

Translating for the Stage: The Role of “Aesthetic Fitting”

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Abstract

The translatability of a literary work depends not only on the difficulties the language and culture may pose but also on the aesthetic trends. Literary translations have an impact on the canon, perception and reception of the translated authors. Previous translations of a play, audience expectations and trends in acting are part of what could be called *aesthetic fitting*, and that may determine what is likely or not to be translated and the degree of acceptability of a translation. The act of translating a play is a cultural performance that establishes a dialogue between traditions. Performing traditions are very often conveyed within orality, connecting, thus, theatre performance or the teachings in acting schools with intangible heritage. The aim of this article is to define the concept of aesthetic fitting and see its relevance in the study of the translation of plays.

Keywords

Aesthetics, Literary Canon, Community Heritage, Reception, Aesthetic Fitting

1. Introduction

In this article, I will be analysing different aspects of aesthetics in connection with the translation of plays. When a play is translated and performed in another language, it establishes a dialogue with the receiving tradition in different ways and these determine performability. This concept has been controversial because it does not only refer to the conventions and trends in theatre performance, but also to the justification of changes in a translated text in order to adapt it to a pre-determined idea of the audience expectations. Bassnett (1991), in *Translation Studies* states that a play can only gain its complete meaning if it is understood to be staged, therefore, a translation of a play should bear in mind that feature of theatre texts. In this article, performability will refer to the aesthetic elements that

will make a play stageable, that is, what will enable a *mise en scene* acceptable for an audience, whether it is in a traditional way or whether it breaks new ground in the field.

First, we should bear in mind the literary fate or reception of that play, as this varies in different cultures: “The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its audience. For it is only through the process of its communication that the work reaches the changing horizon of experience” (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970: p. 8). We can trace the reception of a literary work in different countries through translations and the criticism about the authors, as we can see, for example, in investigations like Kennedy (1993) *Foreign Shakespeare*.

Another important point is whether the writing is similar to any of the existing works in the new tradition or it is opening a new aesthetic path or even filling a void in that literary tradition, as happened in the recent translation of the 18th century British playwright Sheridan into Catalan. The criticism exerted on an author and how it varies with time influences the interpretation of the reader and translator and audience expectations, which are fundamental aspects of performability:

“Most researchers believe that drama translation should end with the goal of achieving performability. According to Newmark (2001), drama translation ensures the success of its performance. Furthermore, he emphasised the differences between drama and fiction translation. Drama translators face more challenges than novel translators in achieving performability because there is no annotation for the audience, making it challenging to explain puns, ambiguities, or cultural differences. Moreover, Pavis (1992) proposed that translators reconstruct drama texts according to the original version, emphasising gesture fulfilment and the importance of audience reception in drama translation” (Li, 2022: p. 66).

An example of the influence of criticism on the interpretation of an author is the change of appreciation regarding the 18th century Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni at the beginning of the 20th century. Goldoni had been regarded as an author who just wrote unpretentious light comedies, but under the view of Marxist analysis, he was seen as someone who undermined the social status, making servants smarter than their masters and women able to decide their own fate. Performability, therefore, depends on the theatrical conventions in vogue as much as on the criticism on an author.

On the other hand, each director finds different topics addressed by the play that he or she wants to emphasise and, in this way, connects the work to present day issues and audiences. The concept of what I call *aesthetic fitting* should be included in the considerations when addressing the topic of performability: when analysing texts for their translation, style is a key element and, by distinguishing between style and aesthetics, the concept of aesthetic fitting will be better understood. Style is composed by the set of choices regarding linguistic resources that are meant to suggest an effect on the reader or audience and it is of paramount importance in translation: “It is a term of convenience rather than a term with any

particular theoretical or empirical impact, because the whole of the way a text is written could be said to constitute its style. However, in terms of the way we read a text, it does seem intuitively the case that certain stylistic devices stand out.” (Boase-Beier, 2004: p. 278). In this article, the concept of aesthetics will refer to the reasons behind the style, that is, the ideas that sustain a literary work of art, as much as focussing on the aesthetic experience or aesthetic value. However, as reception is key to the idea of aesthetic fitting, the reader or audience will be seen within the frame of sociology and aesthetics, that is, a sociological view of aesthetics: “The pervasiveness of the aesthetic thus provides a different model for grasping human values. For aesthetic perception pervades the human world and, because experience is broadly social, we are led to recognize the omnipresence of a social aesthetic” (Berleant, 2017: p. 12). The question is: why are some literary works, some plays, in our case, more suitable for an audience and therefore more likely to be translated and performed? We are talking about many different authors and plays and, therefore, the fitting applies for a wide idea or trend, more a tendency than a set of constricting rules.

