

Confronting the Retranslation Hypothesis: Flaubert and Sand in the British literary system

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ABSTRACT

Despite retranslation (the repeated translation of a given work into a given target language) boasting a very tangible presence in practical terms, theoretical explorations of its motivations and outcomes are disproportionate in their infrequency; empirical studies even more so. One of the most prevalent justifications for this repetitive phenomenon is encapsulated in the work of Antoine Berman who claims that an initial translation is necessarily “blind and hesitant” (1990:5, my translation), while retranslation alone can ensure “the revelation of the particularities of a foreign work to the receiving culture” (1995:57, my translation). This dynamic from deficient initial translation to accomplished retranslation has been consolidated into the Retranslation Hypothesis, namely that “later translations tend to be *closer* to the source text” (Chesterman 2004:8, my emphasis). In order to investigate the validity of this hypothesis and to shed new light on the behaviour of retranslation, this thesis undertakes a multiple-case study of the British retranslations of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and George Sand’s *La Mare au diable*.

A methodology is proposed which allows the key notion of closeness to be measured on both a linguistic and a cultural axis. Given Flaubert’s famous insistence on ‘le mot juste’, *Madame Bovary* serves as a basis for an examination of linguistic closeness which is guided by narratology and stylistics, and underpinned by Halliday’s (2004) Systemic Functional Grammar. On the other hand, Sand’s ethnographical concerns facilitate a study of cultural closeness: here, narrativity (Baker 2006) informs an analysis of how Berrichon cultural identity is mediated through retranslation. In both cases, the thesis draws on paratextual material (Genette 1987) such as prefaces and advertisements, and on extra-textual material, namely journal articles and reviews, as a means of identifying specific socio-cultural influences on retranslation, as well as highlighting the type and extent of interactions between the retranslations themselves. Retranslative behaviour around and beyond the text is then mapped onto the contours of Bourdieu’s (1991) literary field in order to situate the works, the authors and/or the translators along the hierarchical clines of symbolic and economic capital.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that retranslation is a non-sequential, mercurial phenomenon whose various and varied guises cannot be subsumed into or explained by the trajectories of the Retranslation Hypothesis: degrees of linguistic and cultural closeness fluctuate within and between individual texts, while partial and hybrid translations frustrate the supposedly clear-cut opposition between initial translation and retranslation. Moreover, the binary oppositions between ‘passive’ and ‘active’ retranslations (Pym 1998) fail to hold in the wider socio-cultural context. Instead, retranslation demands a conceptual paradigm which can encompass heterogeneity, metamorphoses, and instability. To this end, the lines of enquiry which inform the field of genetic criticism are presented as a rich and workable alternative to previous approaches.

KEYWORDS: Flaubert, genetic criticism, narrativity, narratology, nineteenth century French literature, paratextuality, retranslation, Sand, Systemic Functional Grammar, sociological approaches, translation history.

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