

## Foreignisation and resistance: Lawrence Venuti and his critics

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### Abstract

This article evaluates whether Lawrence Venuti's translation approach of "foreignisation" is likely to achieve his stated goal: translations that can resist cultural dominance. This is assessed in light of criticism of his approach from other translation scholars also concerned with cultural encounters and power relations: Maria Tymoczko, Mona Baker, Tarek Shamma and Michael Cronin. The article concludes that it is problematic to identify foreignisation and predict its effect. In spite of this, Venuti's focus on the dangers of a one-sided privileging of fluent translation strategies is important and valuable, not least in the perspective of the internal cultural and linguistic struggles that will take place within the target culture.

### *Introduction*

In this article, I aim to evaluate whether a translation approach which emphasizes "foreignisation" as proposed by Lawrence Venuti (1998, 2008, 2010) can be expected to resist "ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism", as is his aim (Venuti 2010: 78). The relevance of his concept will be assessed in light of criticism which has been aimed at his approach from other translation scholars also concerned with questions of cultural encounters and power relations, namely Maria Tymoczko (2000, 2006), Mona Baker (2010), Tarek Shamma (2009), and Michael Cronin (1998). First, I will briefly position Venuti within translation studies, and examine his concepts of foreignising and domesticating translation. The discussion will then go on to problems of defining and delineating foreignisation, drawing mainly on Tymoczko. I see this as a central problem and one which will reoccur as a part of the criticisms raised by other scholars: it is certainly closely connected to the problem discussed in the next section: the inherent problems of dichotomous categories mentioned by Baker as well as Tymoczko. This will be discussed quite briefly. The problem of definition also reoccurs in my somewhat more detailed discussion of the relationship between foreignisation and exoticism, which will be based on Tarek Shamma's criticism of Venuti and Venuti's response to this. I will next briefly examine Cronin's claim that foreignisation as a

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translation strategy is particularly unsuited to minority languages threatened by major ones: this is a point which can be seen as more separate from the question of definition. Finally, I shall conclude by acknowledging the problems inherent in using a set of terms for characterising the overall effect of a translation text when these effects are dependent on the cultural and political situation of the reader, yet I shall also emphasise the value of Venuti's concepts as a reminder of the consequences of translation choices.

This list of points of criticism is not meant to be exhaustive, nor even to take up all points raised by the scholars mentioned, and, as indicated above, some of these points will have to be treated fairly cursorily. It can perhaps be claimed, though, that the way in which I see the problem of achieving a stable definition as a recurrent one makes the more cursory treatment of some of the individual points less problematic.

### *Venuti and foreignisation*

The relevance of cultural identity and cultural difference to translation is too obvious for this aspect ever to have been completely neglected, yet in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the idea of a "Cultural Turn" within these studies emerged (Munday 2009: 11). This interest in translation studies as closely related to culture studies supplemented, or challenged, an interest in translation as primarily a linguistic process, in which cultural differences were an inevitable obstacle to overcome in order to communicate the source language meaning. Instead, translation came to be seen as "a more complex negotiation between two cultures" (Munday 2009: 179), in which questions of power relations would have to be central. This applies both to relations between dominant and subjugated (or numerically threatened) cultures globally and to relations between dominant and marginalised linguistic and cultural forms and their representatives within the same culture.

Lawrence Venuti is an influential, but also controversial translation scholar within this "cultural turn". He is interesting not least because he takes up and seeks to develop a tradition in translation strategy which he sees as going back to Friedrich Schleiermacher (Schleiermacher 2007, Venuti 2008: 15-16), and including Walter Benjamin and Antoine Berman among its later proponents, of "linguistically marked" translation, and which he sees as responding to

the need for awareness of cultural differences between source and target cultures (Venuti 2004: 72 and 225). However, while explicitly tying in his ideas with scholars who defend “faithful” rather than “free” renderings of the source text, Venuti reorients his approach from a literalist concern with preservation of the source language structures, to a concern with the exclusion or inclusion of peripheral and minority forms within the target language in the translation process.

Venuti develops the distinction between what he terms “domesticating” (from Schleiermacher’s “einbürgernde”) and “foreignising” (Schleiermacher’s “verfremdende”) translations to describe two extremes of how a translator positions a translated text in the target language and in the textual environment of the target culture.

In a domesticating translation, one strives for a style as indistinguishable as possible from a text originally written in the target language; fluency and “naturalness” are prioritized. A central contention of Venuti’s is that prioritization of “naturalness” in this context will tend to limit linguistic and cultural choices in the translation process to the dominant discourse in the target culture, while choices that would be associated with marginalized groups tend to be avoided. He also claims that domestication and fluency have become the expected mode of translation, at least within Anglo-American culture. In *The Translator’s Invisibility* (2008: 3-4), he supports this claim by quoting from reviews of translated texts from 1947 to 2005, reviews in which naturalness and fluency are the recurrent terms of commendation. He also uses these reviews to ascertain or confirm which features characterize this apparently desirable fluency, among which are current rather than anachronistic or archaic usage, standard forms rather than dialect or slang, and avoidance of a mixture of standards (e.g. British and American).