The aim of the concept “aesthetic fitting” is to bring together different approaches to determine the extent to which a literary work differs or is similar to the expected aesthetic trends. It can be used to study some of the reasons behind reception, to analyse shifts in the literary canon or aesthetic difficulties for the translator. Aesthetic fitting is characterized by the intentionality of the aesthetic intervention, the emphasis on stylistic elements, the key role of audience perception in translation decisions and context-dependent choices of aesthetic value.

2. Literary Models

A translated literary text establishes a dialogue between literary systems that contributes to the constant reordering of the canon, both in the source text literature and in the receiving one, placing the text in a new context and changing its reception. A translation inserts a foreign work in a new tradition, altering it, reinterpreting the past and shaping a new literary canon. The canon goes far beyond the idea of period and the creation that takes place at a certain time, to be considered as part of the literary system, which is a much wider concept where the literature of the past and present lives with all that the reader has access to and it is valued and reinterpreted by each generation. We will be looking at the translations of two 18th century playwrights into Catalan: Sheridan, from the British tradition and Goldoni, from the Italian to see the relevance of aesthetic fitting in their translation process and reception.

These examples have been selected because each of them addresses a different aspect of aesthetic fitting and provides a wider view of the concept. The example of Goldoni provides insight into the shifting of the literary criticism and how that may determine aesthetic features in translation, while the considerations about the translation of Sheridan add a reflection on literary models and influences. On the other hand, the case of Brecht focuses on reception and the role of ideological frames.

Let us take the example of Richard Brinsley Sheridan into Catalan. First, a few words on the context: on the one hand, there are no models of 18th century plays in Catalan due to the lack of literary production at that time caused by political events that took place after the defeat of Catalonia in the Spanish War of Succession in 1714: “After the war, the Bourbon king of Castile, Philip V, issued a decree known as *decreto de Nueva planta de la Real audiencia del Principado de Cataluña* in 1715 in order to modify Catalonia’s institutions and structures. In this political-reorganizing text, in addition to the suppression of all Catalan political institutions (such as the *Cort general de Catalunya*—the Catalan parliamentary assembly, or the *Diputació del General de Catalunya*—the Catalan government), there was also a chapter depriving Catalonia of its whole body of laws”. (Oleart, 2014: p. 3). That was the beginning of the decline in the use of the Catalan language and also in the production of literary texts in Catalan.

The staging with some periodicity of translated authors gives us an idea about their work and determines translation expectations. In Catalonia, an example of an especially loved playwright is Carlo Goldoni, of whom we often see new translations and performances (Gavagnin, 1996). David Johnston expresses it this way when talking about an often-translated author, he says of Shakespeare’s plays: “Romeo and Juliet exists in the dialectics between the textual evidence, the plays staged and the concept inherited from his work” (Pujante & Gregor, 1996: p. 90). That is why, as evidenced in the book by Kennedy (1993) *Foreign Shakespeare*, each country has its own reception of the work of Shakespeare and its own interpretative and evaluative tradition. The translations of the works of Sheridan, for example, open a space for the author within the canon of English and Catalan literature.

What we could call cultural *scripts* can hinder or facilitate a translation and in the case of literature, it is very clear that the connections of plays with their historical circumstances at any time are very close. Plays often make implicit or explicit references to people or situations connected to the historical time in which the text is set and, even if the play describes a completely fantastic setting, the audience often connects the topics and characters to their present situation: “As a cultural practice that amalgamates religious, political and social elements, the theatre has always been a medium for the observation of, and reflection on, social relations of and to the self.” (Koch et al., 2018: p. 14).

