



Turreted symmetrical buildings (c. 1890) in Copenhagen, Denmark

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POETRY: THEORY, PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK TO THEORY

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Abstract:

It is a tenet in Translation Studies that poems are ‘untranslatable’ or can be translated only by poets. The article challenges this view and holds that if this tenet is proved erroneous, other ‘unquestioned’ assumptions about translation may also be tested. True, no strict ‘equivalence’ is possible in poetry translation, but it is not possible in any type of translation anyway. The author describes classroom work in which students read one another’s poems, have lively discussions and ultimately feel encouraged to do ‘the impossible’, namely poetry translations. Sample student translations between Danish and English are discussed in terms of acceptability and poetic merit. The results indicate that, rather than a general case, André Lefevere deals with a special one in *Translation Poetry* (1975). The author holds that poetry must be assessed within the target culture and concludes that poetry translated into Danish employs fairly consistent compensatory strategies by introducing features considered ‘poetic’ in Danish culture.

KEYWORDS: Poetry translation: Translation theory; Danish; English students; Compensation in poetry translation.

Introduction

It is an oft repeated truism in translation that poetry cannot be translated, or at least that only poets can translate poetry. If I had to cite all the references I have come across which emphasise this fact, they would probably fill more than this article alone, so three examples will suffice.ⁱ ... // 131 ... Among the numerous clichés which still befog translation theory, this is one on which critics, theorists, practitioners and, of course, above all, poets, readily agree.

To challenge this assumption is therefore not only to cast doubt on the views held by a few ‘odd-balls’ (as theorists are to practitioners, and practitioners to theorists), but is also an implicit questioning of much thinking about translation, i. e. translation theory: if this sacred tenet can be questioned, it is obvious that other unchallenged presuppositions in any so-called theory or approach to translation may ultimately fall short when similarly tested.

In order to defy such cherished assumptions, one must declare one’s background. Mine is that of a translation scholar with some (little) remunerated translation and interpreting work and much experience in observing and drawing conclusions. Over the years, I have come to doubt the correctness of the dictum that poetry cannot be translated: a simple doubt, indeed. The reasons normally adduced to prove that poetry is impossible to translate are manifold: most of them concern the ‘spirit’ of the original poem, but occasionally questions of form also enter the picture. On the other hand, there are numerous people who have not only ‘translated’ poetry but have even been praised, indeed have received prizes, for doing so. In other words: in the translation world, publishers, critics, and the intelligentsia every so often accept translated poetry as ‘genuine and authentic translations of poetry’: witness the many translations of, say, Shakespeare’s difficult poetry.

On the other hand, there is no denying that it is impossible to translate poetry in the sense that we establish ‘identity’ between the source-language poem and the target-language poetry. This is surely not a tenable argument: it is true that the phantom monster of ‘equivalence’ still occasionally rears its ugly head, and mythical sightings of it still lure a few foreign language teachers and pupils into hunting ‘equivalent words’ and ‘equivalence’ itself through mazes of confusion. Yet the concept as such is so thoroughly flawed ontologically, culturally, in terms of literary traditions, in terms of audience reception, in terms of syntax and lexis, that we should speak of it only in the controlled domain of classroom settings where it is useful as a relative yardstick when domesticated and kept on a tight rein. ... // 132 ...

Students

It is not only translation theorists who argue that poetry cannot be translated by ordinary mortals, however. The representatives of these mortals closest to me in my daily life, my students, clearly share this view. Over the years, I have therefore smuggled in the occasional poem among other (prose) assignments to see what

would happen.ⁱⁱ

The first time I did this, the twenty or so solutions varied from inept, via competent and poetic renditions adequately reflecting the style and tone of the original, to very free adaptations. I realised that if I corrected these translations one by one and handed them back to the students individually, this would lead to yet another futile debate about whether poetry can be translated or not. I also know that students are rarely aware of their peers' performances. Therefore I decided to tackle the project in a different way. I picked out some four or five representative samples spanning the whole range of translations. I blotted out the names of the 'translators' and instead arranged them in an order starting with close translations via the good translations to the freest one. I numbered the translations, appointed two students (neither of them the 'author') to be 'critics' of each rendition, photocopied the lot and had each student read and prepare the poems.