In a foreignising translation, on the other hand, the translator intentionally disrupts the linguistic and genre expectations of the target language in order to mark the otherness of the translated texts: “Discontinuities at the level of syntax, diction, or discourse allow the translation to be read as a translation [...] showing where it departs from target language cultural values, domesticating a foreignizing translation by showing where it depends on them” (Venuti 2010: 75). These discontinuities can be created by utilizing precisely those marginal and minority forms within the target language which are excluded by the

expectation of fluency. Venuti emphasizes the patterns of power and dominance found in any cultural/linguistic realm: “Any language use is thus a site of power relationships because a language, at any historical moment, is a specific conjuncture of a major form holding sway over minor variables” (1998: 10). These minor variables (minor in the sense of being marginalized and put into a minority position), which Venuti with a term borrowed from Lecercle (1990) calls “the remainder”, constitute a foreign element within the target cultures which can be used to mark the foreignness of a translated text. Good translation, Venuti contends, “...releases the remainder by cultivating a heterogeneous discourse, opening up the standard dialect and literary canons to what is foreign to themselves, to the substandard and marginal”<sup>1</sup> (1998: 11). Activating this remainder will disrupt fluency and create its opposite: a resistant translation. The significance of resistancy, as of fluency, is obviously not limited to translation; it has relevance for all communicative acts. However, in translation it gains an extra level of significance in preserving the foreignness and otherness of the translated text.

The focus on the use of the marginal in the target language and culture to mark the otherness of the translated text, shows that foreignisation in this sense is a choice that takes place within the target language framework. “The foreign in foreignizing translation is not a transparent representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text, and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current situation in the receiving culture. Foreignizing translation signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the codes that prevail in the translating language” (Venuti 2008: 15). However, while it might seem, based on this, that foreignisation is only about disrupting the majority within the target culture, this is not unambiguous in Venuti’s account. He is concerned with the marginal in the source language as well as in the target language. He sees the choice of a text or genre which will appear as marginal in the target language as minoritising, but also the possibility of choosing what is marginal in the source language as having the potential for the same effect. The distinction between the terms foreignisation and

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<sup>1</sup> Venuti mentions some examples of such foreignising, and in his view good, translations, among others Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky’s translations from Russian, such as *The Brothers Karamazov* (1990).

minoritisation is not very clear, but they may perhaps be seen to cover the same reality from two different perspectives: a translation conducted along these lines is meant to be foreignising in that it marks the otherness of the translated text, but it is minoritising in that it uses minority forms within the target language and culture to create this text. The term minoritisation may also be intended to point to a more overarching objective: to put the majority into a minor position in order to disrupt a cultural hegemony, e.g. by using a marginalised form of the target language for translating prestigious works from a dominant culture.

When Venuti above speaks of “good translation” as containing an element of foreignisation, this makes it clear that the choice between the alternative strategies is not to him a neutral one: the disruption implicit in foreignisation is not just a possible strategy, but also a desirable one. He describes domestication and foreignisation as *ethical* attitudes to translation (Venuti 2008: 19). The ethical aspect of foreignisation may be seen as touching on the translation’s relationship with the source culture, the target culture and the individual reader.

In relation to the source culture, Venuti sees translation as an inherently violent process: the translator must always “eliminate”, “disarrange” and replace the source language text (Venuti 2008: 14). While this domesticating violence is to some extent inevitable, he sees it as deeply problematic when the domestication becomes “wholesale” (ibid.); he writes of the need to “do wrong at home” in order to “do right abroad” by “deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience” (Venuti 2008: 16). The terms he uses here suggest that the ethical question in this case concerns the relationship between the source and the target culture; that the translator has an ethical obligation to indicate the otherness of the source text and the source culture in the translation. This must then be understood as an *obligation* the translator has towards source text and source culture—to maintain, as far as possible its separate identity within the target language and culture—and would be an ethical consideration he inherits from preceding translation scholars who argue for a foreignising approach (Schleiermacher, Steiner, Berman).

More than his predecessors, however Venuti is also concerned with the ethical *effect* of translation on the internal power structures of the target culture. A regime of translation which selects foreign texts for translation based on their potential ability to enter into the dominant

discourse of the target culture without resistance, and which domesticates texts in order to achieve such a resistance-free integration, does not only affect the relationship between the source and the target culture; it also strengthens this dominant discourse within the target culture in relation to potential rival discourses within this culture. As Venuti puts it “Translation enlists the foreign text in the maintenance or revision of dominant cultural paradigms, research methodologies and clinical practices that inform disciplines and professions in the receiving culture” (2008: 15). This clearly implies that domesticating translations will tend to serve to maintain these structures and that foreignisation potentially may serve to revise them. However, the meaning of the term “revision” here apparently needs to be specified: according to Venuti “The aim of minoritizing translation is ‘never to achieve the majority,’ never to erect a new standard or establish a new canon, but rather to promote cultural innovation as well as the understanding of cultural difference by proliferating the variables within English” (Venuti 1998: 11). Thus, the goal seems to be to establish a cultural situation in which a number of voices are allowed to exist simultaneously.