The disappearance of a cultural background and a set of beliefs add difficulty to translations. William Cowper, writes in the introduction to the English translation of the *Iliad* in 1814 (Cowper, 2014): “it’s hard to kill a sheep with dignity in a modern language”, because every generation has its own reading of the classics and its reinterpretation of history. Therefore, the idea that we have of an author determines our reading and the translations that can be made of their works. Sheridan is an English classic that is often represented in the United Kingdom and the fact that it is not well known in Catalonia, while on the one hand may be a staging constraint, on the other, gives more freedom to the translator because there is no

previous tradition of translation that may influence or even compel the translator to follow a previous view about the author. If the works of Sheridan were represented, a new interpretive tradition would start, if not, the impact of the translation would not be very significant. We should also take into account the tradition of translation of a classic play. It very often happens, that a new translation of a classic has to be aware of the similarities and differences with previous translations and the way in which these will be perceived.

Regarding the translation consequences, the lack of texts with a similar aesthetics in the Catalan language in the 18th century is a problem because there are no models to what a play from that period would be like in Catalan but, in an indefinite way, we compare literary works to an *unconscious canon* that tells us what good texts should be like, created by the established canonical literature we have read and, in this case, the Spanish tradition plays a very important role, as we have an excellent 18th century theatre production in that tradition. Somehow, the Catalan translation of literary texts of the 18th century recreates a space, that is, it fills in a historical gap.

Regarding the difficulties connected to language in plays, we should bear in mind that each character has its own idiolect. In the case of Sheridan, the difference in the language of the characters is very clear and deliberate and has a meaning. For this reason, the very names that the author chooses for the characters in his comedies suggest the defects that define them and their way of talking and these elements represent the first challenge for the translator.

What makes a work performable is a complex topic: with regard to the length, the directors can find an easy solution, but the translator must translate the text without reducing it; and with regard to changes of scene, often connected to performability, solving them depends a lot on the director's imagination.

A translation reorders the canon in the receiving culture, so much so, that some authors may have more prestige in a foreign culture than in their own. In the 1980s, for example, Cesare Pavese was more famous in Spain than in Italy. The foreign authors that are chosen to be performed in English theatres and the way in which they are staged establish aesthetic frames which influence the possibility of the translation of other authors, that facilitates their "aesthetic fitting".

3. Reception

Schleiermacher (2000: p. 111) in *About the Different Methods of Translation* [1813] appreciates the enrichment which translation means to a language: "we shouldn't ignore the fact that in language there is so much beauty and strength that only through translation can it be developed and rescued from oblivion", but can texts from very different cultural backgrounds be effectively translated? One of the first issues which arise when we think about translation is the fact that there have been texts described as translatable and others as untranslatable, especially as regards poetry, with all the possibilities in between ranging from a great acceptability and consent in meaning to great discussions about certain interpretations

of texts. The reasons why some texts are considered untranslatable have to do with the historical and social circumstances not with something inherent to language. It is useful to have the same aesthetic movements to make a good translation feasible, because these provide the linguistic and cultural models that will be fully understood by the readers. Symbolist poetry, for example, would not be so difficult to translate into a literary system which also had a symbolist movement. On the other hand, when there is no model, the translation is unable to transmit the complete historical meaning of a play, and that is why when I undertook the translation of a play by Goldoni (1762), *The Miser*, from the Italian, I made some reflections on the place he occupied in his tradition and the impossibility of translating the complete meaning of his works. As for the context of his plays, they represented a break with the *commedia dell'arte*, where everything was based on improvisation and some extremely simple plots or *lazzi* with very stereotyped characters, while his comedies produced humanized and complex psychological types and were rich in peripety, which showed social behaviour. Goldoni used some of the characters from the *commedia dell'arte* and changed them gradually, so the Italian audience and readers could understand different shades of meaning from their knowledge of comparison with the old tradition and the new ways. Goldoni, inserted in a new tradition, cannot possibly convey its complete aesthetic meaning.

