mukarovsky (aesthetic function, norm and value). These
distinctions have enabled researchers to construct systems
(homogeneic models) suited to "scientific" inquiry, for
pressures of adjacent systems have been deliberately
eliminated. It is against such exclusivism that the
polysystem theory has been proposed. A language is a
polysystem; we cannot discuss the general idea of language
function without accounting for that function in a specific
period of time. We cannot study standard language without
taking non-standard varieties into account. A culture of a
society is a polysystem; we cannot single out the culture of
the ruling class as the true "spirit of the nation." So is
ideology. Literature is a polysystem; we cannot dismiss as
junk mass literary production (science fiction, thrillers
and romance novels). Translated literature is also related
to "original" literature in mutual dependency. Let us
remember here that the polysystem theory neither makes nor
accepts value judgments as to what should count as language,
literature, culture or ideology. The purpose of the theory
is just to observe interrelations that have been unnoticed or simply rejected. Indeed, the integration of such interrelations between apparently disparate phenomena is a precondition for applying the polysystem theory to any semiotic research.

Against the background I have described above, I think we can define the function of translation in a national literature by borrowing some concepts from the polysystem theory and applying those concepts to elaborate on Stanley Fish's conclusion: the authority of interpretive communities. The polysystemic concepts I will be dealing with are "stratification" and "canonicity."^2

According to Fish, skilled reading is not "a matter of discerning what is there, but . . . a matter of knowing how to produce what can thereafter be said to be there" (Fish, 1980, p. 327). For we as readers do not decode texts; we make them. He concludes:

Thus while it is true to say that we create poetry, . . . we create it through interpretive strategies that are finally not our own, but have their source in a publicly available system of intelligibility. Insofar as the system (in this

case a literary system) constrains us, it also fashions us, furnishing us with categories of understanding, with which we in turn fashion the entities to which we can point (p. 332).

The interpretive strategies we, as readers, use to understand literature are the product of a collective decision. This decision will remain in effect only as long as a community of readers continues to adhere to it. Of course every interpretive community proceeds from certain goals and interests. So interpretive strategies are made and remade as the goals and interests of one interpretive community are dislodged or replaced. But as any national literature is made up of many communities that constantly make and remake interpretive strategies, I find it important and useful to examine how different communities operate in a national literature.

It is no secret that a lot of the professionals in our field (English) would love to believe that interpretive communities—especially in free countries—operate quite untroubled in a scholarly, academic and impartial atmosphere. Of course, I have no quarrel with such an ambition, yet, as Michel Foucault and Edward Said have been arguing for years, this atmosphere does not exist, not even in Utopia. Fish touches on this issue when he says, "An interpretive community is not objective because as a bundle of interests, of
particular purposes and goals, its perspective is interested rather than neutral . . . " (Fish, 1980, p. 14). If we accept this point, I think we will notice that there are hierarchies within the literary polysystem: interpretive communities are stratified. The permanent struggle between different strata effects change in strategies deployed by different communities. But as a polysystem, struggle is based on center-and-periphery relations. On the other hand, if we deny this dynamic stratification of interpretive communities, we will not be able to explain the process of change in interpretive strategies except in terms of "individual inventions" of "inspired minds" (recall romantic theory)--;this attitude will inevitably lead to a distorted idea about creativity and the circumstances in which writers and readers of literature work.

The concept of dynamic stratification in the polysystem theory--multiple centers and multiple peripheries--leads to a distinction between canonized and non-canonized literature. Canonized literature is the product of the community that occupies the center of the polysystem; the strategies of such a community become the most prestigious, and its members become the "right" people. (In a "young" literature when this takes place, it means the crystallization of a national literature; in a developed literary polysystem, however, even the canonized system has a center and a periphery.) Once the center is occupied by a certain
system, this system will immediately come under attack from various communities that occupy peripheral positions. If the community occupying the center does not allow attacks for cultural, ideological or political reasons, the whole literary polysystem will stagnate in a very short time. Attacks, pressures, struggle, even the defeat of the canonized system and its replacement are signs of healthy evolution and a vital literature.