The ethical issues of translation as regards the individual reader are closely tied in with what Venuti refers to as the invisibility of the translator (and of translations) within the prevailing regime of domestication. He sees it as problematic that the fluent and domesticating translation represents an interpretation of the text as if it were the original (Venuti 2008: 5). By using an apparently transparent medium (and by choosing for translation those texts which are easily adaptable to target language values), a culture of domestication renders invisible the role of the translator, thus, according to Venuti, marginalizing the role of the translator, but also paradoxically makes the reading of the text in the translation more authoritative, by presenting it as the thing itself rather than a reading. A translation positions itself between the source language text and the target language reader, and by communicating its reading of the text, it simultaneously gives and denies the reader access to it. A foreignising translation would in this situation cloud its own surface, and thus draw attention to itself and its status as a reading. The reader is still dependent on the translation for access to the original, but she is regularly reminded that the text she is reading is in fact not the original; it is another text in which potential for meaning has been eliminated and added. In this it may be said to be striving to de-

legitimise itself. How is this more ethical than a domesticating “transparent” translation? Presumably in that Venuti sees non-transparency as a more honest and (if I may) more transparent approach, which does not attempt to hide its own distinctiveness vis-à-vis the original, and thus also sets the reader free to question it. This can then be seen as relating to both the obligation of the translator towards the reader, and the effect of the translation.

*Problems of defining foreignisation: Tymoczko*

Maria Tymoczko, while in sympathy with Venuti’s general goals, sees the chances of his approach to achieve these goals as slim. She criticizes Venuti’s concepts as not strictly defined: she points out that necessary and sufficient criteria for foreignisation are never established. This is of course more than a theoretical problem: if one cannot establish what constitutes foreignisation, how can translators then take it in use to achieve the desired resistance? Tymoczko acknowledges that the lack of a “tight definition” may not in itself constitute a problem—that the definitions of “domestication” and “foreignisation” may be of the Wittgensteinian “family resemblance” type (Tymoczko 2000: 36). However, Tymoczko maintains that when Venuti claims foreignisation may result from the choice of text to be translated, regardless of the translation discourse, as well as from the conscious choice of translation discourse, he ends up with a definition by “...disjuncts of various properties rather than partial overlaps” (2000: 36). Tymoczko claims that Venuti proposes his terms (domestication/fluency vs. foreignisation/minoritisation/resistance) as “a kind of absolute or universal standard of evaluation, with a sort of on/off quality rather than a sliding scale” (2000: 38), but without specifying how much foreignisation is needed for a translation to qualify as such. She considers the possibility that the proof of the pudding might be in the eating, so to say: that any translation that provides cultural resistance is foreignising, regardless of its actual translation choices, but claims that the criteria for cultural resistance are too vague for this to work.

The claim that a foreignising effect may be achieved by choices at several levels does not in itself seem problematic to me. It seems reasonable that choosing a text which, because of its genre or subject matter, in itself sits uneasily within the mainstream of the target culture

may have an equally strong foreignising effect as localized choices in diction.<sup>2</sup> Thus, I would not necessarily accept that the possibility of creating discontinuity with the target culture at different levels, and thus cause a foreignising effect by a variety of means, need create a “definition by disjuncts”. However, Tymoczko’s point that it is problematic to see the domestication/foreignisation opposition as a universal standard of evaluation is a strong one: it becomes more difficult when we try to characterize translations of whole texts as being domesticating or foreignising overall. Also, even without going into the problem of how to define resistance, Venuti’s project seems to lose much of its significance if we end up having to define a foreignising translation by its effect (i.e. cultural resistance); even if such a definition enabled us to recognise foreignisation/resistance, we would then be no further along as to what creates this resistance: the claim that foreignisation can create resistance would then be entirely circular. Venuti does not, of course frame his definitions in this way, but there seems to be a widening of his understanding of what foreignisation can be which might put him in danger of ending up in this position.

The problem of characterising the effect of a text as a whole may perhaps be illustrated by one of Venuti’s own examples. Venuti sees his approach to translation both as a potential basis for translation practice (including his own), and as an analytical tool in relation to historical and contemporary translation texts by others. An interesting example of such an analysis is his discussion of the translation of Freud into English in the Standard Edition of his works (Venuti 2010: 75-78), (Strachey 1953-74). His starting point is Bruno Bettelheim’s 1983 critique of this translation. Bettelheim points out how the translation serves to make Freud appear more formal, depersonalised and scientific in his diction than he does in the German original. Bettelheim uses the term “Fehlleistungen” translated as “parapraxis” as an example: a transparent

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<sup>2</sup> To construct an example: translated into a predominantly secular/liberal culture from a conservative religious one, a graphic sermon on the eternal punishments of hell is likely to feel alienating/foreignising however its diction is translated (though if this was a marginal text-type in the source culture, it could also be seen as an *exoticising* choice: see the discussion on Shamma). A sermon on the virtues of neighbourliness would not automatically have as foreignising an effect, but it would still be possible to make foreignising choices in the translation of it.

everyday German term is replaced in English by an opaque, technical-sounding borrowed term. Bettelheim sees the translator's choice here as representing his desire to make Freud's (as Bettelheim sees it) fundamentally humanistic texts acceptable in an Anglo-American medical culture dominated by positivism. Superficially, the choices of the translators might appear to be foreignising: transparent, everyday terms are replaced with technical jargon which will not contribute to general fluency. Since this, however, is seen as an attempt to adjust the foreign text to a dominant paradigm in the target culture, he describes it as a shift which in Venuti's terms would be domesticating in relation to the intended readers: the Anglo-American psychological community and medical profession.