The long tradition of staging of Goldoni's plays has created expectation on the audience that need to be met unless the theatre company is ready to accept criticism or to risk in a new view on the author. That tradition is an staging constraint to be taken into account. The translation consequence is that the translator is very conscious of previous receptions and that awareness may determine certain translation choices.

On the other hand, sometimes, we can adopt foreign genres as in the case of Japanese poetry, for example. A literature has to adapt the style if it doesn't have anything similar to a *haiku* in the target language, but once there have been translations, the *haiku* technique may become common in that language as has happened with Catalan due to the translations from the beginning of the 20th century. The *haiku* poems translated into Catalan inspired poets to try similar structures in their own language and, in this way, there began a tradition of very short poems in Catalan that has had continuity to the present day. Therefore, aesthetic fitting does not always mean a copy of what is similar to the target culture, but the "fitting" can be created and creative. Imagination is a key element in translation. More often than not, the translator faces linguistic challenges that can only be solved by the use of imagination. That is when the translator becomes visible as an artist and when it becomes more obvious that translation does not deal so much with the search for similarity but with the dealing with difference.

The modern idea of untranslatable texts comes from Croce's aesthetics, where he says that it is impossible to give a new aesthetic form to something which already has one; "What one calls a good translation is an approximation, which has

the value of an original work of art and which can stand on its own two feet.” (Croce, 1920, as cited in Jervolino, 2010: p. 31). From this point of view, lack of translations implies an impoverishment. The Slovenian writer Andrej Blatnik made an interesting comment in a recent conference at an International Pen gathering when discussing the fact that there many translations from English into other languages but not so many from other languages into English: “Where to export? Only when the voice of someone else is heard can ‘free choice’ begin. Who loses from these statistics? Those who do not have a choice or those who cannot be chosen?” (*apud* Allen, 2007: 22123).

4. Audience Expectations

A literary translation has consequences that affect the canon in the source and target cultures and, as a cultural performance, it is in constant change and evolution. The readers or audience are an active part in the phenomenon: “All participants act as co-creators of the performance which, in many respects, remains unpredictable and spontaneous to a certain degree” (Fischer-Lichte, 2009: p. 3).

This is particularly true of theatre performances, that vary from day to day and, especially, depending on the setting. The theatre hall where the play is staged may determine the reception and expectations of the audience because each place has its own aesthetic traditions and lines. If we focus on a specific performance, we talk about an *emergence*: “Even if their appearance seems perfectly plausible in retrospect, it cannot be controlled. Unpredictability constitutes a defining feature of emergence. Performative processes cannot be conceived of without the notion of emergence.” (Fischer-Lichte, 2009: p. 5). The audience is not a homogeneous concept and, although there may be other distinctions, the difference of age, to give one example, is essential for the hermeneutical key with which they read the event and which has been built through the kind of aesthetic events each age group is used to.

5. Translation and Literary Canon

There is an element in determining the meaning of a literary work that can never be translated and that is the place the text occupies in its own tradition and the relationship it establishes with previous works. Renato Poggioli suggested that translation should be seen as an interpretative art, like music, and, in fact, the analogy with music is very useful (Poggioli, 1959): we read a source text like a musical score and interpret it, play it, each of us in a different way, every time in a new way. That is why each translation involves a critical commentary of a literary work, a performance and assessment. The interpretation of a play implies assigning value to its form and content.

Translating a literary text is not always a positive cultural event. The Kenyan novelist and playwright Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o expresses very well the danger translation implies: “European languages, in their service to imperialism, have played the role of enabling the visibility of colonized and marginalized cultures, but they

have done so by uprooting native voices from those very cultures and languages.” (Thiong’o, 2007: p. 131). In fact, when you translate a literary work into English you “Briticize” it, placing all the references and meanings in a different language, which is a whole new conceptual map. Translation is a means, among others, to preserve culture but not a substitute for another culture. There have been different approaches that have explained the relationship between traditions as we have seen within the European literary trends themselves, for example regarding classic texts and the way in which they have been translated. If, at an early stage, those prestigious texts are the model and the translation tries to be close to the original, later, the growth in self-confidence of a literary tradition leads the translator to feel freer from the source text and to change it to fit the taste of the receiving culture. Therefore, a history of translation is also the history of the power relations between cultures.

