*T*RANSLATION

Anyone who has taken a foreign language class and attempted to translate either from the source language into English or vice versa knows the difficulties translators face. Even fluent bilingual speakers may have trouble with an accurate rendering in writing, and those who are learning a new language from scratch struggle mightily with grammar and vocabulary, syntax and tone. One can illustrate just how much meaning and nuance are lost in any translation by using a popular computer program like AltaVista's Babel Fish (world.altavista.com/). Here is what the previous sentence looks after being translated from English to French and back to English

again: "One can illustrate just how much significance and nuance are lost in the translation by using a programme of great diffusion of translation per computer like fish of Babel d'AltaVista." A careful reader should be able to tease out the sense of the source message in the confusing second half of the sentence. But then again, maybe not. At any rate, computers are clearly a long way from being the answer for translators, and if translating a fairly straightforward sentence of prose is fraught with difficulty, translating a complex work of literature is that much more daunting.

Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere divide the history of literary translation into three main models. The Horace model is pragmatic and based on expediency. The Roman poet was purportedly an astute businessman, delivering to his customers a quick and reliable—if not especially subtle—product. A translator in this model can be trusted in both the source and the target language, but ultimately negotiation between the two languages is "always slanted toward the privileged language, and . . . the negotiation does not take place on absolutely equal terms" (1998, 4). The Jerome model, styled after Saint Jerome's translation of the Bible, was "characterized by the presence of a central, sacred text, that of the Bible, which must be translated with the utmost fidelity" (2). While this model prevailed for centuries, it was eventually replaced by the Schleiermacher model, named for the German translator Friedrich Schleiermacher. He believed that "the reader should be able to guess the Spanish behind a translation from Spanish, and the Greek behind a translation from Greek. If all translations read and sound alike . . . the identity of the source text has been lost" (8). Cultural sensitivity, attempting to honor *both* the source and target languages, is at the heart of this model.

Lefevere and Bassnett see the future of translation studies as continuing to focus still more on the historical and cultural circumstances in which the work was created, a goal with which Gayatri Spivak would be sympathetic. Spivak maintains that "the translator from a Third World language should be sufficiently in touch with what is going on in literary production in that language to be capable of distinguishing between good and bad writing. . . . She must be able to confront the idea that what seems resistant in the space of English may be reactionary in the space of the original language" (1992, 404). And it is not just the *translator's* responsibility to understand the work's culture of origin. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, the teacher—and by implication, all readers—must do so as well: "utterances are the products of actions, which like all actions, are undertaken for reasons. Understanding the reasons

characteristic of other cultures and . . . other times is part of what our teaching is about" (1993, 427). Of course, in the postcolonial world, there are no simple exchanges between the former colonizers and their former subject peoples. Because translators of third world literature "can shift allegiances . . . they are, therefore, not to be trusted" (Cronin 2000, 39). And while many writers from third world and/or politically repressed countries welcome the opportunity to have their work read abroad, some scholars worry that translating work from these countries into European languages is ultimately exploitive rather than liberating.

Even setting the focus on cultural awareness aside—and it is probably impossible to do so—literary translators inevitably face numerous technical problems. Translating metrical poetry is perhaps the most forbidding task. Lefevere mentions a number of the tricks employed by translators trying to be true to the exact rhythm of the original: truncating words, using "sense equivalents," resorting "to words that do not really belong in the target language but are understood by most of its readers," using archaisms and "ready-made utterances," "expressing one . . . notion in the source text with two closely related words in the translation," and—the translator's great bane—padding (1975, 38–39). As all these expediencies suggest, replicating the meter and rhyme of the original poem has the potential to do more damage than good.

Exasperated by the many obstacles of rendering formal verse into a target language, some translators essentially give up, arguing that is virtually impossible to reproduce a poem in a new language. These translators acknowledge the impediments up front and strive for a "humble fidelity" to the literal meaning of the work. Based on his own attempts to translate Pushkin's novel-in-verse *Eugene Onegin*, Vladimir Nabokov came to the following conclusions: "I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reached up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity. I want such footnotes and the absolutely literal sense, with no emasculation and no padding—I want such sense and such notes for all the poetry in other tongues that still languishes in 'poetical' versions, begrimed and beslimed by rhyme" (1955, 83). Ironically, Nabokov's translation of *Onegin* has been widely panned for being *too* literal, for failing to attempt to capture the music of the original.

Perhaps, as Bassnett argues, the very world "'translation' is vague and unhelpful," and has been for a long time. Bassnett claims that "quibbling about determining the difference between 'adaptations' and 'versions'

and 'imitations'" is an unfortunate, and relatively recent, occurrence: "The medieval world had a far more open attitude to translation and writers do not seem to have operated with a binary opposition between translation and original, but with a cline along which the meaning of those terms passes though many different shades. Indeed, as has been so often demonstrated, the concept of the original is a product of Enlightenment thinking. It is a modern invention, belonging to a materialist age, and carries with it all kinds of commercial implications about translation, originality and textual ownership" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, 38).

Once a work of literature exists in a new language, is it a new creation or simply a secondhand version of the original? As suggested above, the aesthetic answer to that question isn't likely to be decided anytime soon. The "commercial implications," however, are easier to track down, since translations bring copyright and royalty (qq.v.) issues into play. Laws vary from country to country, depending on where the original and the translation are published. European-based translators tend to have their work well-protected and well-remunerated. In contrast, Breon Mitchell warns American translators against working though the "flat-fee system," in which the copyright belongs to the person who hired the translator: "In this case, you lose your moral and legal rights. . . . It's very important to avoid the work-for-hire syndrome, and instead to insist on payment in advance against royalties, which gives you an ongoing legal interest in [the translation]" (Homel and Simon 1988, 79).

Despite the many difficulties inherent in translating works of literature, translation will likely remain a key feature of the literary landscape for some time to come. Indeed, creative writers with a facility for second languages may find translation an avenue to publication, payment, and even name recognition. After all, translators "are, at present, responsible for the general reception and survival of works of literature among non-professional readers, who constitute the great majority of readers in our global culture, to at least the same, if not to a greater extent than the [translated] writers themselves" (Lefevere 1992, 1). Moreover, translating a poem "is one way of learning what delicate clockwork causes the poem to keep accurate faith with music, meaning and time" (Hirshfield 1997, 79).

While other countries are increasingly becoming bi- and tri- and quadrilingual, many Americans remain stubbornly monolingual: the popularity of "English-only" statutes in states throughout the country demonstrates just how entrenched our fear of The Other is. Yet curious creative writers will continue wanting to know what is being written outside their home

country, outside the language that, at times, may seem more like a prison house than a means of communication and understanding.