Venuti agrees with Bettelheim's observation of an increased "scientification" of diction in the Standard Version; he claims that the inconsistency of the diction between a highly scientific and a simple, everyday one is so obvious that it can be observed without looking at the German text itself. However, Venuti also points out that the diction in the Standard Edition translation, in spite of being made more technical and scientific, is still highly inconsistent: "parapraxis" is juxtaposed with non-technical expressions, such as "names go out of my head". He also points out that the German text itself also contains a tension between these two stylistic levels. Venuti sees this as a reflection of Freud's project being fundamentally ambiguous between a humanistic approach, which Venuti seems to link with a therapeutic<sup>3</sup> purpose, and a hermeneutic/descriptive scientific approach, a discontinuity brought into focus by a tension in the understanding of the human consciousness. While the changes in the level of diction of the translation might in

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<sup>3</sup> We must take care how we read Venuti's use of the term "therapeutic" about Bettelheim's project. A main concern of Bettelheim's suggested adjustment of the translation is to reposition Freud's texts **away** from a professional medical sphere, in which it functions as the professional's therapeutic tool vis-à-vis the client, towards a wider and more open function of providing both the general reader and the specialist with metaphors to help them gain greater insight into their own souls. (Bettelheim would here clearly prefer "soul" to "mind".) This might be therapeutic, but not exclusively, or even primarily, in a clinical sense. That Bettelheim's project entails a repositioning means that such a conjectural retranslation would simultaneously move the text towards greater foreignisation **and** domestication, depending on the group of readers.

isolation be seen as domesticating, the fact that these remain mixed with a far more everyday level of diction means that this shift in stylistic level actually increases the tension and discontinuity which already exists in the text. This makes the translation, Venuti seems to imply, potentially foreignising rather than domesticating. A revision of the translation towards a less technical language (as suggested by Bettelheim) would, Venuti seems to imply, ease the tension in favour of a unified humanistic reading of Freud. He does not expressly characterise such a reading as domesticating, but when he speaks of Freud's texts possessing 'a fundamental discontinuity which is "resolved" in Bettelheim's humanistic representation...' (his quotes), it is difficult to read him in any other way. Perhaps more precisely, we could also say that Venuti sees the Standard Edition translation as exacerbating a tension inherent in Freud. While this tension is not immediately visible when the edition is read within the Anglo-American science-oriented tradition (and therefore not immediately foreignising), it is there as a potential is brought out by Bettelheim's alternative reading, or by his own analysis. An alternative "humanistic" translation, as suggested by Bettelheim, would not in itself have this tension, this potential for foreignisation.

We could then argue, however, that Venuti's contention is only true if we look at the text in isolation. If a "Bettelheimian" translation of Freud—as a harmonising humanistic/therapeutic reading of his works—had been introduced into a positivist, science-oriented Anglo-American psychological discourse, might it not according to Venuti's own theory have an equally foreignising effect? It might lack the internal discontinuity, but it would still be discontinuous on a macro level. In fact, while the introduction of more technical-sounding terms in the Standard Edition may create a text with greater internal discontinuity, the same process would still serve to make the text merge into the intended positivist discourse with less resistance, and might thus functionally be seen as an instance of domestication.

To this, one might object that for a version of the texts less adapted to positivism to have such an effect within a discourse, it depends on being accepted as a valid contribution to the discourse. A foreign contribution that already has great international scholarly prestige (such as Freud) might not have problems in this respect, but this would not be the case for a great majority of the foreign texts to be translated, and unless the text gains an entry into the intended discourse, it cannot have

its foreignising function. This is, I think, a valid objection; however, it highlights the problem with establishing foreignisation vs. domestication as a universal standard of evaluation of whole texts as pointed out by Tymoczko. In order to achieve a resistant effect within the target language discourse, the translator would be dependent on balancing elements of domestication and foreignisation in such a way that it is domesticated enough to be accepted into the discourse, and yet alien and foreignising enough to be resistant. Venuti clearly agrees that a balance of these elements would be required—a totally foreignising translation is, in a sense, no translation at all—but this still seems to make the assessment of the foreignising vs. domesticating effect into an assessment of the socio-political effect of the text in a certain society at a certain time. Again, Venuti would probably agree, that it is in fact the overall political effect of a translation which decides to what extent it is foreignising, but then one could with Tymoczko ask whether his concepts provide tools for performing such an analysis on such a general level, whether his criteria are clear enough.