Ngu~gĩ~ wa Thiong’o tries to find a conciliatory way: “Translation between the dominant languages and marginalized languages; translation between marginalized languages; translation as the common language of languages should go a long way towards enabling dialogues among the different world cultures, large or small. In contrast to Western self-aggrandizing globalization, we could create a better cultural foundation for egalitarian globalism.” (Thiong’o, 2007: p. 131).

While it is not possible to translate the meaning of the value of the work in the tradition to which it belongs, it is quite true that translation establishes a dialogue between literary systems that contributes to the constant change in the canon, both in foreign literature and in one’s own, since by inserting a text into a new context, it modifies the evaluation of literary works in both traditions.

In the case of Sheridan, the linguistic challenges are stylistic difficulties that are essential to 18th century Restoration comedies and make the richness of rhetoric devices visible to the present-day audience. The translation of Sheridan’s comedies need the translator’s imagination, as well as linguistic and cultural knowledge, for example, various aspects of the translation of humour, like in *The rivals*, where we find Mrs. Malaprop, continually changing the words for others phonetically similar but with a sense different from that desired, or in *The Critic*, with versification and bombastic language used for ironic effects, and since everyone would provide equally valid different solutions, it is essential to build a text consistent with itself and with a rhythm that facilitates reading to a current audience. A good example could be malapropisms, the wrong words similar in sound to the right ones that Mrs. Malaprop uses in Sheridan’s *The Rivals*.

6. Acting Traditions

Giving value to tradition is paramount for societies that want to maintain their identity. Acting traditions and theatre performances are considered intangible heritage and are a key element in aesthetic fitting. The awareness of what constitutes a tradition worthy of being preserved does not often exist without a previous re-evaluation. In a survey that asked Japanese farmers about their rituals and tra-

ditions, [...] “they were convinced that the Government and its specialists did not have any interest in *Bon* dancing (which occurs when planting rice as a prayer for a good harvest), although this was precisely the kind of information I was looking for” (Thornbury, 1994: p. 218). On the other hand, the long coexistence in Japan of the traditional with the new gives us a perspective of what can happen: “many communities dedicated to conservation groups have become clubs for the elderly, especially in the areas in which depopulation has left few people” (Thornbury, 1994: p. 220). Intangible heritage lives in constant change in order to survive and always depends on the people who perform it; for this reason UNESCO also protects the performers of this kind of heritage. One example of intangible heritage preservation is Los Cenzontles, an organization in California that is dedicated to the transmission of the Caribe Mexican musical heritage as regards songs and instruments or dance. It was created in 1994, and since then, its experience has led to interesting considerations with respect to the treatment this type of heritage requires. In their quest for repertoire they saw immediately that they would need teachers in the United States, and that these, in Mexico, improvised constantly, not allowing the fixing of standards. The variations are intrinsic part of the intangible and individual contributions change actions and repertoires. Especially important is the role of the teachers, as these are not formed in any kind of didactic concepts. Fabiola Trujillo, Member of the group, reflects upon this returning from Mexico: “Don Atilano says ‘look at me’, and ‘dance’, never says ‘bend your knees’; I have to decipher what he means watching him carefully and divide it into specific instructions to teach the children here at home” (Álvarez, 2003: p. 7). The oral transmission of traditional performances can be an excellent field of study to create awareness in the valuable nature of intangible heritage didactics and, in the case of theatre, of theatrical acting traditions.

The study of this kind of heritage is of special relevance today, in our multi cultural societies, as we can see, for example in the policy of Royal Flemish Theatre in Brussels: “The shift from a systematically upheld conservation and consecration of a(n illusory) singular and monocultural heritage to promoting cultural plurality attests to the institution’s awareness of its own influence, canonical power, and accountability” (Denolf, 2025: p. 128).