I have had little occasion to prompt discussions in ensuing classes. The discussions have been lively and enlightened: 'Is this poetry?', 'Aha, so it can be translated', 'Oh no, it can't', 'Bad rhyme', 'The metre is poor', 'This has preserved the atmosphere of the original'. ...// 133 ... The main point, however, is that the second time I have handed out a poem for translation, the number of poetic translations submitted has increased manifold: in other words, there is a gradual realisation that poetic translation may not, after all, be impossible.

In addition, it is also evident that the students have considered these assignments to be much more challenging than ordinary 'run-of-the-mill' translations, and gradually, always informing students of the author's identity and (if available) the date of the poem, I have extended the repertory.ⁱⁱⁱ In the following pages, I shall present a few samples (from different classes and students) for discussion. The first two texts are English poems translated into Danish. For reasons of space, I present only the first stanza(s) for discussion.

English into Danish



English original

Byron: 'She walks in beauty'

- 1 She walks in beauty, like the night
- 2 Of cloudless climes and starry skies:
- 3 And all that's best of dark and bright
- 4 Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
- 5 Thus mellow'd to that tender light
- 6 Which heaven to gaudy days denies.

Selected Danish renditions

A.

Hun bærer skønheden i sig, ligesom natten
Med skyfri og stjernebestrøet himmel:
Og alt det bedste af mørke og lys
Mødes i hendes udseende og i hendes øjne:
Selvom hun afdempes af de blide lys
Som Himlen på strålende dage benægter.

B.

Hun går i skønhed som natten
Med skyfri himmelstrøg og stjerneklar himmel.
Og alt det bedste af sort og hvidt
Ses i hendes fremtoning og hendes øjne,
Således afdæmpet i det bløde lys
Som himlen nægter den skinnende lyse dag.

C.

Som natten, i skønhed hun går;
En nat med en himmel så skyfri med stjerner derpå.
Alt hvad der er ypperst af mørkt og lyst, hun formår
At udtrykke med sit ansigt og sine øjne blå:
Således mildes hun af lyset i disse år
Hvilket himlen til den pompøse dag benægte må.
... // 134 ...



English original

Rudyard Kipling: 'Hymn before action' (1896)

The earth is full of anger,
The seas are dark with wrath,
The Nations in their harness
Go up against our path:

Ere yet we loose the legions -
Ere yet we draw the blade,
Jehovah of the Thunders,
Lord God of Battles, aid!

Selected Danish renditions

D. Jorden er fuld af vrede,
Oceanerne er mørke af forbitrelse.
Nationerne i deres rustninger
Går op ad vores vej:
Førend vi mister legionerne -
Førend vi trækker sværdet,
Tordenvejrets Jehova,
Herre, Gud over krig, stå os bi!

E. Havene dystert raser
Verden er fuld af vrede
Nationer i harniskklæde
Kommer os taktfast i møde.
Endnu før vi taber slaget
Endnu før vi våbnene drager
Herren over alle vinde, skån os
Herren over alle krige, stå os bi.

F: Nu vreden hyller jorden,
Den klæder havet sort.
Nationerne i harnisk
Står samlet for vor port.
Før vi med kraft frembryder
og drager skjold og sværd,
O Gud, se til vor stræben,
Og ved vor side vær!

English into Danish: comments

It is noteworthy that, despite the relaxed atmosphere in the classroom (which might encourage sloppy work), no student has ever handed in a mere prose translation of the poems. This is quite surprising given that André Lefevere (1975: 42) claims that such translations are favourably received.

It seems that Danish undergraduates clearly consider the layout and the typographical form to be an integral part of a poem. There have been one or two cases in which translations have been one line longer than the original, but the above samples are representative, in so far as the target-language renditions

normally have the same number of lines as the original.

The two poems under discussion are radically different. One is a lyric in praise of a woman, and is not necessarily amorous and erotic. The second one is martial and imperial in its tone. ... // 135 ...