*Problems of dichotomous systems: Mona Baker*

The problems with using dichotomous systems in translation studies is taken up by Mona Baker, as well as by Tymoczko and others. Baker (2010: 115) sees this dichotomy as too simple to describe the reality of what happens in translations. It is problematic as a description of the overall character of a translated text, since it forces one, as she sees it, to classify a rich variety of possible translator attitudes to the text as a whole as either domestication or foreignisation. Baker seems to be concerned that Venuti's generalisations will disguise the fact that the same text will contain both foreignising and domesticating elements on the same level and of the same kind (not just, as previously pointed out, foreignising and domesticating effects on different levels). Venuti can of course here argue that he is not only aware of this fact, but that he also repeatedly points out this tension, as in his discussion of the translation of Freud. He also denies that his system is a true dichotomy:

...the terms “domestication” and “foreignization” do not establish a neat binary opposition that can simply be superimposed on “fluent” and “resistant” discursive strategies [...]. The terms “domestication” and “foreignization” indicate fundamentally ethical attitudes towards foreign text and culture, ethical effects

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produced by the strategy devised to translate it, whereas terms like “fluency” and “resistancy” indicate fundamentally discursive features of translation strategies in relation to the reader’s cognitive processing. Both sets of terms demarcate a spectrum of textual and cultural effects that depend for their description and evaluation on the relation between a translation a translation project and the hierarchical arrangement of values in the receiving situation at a particular historical moment. (Venuti 2008: 19)

I take Venuti’s point here to be not only to deny that the domestication always and inevitably is the result of fluent strategies, and that foreignisation always follows resistant strategies, but also to deny their binary quality. He refers to a spectrum of effects—presumably with all degrees of transition. It is difficult, however, to see that the use of these terms avoids a grouping of the effects as a spectrum on a metaphorical axis between the paired concepts. Also, in his analyses of translations, Venuti tends to end up by giving a description of the overall effect of the translation within his two-part system, e.g. “The controversial reception of Burton’s translation makes it clear that it had a foreignizing effect” (Venuti 2008: 271), or “...the Zukovskys followed Pound’s example and stressed the signifier to make a foreignizing translation...” (Venuti 2008: 186). This seems inevitable in order to assess translations according to his stated goals of achieving resistant translations.

The seriousness of the problem inherent in a dichotomy would still depend on what function the terms in the dichotomy are meant to have. If the foreignisation—domestication opposition is only meant as one among many possible considerations and is mainly applied to localised translation choices, its dichotomous nature (accepting that it is indeed dichotomous) would seem much less problematic than if it is intended to be an overall and general consideration. Applied to individual translation choices as one of many possible considerations, it might still be a simplification, but a much less problematic, and perhaps even a necessary one. Again, Venuti’s stance is not necessarily easy to discern. He does at times seem to ascribe to it a more limited role, as when he in the introduction to the 1991 Italian translation of *The Translator’s Invisibility* describes foreignisation and domestication as “heuristic concepts...meant to promote thinking and research” rather than as dichotomous terms (quoted and discussed in Munday 2009: 148). In most of his writing, however, Venuti seems to give the concepts more weight than that implied by the idea of them as purely heuristic tools, as we see from his use of foreignisation as a criterion of good translation.

This makes it more difficult to defend as an innocuous simplification applied to a limited and localised aspect of the text.

The problem of dichotomous systems is clearly related to that of definition. While Venuti denies that it creates an absolute dichotomy of black or white effect, and while all translations may contain both foreignising and domesticating elements, the idea of a spectrum of effects still presupposes that there are recognisable and identifiable poles at opposite ends of the spectrum. However, it can also be seen as taking the criticism one step further: as well as questioning to what extent it is possible to achieve such an overall classification within his system; Baker and Tymoczko seem equally to query whether it is desirable and productive to make such a classification, even if possible. Perhaps it rather results in a simplification which hides more than it reveals? Even if we can say that the text is overall more domesticating than foreignising or vice versa, it is not certain that this gives the best and most meaningful description of the translation and its effect.

*Foreignisation and Exoticism: Tarek Shamma*

Venuti's linking of foreignisation and resistance to cultural hegemony and ethnocentrism is also a point seen as problematic. Tymoczko points out that foreignisation and domestication can both be made to serve "progressive" political and cultural aims, but also the opposite: "...any translation procedure can become a tool of cultural colonization, even foreignizing translation" (Tymoczko 2000: 35). Tarek Shamma supports this point and aims to substantiate it in his study *Translation and the Manipulation of Difference* (2009). Here, he analyses 19<sup>th</sup> century translations from Arabic into English according to the domestication—foreignisation dichotomy, while examining their likely effect as well as their actual contemporary reception in a colonial/anti-colonial perspective. His contention is that the translations he classifies as foreignising would be likely to reinforce English prejudices against the source culture: that their effect might equally well be called exoticising as foreignising. The one translator who he sees as having a "resistant" agenda and where he also sees the translations as having a potentially "resistant" effect, Wilfred Scaven Blunt and his translations of *The Celebrated Romance of the Stealing of the Mare* and *The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia*, he judges to be in fact domesticating in their

translation choices. He also sees Edward Fitzgerald's extremely popular and influential translation of Omar Khayyám's *Rúbaiyât* as domesticating, but with a far less progressive intent and effect.