Acting traditions and trends are essential to performability and that is why, for example, it might be much more difficult to stage and translate a play written by Brecht than other classic authors, as he requires a kind of acting aesthetics that is not in vogue nowadays; we are currently used to plays which address our emotions and to be moved by a performance, while Brecht wants emotional distance and the audience to be intellectually engaged; he expels emotions from the equation in his search of a social analysis that is not biased by easily manipulated emotions. Another important element to bear in mind in connection with theatre is that even though scholarly research may sometimes neglect orality, much of theatrical intangible heritage is transmitted orally and requires attention to spoken language.

We should bear in mind the context in which Brecht's plays were first staged. One of the main reasons behind his plays was class struggle. Today, this issue has been neglected and the term itself almost forgotten. Brecht is a classic and he will be translated with some regularity but, the social reality may make the performance of his plays very challenging, as it has been the case in Catalonia. Some translation may suffer from the translator's self-censorship with the aim of making them fit into the new aesthetic trends.

Acting traditions and schools are also important for the aesthetic fitting of a play. They are intangible heritage that shape our view of playwrights and plays and that, although they are, mainly, orally transmitted, are worth studying in connection to performability. Thus, the study of a play as an aesthetic event and translation as a cultural performance can find in the field of intangible heritage a frame in which we can develop a fruitful analysis.

7. Aesthetics and Politics

The aesthetic fitting is determined by previous translation of a play, the criticism about an author, audience expectations and the trends in acting. The view about an author is often determined by the political context. We can see that analysing, for example, the aesthetics and the political views of Berthold Brecht described in the play *Tales from Hollywood* (1982) by Christopher Hampton.

The different theatrical conceptions of Brecht and Horváth diverge from the very basis of their texts. "In his works [of Horváth] language is not fundamentally a means of transmitting information, a form of reliable communication, but exists in dialectical relation with action, often denying it. In his intuition of the inadequacy of language, its distortions, the barriers it erects between human beings, the evasions it allows, Horváth can be seen as the nexus between Chekhov and Pinter" (Ketels & von Horvath, 1979: p. 40).

The discussion of the stylistic and ideological differences between Brecht and Horváth centre much of *Tales from Hollywood*, where the two spheres are always interrelated:

"As a student of German literature and a translator of Horváth, Hampton was undoubtedly well aware of the controversy surrounding the dramatic theories of Brecht and Horváth in the late 1960s. Horváth believed that the theatre should express the emotional instincts of ordinary people through the strange juxtapositions of their unconscious impulses and their absurd jargon, taken from popular clichés. He wrote about people with the fun distance that Hampton attributes to him in *Tales from Hollywood*, Brecht, on the other hand, is known for his theories of epic theatre with the empty scene, the characters and plot designed to expose the contradictions of the story" (Free, 1994: pp. 90-91).

Despite the seriousness of his style, Brecht remains optimistic, since he believes in the workers' revolution and, in turn, Horváth is pessimistic because he does not see a real way out of the problems of ordinary people: "Horváth in his criticism of nationalist sentimentalism maintains the same delicate balance between the comic

and the tragic as when dealing with his other black beasts. Like Dürrenmatt after him, he was convinced that the only genre capable of combating political tyranny was comedy. His works are all tragicomedies” (Genno, 1972: p. 318). Horváth’s poetics show an interest in people excluded from society that is ultimately condescending and that, finally, does nothing but highlight the differences in the social and especially in the cultural sphere.

The work of any of the authors portrayed in *Tales from Hollywood* cannot be simplified and reduced to favour easy dichotomies, much less so when both Brecht and Mann suffered the manipulation of their ideas and were doubly exiled for their intellectual courage, since in 1948 they again coincided, this time in Zurich, expelled from the United States by the anti-communist fight led by MacCarthy (Brecht & Bentley, 1963). Mann was accused of being a communist and Brecht, who was a true one, for his part, would not fit into the official aesthetics of the Soviet Union either.