Poem A is marred by a prosaic spelling error (l. 5 'afdempes' instead of 'afdæmpes'), which spoils the poetic flavour. Within the confines of the rendition, it is less important that the last two lines fail to make sense [Back translation: "Even though she is toned down by the soft lights which Heaven denies on bright days"]. There is no attempt to rhyme; the iambic and anapestic rhythm is not regular but has the typical Danish unstressed endings in lines 1, 2, 6. On the other hand, there is still a contrast in line 3, and there is alliteration ('sk-' ll. 1-2; 'm-' in ll. 3-4) and an unusual assonance exploiting the Danish 'ø' sound. It remains fairly close to the original but is not an outstanding poetic rendition.

Poem B is semantically even closer to the English original. The rhythm is also predominantly iambic and anapestic, with three unstressed endings. Line 2 adds four syllables to the line and l. 6 three. There is no attempt at rhyme, but there is alliteration ('s-') throughout and a pronounced use of sibilants. This rendition is accepted as poetry by classes.

Rendition C uses the same rhyme scheme as the original, an iambic rhythm with stressed endings. The number of syllables varies, and there are two instances of unusual word order ('Som natten, i skønhed...' (l.1) and 'øjne blå' (l. 4)), a feature associated with archaic Danish poetry. The word 'pompøse' is unusual in a positive sense, and 'mildes' (l. 5) is a perfectly understandable *ad hoc* formation ('soften'). Unlike the original, the two last lines interpret the poem as a description of the woman's appearance over a period of years. Students also consider this rendition to be acceptable poetry.

As far as Kipling's poem is concerned, the tone is more sinister in all translations.

Rendition D has the imprint of dictionary usage. In line 2 the Danish words corresponding to 'seas' and 'wrath' are much too long to qualify as 'poetic'. Line 4 is a calqued word-for-word translation, and the phrasing is suggestive of a walk along a road in the suburbs, rather than of an imminent threat of war. In line 5, 'loose' has been mistaken for 'lose', and 'Thunders' (l. 7) is interpreted as 'thunder storm'. ...// 136 ... The rhythm is mostly iambic and anapestic. On the other hand, the layout and the tone still preserve some semblance of poetry.

E has chosen to emphasise some features (l: 'dystert' ('sinister'), 'taktfast' (l. 4: in step), to use an *ad hoc* word which is understandable ('harniskklæde') and allows for a coupled rhyme ('vrede' - 'klæde'), and an inversion ('vi våbnene drager'). 'Thunders' are 'winds', and Jehovah is asked to show mercy ('skån os'). There are two inversions (l. 1 'dystert raser'; l. 6 'vi våbnene drager'). The poem does evoke enough poetic associations to qualify as poetry for most readers.

F is predominantly iambic, and every second line rhymes. Although l. 5 is not unambiguous ('break through' (like the sun through clouds)) and l. 7 refers to 'ambition', there are alliterations (ll. 1-2 'h-' initial and stressed; ll. 4 ('s-'), l. 4-5 ('s-'), ll. 6-7-8, and 8 'v-'). This is clearly poetic.

Danish into English

Danish original

Tove Ditlevsen: Det skønneste jeg ved ('The most beautiful thing I know')

Jeg kysser dine læber
og leger med dit hår,

men dine øjne taler
et sprog, jeg ej forstår.

Du taler, og jeg elsker
din tunges lette spil,
kun taler du om noget,
jeg ikke kender til.

Selected English renditions

G.

I kiss your lips
my hand plays with your hair
but in your eyes I see
a language strange and fair.

You speak, and I do love
the light touch of your tongue,
but what your words are saying
is like an unknown song.

H.

I press soft kisses down upon
your lips, and my heart sighs,
for I can never understand
the language of your eyes.

Your words are delicate and wise,
and they are dear to me,
but what your words are pointing at
is not for me to see.

... // 137 ...

Danish original



N. F. S. Grundtvig: Dejlil er den himmel blå ('The blue sky is so wonderful')

Dejlil er den himmel blå

lyst det er at se derpå,
hvor de gyldne stjerner blinke,
hvor de smile, hvor de vinke
os fra jorden op til sig.
Selected English renditions

I.
Lovely is the dark blue night,
watching it is true delight,
as the golden stars do gleam,
as their smiles make our joy stream
from the earth to their realm.