The best example of foreignising strategies he judges to be Edward Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights*. In this context he points to two main translation strategies which he sees as having this effect: one is a literalistic translation of phrases and expressions from the Arabic, so that not just the meaning, but also the "mécanique, the manner and the matter" (Burton, quoted in Shamma 2009: 65) is followed closely. He lists a number of examples, such as "I will bring thee to thy wish", "give me to know thereof", "despite the nose of thee"—in some cases with incomprehensible result (Shamma 2009: 64). In this category he also includes a use of untranslated Arabic words quite unlikely to be understood, for example "Alhamdolillah" (= thank God). The other main foreignising device Shamma sees in Burton is the use of English archaisms, such as "thou" "thy" "aught", "naught" "whilome", "tarry" etc. (Shamma 2009: 65). Shamma also points out an over-emphasis on culturally alien customs and phenomena, which Burton tends to introduce even where they are not present in the original. There is a special over-emphasis on gory details of violence and anything which might be construed as sexual—so that for example slaves become eunuchs whenever possible. Footnotes are used to add even more colourful details of both sex and violence. Whether Shamma sees this last feature as an aspect of foreignisation is not said, but it seems to be implied. The overall effect of such a translation, Shamma claims, is in fact exoticising rather than foreignising; however, his central contention is that one cannot distinguish between these effects. The translation method creates an image of the source culture which marks its differentness, but which is more likely to leave the readers with a complacent attitude of cultural superiority than make them question their own norms. He also maintains that Burton's objectives concerning ethnocentric attitudes are at best ambiguous: he may have claimed a desire to achieve better understanding of Arab culture, but one important justification for this is Britain's need to understand its Muslim colonies. Thus, he claims to demonstrate the lack of a clear connection between an overall translation strategy and the political effect of a translation.

Venuti and Shamma enter a direct discussion on the merits of Burton's translation as concerns resistance to ethnocentrism. In *The*

*Translator's Invisibility* (2008: 268-273), Venuti responds directly to Shamma's 2005 article "The Exotic Dimension of Foreignizing Strategies: Burton's Translation of the *Arabian Nights*", which presented a first version of his critique of Burton's translation. Shamma then again responds to Venuti's defense of Burton in *Translation and the Manipulation of Difference*. Venuti defends Burton's translation as a true example of foreignisation, and claims that it would indeed have had an anti-ethnocentric effect. He sees the potential for stereotype in Burton's depiction of "the sensuous East", but he claims that this is countered by the translator's arguments, both relativistic and universalistic, for a frank presentation of Eastern sensuality. Burton makes both the point that norms are relative, so we cannot apply our norms to the mores depicted in Arabic stories, and that in any case, the "indecentcies" in the *Arabian Nights* tales are really no worse than what is found in the Western classics (such as Shakespeare, Sterne and Swift). This, Venuti claims, is aimed at disrupting the relative centrality of the Western canon to his readers. Another argument in defence of Burton is centered on the identity of his intended audience. Venuti points out that the translation was published by subscription and at a relatively high price, which would indicate a select and culturally sophisticated audience. Such an audience would be likely to sympathise with his heavily eroticized translation as an attack on British prudery, Venuti claims, and his translation would thus have the effect of subverting dominant target culture norms. This defence is interesting in that it emphasizes the previously highlighted connection between the effect of a translation and the discourse into which it enters. However, this defence would appear stronger if Burton's subversive translation had broken contemporary norms only concerning sexual mores; his gratuitous footnote references to, for example, grotesquely cruel methods of punishment must surely undermine the defence. Are these also meant to represent frankly avowed natural appetites as opposed to European hypocrisy? Surely not. Nor can they be seen as subverting dominant norms or creating sympathy for the culture described. Partly on this basis, Shamma sees Venuti's defense of Burton as not responding directly to Shamma's own concern with the difficulty of distinguishing between anti-ethnocentric foreignisation and ethnocentric exoticism.

It can be argued that what Venuti and Shamma agree on is no less interesting than what they disagree on. Shamma depicts Burton as a

foreignising translator and Wilfred Scaven Blunt as a domesticating one, and at least the first premise is accepted by Venuti (he does not comment on Blunt). This is interesting since, based on the examples from Burton used by Shamma, it does not seem obvious that Burton's style of translation has to be characterized as foreignising in all respects. His strategy of literalism does not necessarily correspond to Venuti's ideas of the use of the cultural "remainder" in the target culture: while his translation certainly shows where it departs from target culture norms, it does not primarily use target language minor forms to do so. The element of archaism in his translation may be seen as adhering more closely to Venuti's description of foreignisation: on this point, there is indeed a use of target language marginal forms. However, this is also the point at which Shamma's argument seems less than clear to me. Burton's archaisms are seen as a foreignising element, yet in his description of Blunt's (according to Shamma) *domesticating* translations, he describes their adjustment to a British/European chivalric style, through the use of archaizing forms. In Blunt, "girls" become "damsels", "clothes" becomes "mail-coat and armouring" (Shamma 2009: 107)—indeed, he speaks of Blunt's style as possessing "formality, and occasional archaism" (Shamma 2009: 110). If archaism is foreignising in Burton, why is it domesticating in Blunt?