Brecht, the official communist in the West, was not represented in the Soviet Union until the 1980s. His way of spreading Marxist ideas did not coincide with the mandates of social realism, as neither did the historical avant-gardes which were favoured by Lenin as a sign of the change of the bourgeois values of the past. With the rise of Stalin the Avant-garde suffered persecution and Brecht’s work was too formally innovative for Russian realism. But the German playwright never gave up any of his theatrical conception, as he argues in the magazine *France-Observateur*, on June 25, 1955:

“The man of theatre does not have to seek lessons from the state. Instead, the state can learn from the playwright; there are always problems, in fact, that society does not manage to solve; it is in this domain that the writer works; his imagination can help to complete these tasks; and he can even discover new tasks. In any case, it should not be a mirror or a spokesman” (*apud* Desuché, 1966: p. 112).

Theodor Adorno’s 1962 article “On compromise” is already well aware of the different and ambiguous interpretation of the ideology expressed in the artistic media: “The social function of the discussion on compromise has become somewhat confused. Cultural conservatives who ask a work of art to say something join forces with their political opponents against works of art with structural and hermetic defects” (*apud* Adorno & MacDonagh, 1978: p. 5). Now that we know that every discourse is inevitably ideologically marked, that the form is never empty of political meaning, we must not forget that our interpretation is possibly one more manipulation of the author’s aesthetics, perhaps a sum of meaning that enriches the text or perhaps a biased reading (Lefevere, 2016). In any case, theatre has been and is a perfect forum to discuss this issue and *Tales of Hollywood* one more piece in this reflection. The recent interest in the way in which plays have represented exile cannot ignore this fundamental aspect of the lives of intellectuals away from their homeland. Now that in many scenarios the rupture and social criticism have become pure cliché, it is good to remember the honesty and intellectual value of the truly committed authors. Now consideration of the role of art, especially the-

atre, seems appropriate, and the way in which each play fits into the aesthetic trends tells us a lot about our societies and the values that are promoted through cultural goods: “disorderly spaces of the café-concert, the popular song, and the theatre existed before the commodification, professionalization, and state-sanctioned rise of the cultural industry” (Lewis, 2014: p. 41).

8. The Director’s Play

Theatrical texts that get the attention of directors usually seem to deal with current issues but all works can somehow be connected to the present. Every year is a writer’s year and the cultural industry takes advantage of this to promote studies, edit books and organize conferences. All the attention the honoured writer obtains represents an ideological patronage that re-values and relocates him in the canon (it is rarely *her*) often to be forgotten the following year. There are many reasons why you can choose to translate a particular author. The translations into Spanish of *Volpone* (1605) by Jonson (1929), for example, were attributed to sociological reasons given that the piece talks about inordinate ambition and this feature is understood as characteristic of that time in Spain, but the truth is that, as Rafael Portillo and M^a José Mora say: “in reality, *Volpone*-mania had started a year earlier in Paris” (Pujante & Gregor, 1996: p. 90) when we find two of the translators of the work. On the other hand, there are works that, as in classics, have the virtue of always being topical, but this can also be an exaggeration. Shakespeare, for example, does not just describe the human soul, from my point of view, he enlarges the human soul and it is from this that we find pleasure in reading it, in fact, the feelings and emotions that he describes are of such intensity they may bring some of his characters to madness.

We talk about the “cultural industry” and when we commemorate anniversaries (either of someone’s death or birth or others) we determine the “modernity” of literary works and because they are very often sponsored by state institutions, they often result in censorship or auto-censorship. I had no problem translating 18th century playwrights into Catalan, but when I offered to translate the play *The Mysterious Mother* by Horace Walpole, no publishing house wanted to publish it because it talks about deliberate incest.

Regarding translation, it was Lefevere (2016), the scholar who studied translation as rewriting, and together with Bassnett (1991) the ones who introduced ideology into the considerations about translation. From this point of view, the translated text can be seen either as a battlefield or a meeting place of two cultures. The power relations between cultures are also expressed through translations and determine aesthetic values depending on the audience or reader’s view of the culture of origin. A prestigious culture can cause admiration or it can be seen as oppressing or paternalizing.

Translators also make their own reading of the texts and: “Any kind of translation is dependent on the translator’s perception of the focal points of the source text, something on which to build the translation” (Lass, 2023: p. 123). Translators are,

first of all, readers and every text has different points of appeal for each person.