J.
Beautiful, the sky is blue.
Bright it is to witness, too.
How the golden stars they twinkle
How they laugh and how they tingle
Bringing joy from them to us.

Danish into English: comments

The Danish poems I selected for translation are simpler than the English ones because I assumed that students would find it more difficult to translate into a foreign language than into their mother tongue. It is my intuitive impression that, overall, Danish poetry may be less complicated than English poetry. At all events, the two Danish poems are, respectively, a well-known iambic love poem by a woman author from the 1960s, whereas the second is a popular Christmas hymn from the last century. ... // 138 ...

G and H do not render the iambic simplicity of the lyrical original and the number of syllables is also significantly higher in English. On the other hand, they both retain the rhyme scheme and they also convey the simple feeling of isolation in the poem. There are a few questions of interpretation (or, as some would have it, ‘distortion’) taking precedence for, I assume, purposes of rhyme. For reasons to be discussed below, I consider it highly significant that both fail to preserve the alliterations of the original (ll. 1-2 ‘l-’; ll. 3-4 ‘s-’; ll. 5-8 ‘t-’).

The second poem is also simple, and both renditions cited retain the rhyme scheme. In this case there is, however, one important additional constraint: celebrating the birth of Christ, this hymn is one of the most popular Christmas carols in Denmark and the tune is known to everybody. In addition, I had handed this poem out complete with musical notation. Small wonder, then, that I received only few attempts at a solution. Those cited retain the rhyme scheme, but I has more syllables than the original. Conversely, by a sleight of hand, introducing sound instead of the visual signals of the original [Back translation of lines 4-5: ‘How they smile, and how they beckon us from Earth to their [abode]’], J succeeds in making her translation singable in accordance with the original Danish tune. Both renditions convey the serenity and the simplicity of the original and they do so throughout the five stanzas.^{iv}

Poetry translation: a discussion

In sum: one does not have to be an acknowledged poet to translate poetry adequately. This does not mean, of course, that everybody can translate poetry, but it does imply that many people are capable of translating poetry once they have been made aware that their peers can. It is not an ability which is lost with age: I have encouraged my c. forty-year-old Open University students to do it as well and their attempts were (possibly because of higher motivation) better than those of the ordinary full-time students in their early twenties. ... // 139 ...

There are, however, a few features that merit further discussion. In his celebrated book, *Translating Poetry*, André Lefevere uses a poem by the Latin poet Catullus for his description of the strategies that translators have employed to translate it, namely (1) phonemic translation; (2) literal translation; (3) metrical translation; (4) poetry into prose; (5) rhymed translation; (6) blank verse; (7) interpretation (subdivided into 'version' and 'imitation'). He discusses the pros and (mainly) the cons of each procedure in fairly scathing terms. In the course of the discussion, he highlights a number of problematic procedures, which I am disinclined to believe tie up with the specific strategies under discussion. In the summing up ('Prescription', pp. 95-104) he essentially points out that each of the above strategies restricts a translator's choices. Lefevere posits that, in order to make a satisfactory literary translation, the translator must (a) comprehend the source text as a whole, (b) render the communicative value and avoid distortions not present in the source text, (c) be able to distinguish between structure-bound and culture-bound features (i.e. features dependent on, respectively, other elements in and the overall structure of the poem, as opposed to factors dependent on time and space), and (d) select some adequate correspondence in the target language. Later (pp. 108-109) he argues that a text is not made 'literary' by its theme, and that 'poetry' does not denote any particular form of verse.

These points suffice for the present article.

In my classes I have never encountered phonemic translation (1), metrical translation (3) and blank verse (6). There are two obvious reasons for this. The first is that none of the poems selected have used euphony, and the second is that the Danish basic metre is different from the English basic metre: English tends to have monosyllabic words, whereas Danish has polysyllabic words.^v I may have met with 'version' although I have not preserved any examples.^{vi} There have been two 'imitations', in so far as the translator has used the original poem as a starting point for a new poem (Lefevere 1975: 76). ...// 140... Oddly enough there are no translations into prose, except my own. My prose translation for 'The most beautiful thing I know' goes like this:

The most beautiful thing I know.

Bliss.

My beauty.

I kiss your lips....

....and fondle your hair....

....and caress your hair....