Before I digress any further, let me stop here for a while to examine the function of translation in this knotty complex. We have here three situations or contexts for the use of translation. First there is the situation when a young literature with little written heritage is striving to become a polysystem. The practice of translation in this case is characterized by linguistic and literary enrichment where as many new phenomena as possible are introduced to enhance the emergence of a nationalistic literature. We saw this in Greek/Roman translation, in Greek/Arabic translation, and in translating from Latin into the different European vernaculars. I have discussed this situation in the first chapter. So here I will focus on the other two situations (both of which exist when a national literature becomes a polysystem): translation as performed by a canonized, central community; and translation as performed by a non-canonized, peripheral community.
In his discussion of Oscar Wilde's essay, "The Decay of Lying," Northrop Frye advances the principle of literary production as "creative alienation" (Frye, 1980, p. 5). This principle, as Frye points out, was laid down by the Italian philosopher Vico as follows: that we understand only what we have made ourselves, needs to be refreshed sometimes by the contemplation of something we did not make and do not understand. We can find the same principle in the writings of the Russian critic, Viktor Shklovskij, who goes beyond Vico's "occasional, intellectual refreshment" to introduce the concept of "defamiliarization" as the general goal of art. To Shklovskij, the technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult in order to lengthen the process of artistic perception.

If we accept the concept introduced by these writers (Vico, Wilde, Shklovskij and Frye), we can say that translation is used by a literary polysystem to meet the gradually growing stereotypization of a certain literary repertory; in other words, the inability of a system to "defamiliarize" any more. This state of affairs takes place when the center of the literary polysystem is maintained by a rigid, ossified system. In this case translations are produced by non-canonized communities occupying peripheral strata in

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order to challenge the central system with new, response-inviting tendencies. It is interesting to note here that on several occasions, when translations worked successfully against the central system in Western literature, the sources were remote, exotic, even "inferior" literatures. Some examples are Edward FitzGerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Goethe's translation of Hafiz (Persian), and Waley's selections from Chinese, Japanese, and Mongolian. We can also include Ezra Pound's translation of Chinese poetry, the works of Auden and Robert Lowell in translating Pasternak and Voznesensky, and Omar Pound's translation of Arabic and Persian poetry.

On the other hand, when translation is picked up by a central, canonized system, we notice the perpetuation of established linguistic and literary repertories. We also notice that texts for translation are chosen from literatures that are regarded as "superior." Some examples in this case are translations produced in late neoclassical France and late Augustan England. We can also include German translations from French up to 1750.

Once we establish the definition of the function of translation as deployed by a certain community to achieve certain goals, I think we can make sense of cases previously considered "mistranslations" and "deteriorated imitations," or "genius recreations" and "inspired incarnations." We can even make sense of cases where good translations fail and
simply do not "take up," and cases where loose paraphrases and pseudo-translations are endorsed and institutionalized. (See, for example, Voltaire’s *Othello* in alexandrines, Arnold’s *Homer* in English hexameter, and Longfellow’s *Divina Commedia* in blank verse.) As far as translators are concerned, we can see that issues like fidelity and freedom, version and adaptation, gain only a relative value. Such issues become strategies, each usable in its own right, rather than do’s and don’ts.
CONCLUSION

It might be seen, thus, that the question: "What is good translating?" is similar to the question: "What is good writing?" Both questions cannot be answered a priori in terms of a detached, idealized state. Translating, just like writing, is a phenomenon whose interrelations with culture, ideology, and language are not given once and for all, but are developed in knotty, complicated intersections of historical functions. This state of the art leads us to realize that translation is a more risky business than we used to think it is. For as writers, translators give their readers the opportunity to "make" meaning. Yet translators operate under constraints imposed on them and sometimes imposed by them. Translated texts, like original texts, are by no means neutral, objective renditions; they are functionally facts of power, not democratic exchange.

Such a series of terse statements about translation might enable me to follow in the footsteps of scholars like George Steiner, Georges Mounin, and Eugene Nida and simply declare that we have wealth in practice yet poverty in theory; thereby, I have enough reason to call for more theoretical contributions from linguistic theory and practice. Or I might follow Wittgenstein and assert that we are able to solve specific problems of translation even though we may never find a systematic method for their solution. Such an assertion might indeed enable me to
conclude, as is customary and pointless, by calling for better translations and finer scholarship in literary theory and literary criticism.

As a matter of fact, I would like to see the tables turned this time. Let us put to the test of translation any new or celebrated theories of literary production and/or reception. Let us examine by translating the validity of any linguistic theory, be it social or psychological. Let us see through translating how political, cultural, religious, ideological, economic facts of life are integrated into any human activity, thus determining what we call truth and reality. I think translation can provide a foolproof basis for such studies for "we have here indeed what may very probably be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos."  

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Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980.