The obvious defence of Venuti's concepts here (rather than of Burton, whose translation based on Shamma's examples seems indeed vulnerable to the charge of exoticism), would be that an exoticising translation differs from a truly foreignising one in that the former does not break with the target culture's norms and expectations. By presenting the source culture in terms of prejudice-confirming stereotypes of otherness, it rather puts the foreign text squarely within the frame set aside for it within the target culture mindset—an argument that can certainly be made against Burton's depiction of a sensuous and cruel east. However, it is not clear that this need be the result of foreignising translation: after all, Venuti stresses the uses of target language and target culture resources to express the otherness of the translated text. One might therefore argue that such a translation approach would in fact resist a pigeonholing of the text's otherness as exotic and simply alien. If we choose to regard Blunt's translations as foreignising rather than domesticating, their use of heroic-chivalric genre choices for Arab tales could be seen as one element that makes them so; they may be seen as

defying target language expectations and stereotypes and thus to create a text which is resistant to ethnocentric attitudes.

Such a defence of Venuti's concepts is, however, not unproblematic. The fact that it must be conducted in the face of Venuti's own assessment of Burton's translations might support the critical view that his criteria for judging whether a text is foreignising are far from clear, and perhaps also that they are difficult to make clear. Venuti's reference to Burton's intended readership is a good demonstration of his awareness of how a translation's socio-political effect is dependent on the specific audience. However, his discussion with Shamma also demonstrates how difficult it is to decide the characteristics of a specific readership, and even more so, a text's probable effect on a readership. Also, this would mean that a translation's effect as regards ethnocentricity would be impossible to pin down with any specificity; if the effect depends on the readership, the effect can never be settled, since the readership itself is and must be an open category. Even if we accept Venuti's claim that Burton's translation had a foreignising effect on its immediate and intended readership, this could still not preclude it having a very different effect on other or later readers. This is, in fact, a perspective which Venuti himself accepts: "Any significance assigned to the terms [...] must be treated as culturally variable and historically contingent" (2008: 19). However, this seems to make the desired foreignising effect rather ephemeral.

There is also another aspect of the attempt at using Blunt's translation as an example of foreignisation and thus in defence of Venuti's concepts that needs to be called into question. I have argued that Blunt's use of Western chivalric conventions and lexis associated with these may serve to defy cultural expectations and resist ethnocentrism. However, this is dependent on the use of target language and culture forms which may not belong to the mainstream of the target culture, but which unambiguously and across the board belong at a high level of diction. Would it be possible to achieve a similar defiance if one, as Venuti suggests, mixes high and low from the whole range of marginal forms within the target language? The struggle between marginalized and mainstream forms in the target language (or any language) is central to Venuti's ideas. A consequence of this is the understanding that translation cannot be neutral in such a struggle: if it does not strengthen the marginal by employing forms from its repertoire,

it will inevitably strengthen the mainstream by contributing to making the marginal invisible (see pages 4-5 above). However, while Venuti's desire to use translation to strengthen the marginal in the target language and culture may be commendable, one might also ask whether he is trying to achieve too many objectives at once. When the source language and culture are themselves marginal, it may be more difficult for the translated text to gain a receptive audience in a globalized language. Is it realistic that one can achieve resistance to ethnocentrism by presenting such a text in terms of the marginal within that target culture? Even if we accept that the marginal might encompass the high, the formal and the prestigious as well as the low, colloquial and prohibited, it is not immediately obvious that such a style of translation would be able to valorise the translated texts as serious and important, and if it cannot do that, it is also not clear that it would in return serve to strengthen the marginal in the target culture. Is it a given that linking the weak with the weak will strengthen either part?

In the case of Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights*, it can be argued that its transgression of target culture norms in its depiction of sexuality in many forms, including what would have been considered deviant ones, must be seen in combination with the canonical or quasi-canonical status of the text. This combination might conceivably have given this specific translation a valorising effect towards marginalized minority groups or minority norms in its target culture. However, it seems unlikely that this would mean it also disseminated a less ethnocentric view of the East among the majority of its readers. Blunt's translation, with its depiction of Arabic culture in chivalric terms, may perhaps have served to lessen ethnocentric stereotypes among those who read them, but as Shamma points out (see above p. 12), they achieve this in part by avoiding confrontations between source and target culture norms on other points, thus perhaps also lessening their potential for valorizing marginal groups in the target culture. This may be seen as illustrating Tymoczko's point that "...a person cannot effectively resist everything objectionable in any culture" (2006: 453); we have to choose our battles. Venuti's project might either be accused of trying to do too many things simultaneously, or, if we take translation's task of strengthening and valorizing minority voices at home as the first priority (which certainly seems to be the view reflected in Venuti's defense of

Burton), it may seem that his project can end up “doing wrong abroad to do right at home” (see above p. 4).