....and your hair I caress....

(wrong) play with your hair

(wrong) tossle your hair

....but your eyes are speaking....

....a language I do not know.

....a language whose meaning I cannot guess.

This prose translation is intended for class discussion in which we deal with the process of decoding. The suggestions in italics are in my view legitimate and adequate renditions, whereas the ones in bold are indisputably wrong.^{vii} It seems to me that Lefevre missed the point that the two translations of this type which he discusses are similarly meant to 'give the reader an impression of what the original says' and were never intended to be autonomous literary masterpieces in English.

Other important reasons for Lefevre's results differing so markedly from mine are that:

- linguistically Latin is further from English than Danish: in other words, the linguistic surface is more different between Latin and English than between Danish and English:

Danish-English translation will allow for more 'phonemic' proximity; ...// 141 ...

- the syntactically marked classical Latin allows for more complexity in sentence building than do Danish and English;

- it is important that we are essentially dealing with different types of poems: Catullus' poem is an epic, whereas the poems I have discussed are lyrics concerned with admiration, love, martial pride and religious sentiment. This fact invalidates some of the generalisations that Lefevre makes, for they are obviously only applicable to the type of poem he discusses, not to 'poetry' in general. Conversely, of course, the same also applies to some of the points I make. Yet it seems to me that the main difference is that although both of us have failed to explain whether we were dealing with the distinction so usefully made by Gideon Toury (1995: 166-180) between 'translation of literary texts' (in the source language) and 'literary translation (meant to be literature in the target language)', Lefevre made the mistake of discussing all his target texts, including that from the 'Loeb Classic Library', as if they were adequate poetic renditions (which they are not), whereas I focused only on translations having literary merit.

Returning to Lefevre's categories, we may note that among my student solutions there are some fairly literal translations, A and B being the most obvious examples.

Otherwise, I must argue that the poetic translations I have discussed are, if not poetry on a par with the originals, at least not abysmally bad. What is more: they are accepted as poems by the majority of my students, who do, after all, belong to the target group for poetry in Denmark.

Lefevre states that "translations can only be judged by people who do not need them" (p. 7), but this is surely too bland. It must be modified: "The adequacy/quality of translations can only be judged by people who do not need them", for most readers of translated poetry can read only the translated poem. This is at least one crux of the matter. ... //142 ...

The translated poem exists independently of the original, and is entirely at the mercy of target culture readers. If they consider it poetry, so it is. A pragmatic detail in my classes is worth mentioning: the students receive photocopies of the translated poems, not of the originals, which I rarely see in front of them during our discussions. In other words, the discussion of the artistic merit of the translations is largely severed from the source text. However, the moment the student or scholar introduces the artifice of straddling the source and the target text in a comparative collation line by line, this brings out formal differences and semantic 'distortions' between the two texts and, of course, also reveals 'imitation', i.e.

renditions which have used the original only as a springboard. In order to assess the adequacy of translated poems, we must therefore decide whether they must be assessed in relation to the 'originals' or in relation to the audience in the target language. In reality, there is not much overlap between these two circuits.

The poems as autonomous entities

In the above discussions, I have indeed considered the translated poems as exactly that, namely poems that were translated and could therefore be compared to the original. This is also what André Lefevere did. He argued that the strategies he uncovered were used consistently by the individual translators, and, since most of them failed to state the nature of their intended audience, Lefevere's approach seems fair enough for lack of a better yardstick.

In my classes, the translator's intended audience is either me or the student's own conception of 'typical Danish poetry' (or both). But the next time they are confronted with a poem, the students know that the audience will be their peers and that they should aim at producing 'Danish poetry'. Although I have cited only two examples of 'Danish poetry', it will be appreciated that this concept will cover many different types of poetry, so the students will have a tolerably well-defined audience in mind, and even one familiar with poetry from school. ... //143 ...

The criteria for assessing the success of poetry translation are thus linked with two different components in the translation process and its outcome, namely (a) the decoding of the original (that is, comprehension), and (b) the encoding (that is the integration into the target-language system and the target-language poetry tradition).