For most of the theatrical world, the text is a starting point, not a point of arrival. Directors and actors feel free to cut, add or change the text, but this could have limits. There is, for example, the case of Tennessee Williams who, in 1974, took to court the German company *Theater der Freien Volksbühne* in Berlin that had modified his work *A Streetcar Named Desire* and won. There is a whole vocabulary in the field of theatrical translation that hides the impunity with which there may be unjustified distortions: adaptation, version or free version, and those terms are not clearly defined. Creativity should not be restricted but, one can be very creative without altering fundamental aspects of a play. However, determining what is and what is not fundamental is again a question of interpretation.

9. Hermeneutics and Theatre Translation

In translating a text, the constant decision-making seeking coherence in the final text responds to the choice of what aspects will be neglected or emphasized. There is a determining element in the meaning of a work, however, that can never be translated, and this is the place of the text in the tradition itself and the relationship it has to previous and later works.

In the case of Sheridan's comedies, as in all the plays of the past, a historical reconstruction changes every time there is a new staging; it is a reconstruction that cannot resemble how theatre was done in the 18th century, since both the behaviour of the audience and that of the actors, of whom we only have written descriptions, have changed radically. While occasionally parallels are made between film and literature or attempts are made to find out an author's film influences, we have not yet sufficiently introduced the visual and representation elements that the seventh art code prints in our reading and interpretation of literary texts. The way to imagine and represent the past has now much more to do with the films we have seen, despite the distortion that that entails, than with the readings we have done.

10. Limitations

The study of the role of aesthetic fitting can be very useful for all literary genres, each one with its own specifications. Narrative texts or poetry can also be studied under this concept and that may provide a more complete and extensive context and understanding of the meaning of each work, author, translator and reception. However, the concept connects with many multidisciplinary views (sociology, literary history or textual criticism, among others) and that may derive in vagueness unless there is a very clear scope and aim in the research.

11. Practical Implications

The practical implications for translations are that they can make more conscious choices regarding aesthetic choices and, therefore, may have more control and justification for their translators. Play directors may also benefit from this concept

as they have been applying it without a proper description of what it was they were doing and may better decide the extent to which they want to alter a text. As for researchers, this concept may be of use to have a more complex and dynamic view of the creative act of translating and the translator responsibility towards the author and the audiences.

12. Conclusion

The aesthetic fitting of a play can be smooth if the piece coincides with the mainstream aesthetic trends, it may innovate or even fill in a gap in a tradition, as the case of the translation of Sheridan's plays into Catalan, or it may pose aesthetic difficulties, like the translation of Brecht's works, if they show features not readily accepted by the audience. Actors and directors training and performative traditions are a key element in aesthetic fitting, as well as the aesthetic lines of theatre halls and what state institutions want to favour.

The concept of aesthetic fitting can be of use in the analysis of and commentary of translated works. It may be further studied and it may include more elements. The aim of this article has been to introduce the idea of a concept that bring together different aspects we may take into account in the research about translation of plays, but it can also be applied to any literary work: reception, considerations on the canon or political influence, acting traditions and schools. These aspects, that have traditionally been studied independently, can be framed within the idea of aesthetic fitting.

A literary translation is an aesthetic performance that dialogues with previous translations and criticism and that may open a path or reassure one, that is, it may reinforce one aesthetic trend or it may mean a rupture and the creation of new aesthetic possibilities for authors of the receiving culture or for future translations. As a performance, it is in constant change and it is determined by different elements: audience, setting, age, among others. A particular representation can be seen as a kind of phenomenon liable to be studied in all its complexity and singularity, although this is not contradictory with a more sociological point of view.

We should not forget the way in which translations sometimes engulf foreign cultures and blur the original meaning by transforming it into an aesthetic object fitting in a very different target culture. Literary criticism determines our interpretation of an author and therefore its translation; and a translation implies, in its turn, a criticism of the literary work. As an interpretative art, each translated work is a personal approach to the author, to the reader and to audience expectations. The manipulation of literature in the present creation of taste and the political interference or influence in aesthetics determine also the aesthetic fitting of a translation in a target culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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