*Foreignisation in threatened minority languages: Cronin*

This brings us to the final point: the question of whether foreignisation may be seen as less relevant in some languages/cultures than in others. Venuti's own translation practice concerns translations from Italian into English, but he claims that his concepts have a general applicability. Critics, however, have claimed that while foreignisation may be effective as a critical strategy between major European languages, it may be more problematic when translating from more marginal languages (as Arabic must have been categorised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) into a global one (Shamma 2009: 79). Michael Cronin, however, reverses these positions, as he rather questions the appropriateness of using foreignising strategies in translations into marginal and threatened languages: “Advocacy of non-fluent, refractory, exoticizing strategies, for example, can be seen as a bold act of cultural revolt and epistemological generosity in a major language, but for a minority language, fluent strategies may represent the progressive key to their very survival” (Cronin 2010: 250). His rationale for this claim is that he sees a danger that minor languages (presumably through translation) may become so infused with lexical and syntactic borrowings from a dominant language that they lose their identity (Cronin 2010: 251). Here, it may be claimed Venuti's emphasis on using the remainder, the marginal and marginalized forms within the target language and culture, makes him less vulnerable to this criticism. While a minority language and a minority culture may be marginal compared to its more globalized rivals, every margin has its own margin, and valorizing this margin by using elements from it to present texts from more central cultures, may arguably enrich rather than deplete the choices available within a language. If it is difficult to see that translation of a text from a marginal language into a dominant one in terms of the marginal within the target language will add prestige to the source text and the source culture, then going the opposite way, translating texts from a dominant culture into a marginal language using that which is marginal in the target language seems to hold an interesting potential. Perhaps demonstrating cultural difference and creating resistance may in

fact be more important when moving in this direction, from the dominant to the marginal culture?

I would, however, like to add that this would only be true as long as we maintain Venuti's perspective that foreignisation must use the (marginal) linguistic and cultural repertoire of the target culture. The use of linguistic/cultural material taken directly from a dominant or globalised source culture in a translation into a minor language would most likely not have such an effect: the dominant culture will often be so familiar at a superficial level that culture specific references from it will not be likely to appear as foreignising, and even less likely to create resistance.

### *Conclusion*

As was pointed out in the account of the concept of foreignisation, Venuti has more than one agenda. He has in particular agendas relating both to the presentation of the foreign text and culture through translations, and to the effect of translations on the struggle between mainstream and margins in the target language and culture. It seems to me that regarding the probable efficacy of foreignisation in resisting cultural dominance, we have to make a distinction here.

Regarding the effect of foreignisation in resisting ethnocentrism and dominance in the presentation of the source culture, the problem with the stability and predictability of effect seems to me to be more serious than Venuti apparently regards it. If we have to examine the cultural and political effect of a text in a specific society at a specific time by a specific audience, this is an assessment for which it is difficult to see that Venuti's concepts give us the necessary tools. Even if we could make this assessment, and produce a text that had an anti-ethnocentric effect on the intended audience, the possibility would still remain that the overall effect of the text might be very different: if the assessment of the effect must be tied to a specific audience, there is no way of tying down the translation itself in this way, since it will always have readerships beyond the intended one. It seems easier to defend the usefulness of the terms on a localised level, as a description of individual translation choices, or even as one aspect among many to be considered at individual choices.

It could of course be argued that any analysis of translation effects, not only Venuti's approach, is subject to this instability, and that it

therefore affects all translation approaches equally. This would surely weaken the force of instability of audience and effect as an argument against a foreignising approach to translation. The first part of the argument, that all analysis of translation effects must take account of the changeable nature of its readership, is clearly true. It is, however, not clear that this affects all approaches equally: for an approach which wants to use translations as a tool for political activism, the instability and unpredictability of the effect must be a particularly serious problem, potentially threatening to undermine the project.

On the other hand, the second point referred to above, that the choice of unmarked, mainstream forms within the target language is not a neutral choice or one without consequences, seems to stand. Thus, Venuti's forceful criticism of the regime of fluency (see p. 2 above), a regime which can lead to a translated text being less distinct compared to the linguistic and cultural mainstream in the target language than the original is in its own setting, cannot simply be dismissed. One can of course disagree with the ideological premise underlying the argument, and argue that a strengthening of the mainstream within a language is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is difficult to see that one could argue for this as a neutral choice.

The pressure towards fluency, and in particular the avoidance of the marginal, applies not only to English as the dominant global language: I would claim that the effect may also be observed in Norwegian, my own far from global language, both in translation and in the reception of translated texts.<sup>4</sup> Not all reviewers of translated texts will go to the source language text when they find a usage that strikes them as unusual. Even if the usage might be equally unusual there, this is not always observed, nor are all reviewers equipped to assess this. Thus, translators

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<sup>4</sup> It is probable, however, that the pressure towards fluency is not equally strong for all text types. It should also be added that in translation from a global to a minor language, there might be a pressure towards strict accuracy, which can to a certain extent counter the pressure towards fluency. Some readers of the translated text can - and occasionally do - read the original, and some of them will expect an accurate rendering of textual details: we can sometimes see (probably) conscious departures from textual accuracy in translation decried as mistakes caused by incompetence or ignorance. This may in some cases counter a tendency towards domesticating fluency, but it will not necessarily counter the pull of the target language mainstream.

are well aware that there is a good chance they will be assessed on the basis of their ability to fashion a smooth and fluent target language form. Even more importantly, there will of course in many cases be a commercial pressure for easy readability. The use and promotion of foreignising strategies may perhaps be a way to counter the homogenising effect in and of translated texts. The exact outcome may not always be easy to predict here either, but it may still be possible that this effect is less vulnerable, not least if texts from a dominant culture are presented through marginal forms within a minor language. In such cases, the increased visibility of the minor forms would in itself go a long way towards achieving the outcome desired, and the prestige of the dominant culture might arguably add prestige to the marginal forms. However, one might well ask to what extent it is realistic that a theoretical framework can provide resistance to the cultural and commercial pressure towards mainstream fluency.

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