In another context, I have argued that in a translation context, a text can be discussed at four overlapping levels, namely:

- the structural layer (covering the textual order of elements, passages and episodes);
- the linguistic layer (including euphony, sounds, words, word order, 'style');
- the content layer (the interrelationships constituting the main points for an interpretation); and
- the intentional layers.^{viii}

A collation of the poems reveals one example of structural change, namely in ll. 1-2 of rendition E which has changed the order of 'earth-sea' to 'sea-earth'. There are many differences in the linguistic layers in so far as the rhythm and the rhymes of the originals are not rendered in the target-language poems. There are considerable changes in terms of contents: Lines 5-6 in A, B, and C are difficult to understand. D: 2 has misread the verb of the original. G: 8 introduces a 'song' and H: 7 an intention, neither of which are found in the original poem. I: 4 makes the human observers active and J introduces sounds where the original has signals. Overall, however, the intentions, 'the thematic gist or spirit' of the poems survives, not only in the most poetic renditions, but in all of them.

The moment we turn to the translations as poems in their own right, the result is different.

The structural layer shows one inconsistency in D, E and F: ll. 5-6, in which a nation cannot logically lose its legions, lose the battle, or break a siege, before it draws its sword. ... // 144 ...

The linguistic layer has several interesting features. The spelling error in A is a disaster in terms of poetic credibility. A is also so poor in rhythm that it does not qualify as truly poetic. The other Danish renditions, however, are far better integrated in terms of rhythms which are accepted as 'poetic'. We find *ad hoc* forms (C: 'mildes' (5), E: 'harniskklæde' (3)). There are changes in the word order (which I discussed above) and which lend the translations a poetic tone. There are a few archaic or at least outmoded words which add a poetic flavour: 'ypperst' 'formår' (C: 3), 'stå os bi' (D, E: 8), 'drage

(sværd)' (E, F: 6), 'for[an]' (F: 4). It is notable that rhymes are not used quite as much as in the originals and that repetitions are about the same, whereas alliteration is used more extensively in Danish than in English.

Contentwise, there are several shifts between *agens* (activity, subjects) and *patiens* (passivity, objects): B: 4 ('ses'), G: 7 ('words'). Some figurative phrases are muddled (A, B, C: 5-6, presumably because of poor decoding), D: 4 (possibly a wrong corresponding phrase), whereas F has strengthened the images by personifying 'wrath'. In terms of internal consistency in the target language poems, even the most problematic points, namely lines 5-6 in A, B, and C, are only slight ambiguities.

The intention, indeed the overall idea of all poems, is transferred successfully.

Conclusion: poetry translation

The translations made by my students are inevitably connected with time and place, indeed with the specifics of a classroom setting which change every year. When we approach their poems by straddling the sending and the receiving cultures, there are many differences, and if we believe that it is possible to have equivalence at all levels spanning from letters and sounds to overall designs, we might term all deviations from this ideal for 'distortions'.

Some ambiguities are due to an incomplete understanding of the source text, indeed an ambiguity in it (Byron, ll. 5-6). Others to an incomplete mastery of the target language, especially with doubtful collocations (C: 6 'pompøse [dag]'). ... // 145 ... And perhaps we can also argue that a structural analysis would reveal that 'Thunders' connects with war (Kipling: 7) and not with thunder storms (D: 7) or winds (E: 7).

If we approach the poems as Danish poems, A has poetic overtones, notably in terms of the layout, but does not qualify as poetry. Conversely B and C are acceptable. So are D, E, F because they successfully convey the martial atmosphere of the original. G and H communicate the sense of isolation well, and in their entirety I and J convey the joyous serenity.

The Danish poems work because they fit with the Danish rhythm patterns, and also into a specific tradition which demands less frequent rhymes than most English poetry (cf. Poem 3). At the same time, the 'Danish translators' have compensated. They do so at the structural level by changes in word order associated with poetic usage, at the linguistic level by creative language usage in the form of ad hoc words and notably by introducing 'poetic' words and, above all, by using alliteration - which is the ancient Nordic metric mode. It is in this last context that I find absence of alliteration in the English renditions of the first Danish poem particularly interesting: it corroborates the impression that alliteration is considered poetic in a Danish context. The content layer is frequently changed, but these variations are most often explicable in terms of the internal consistency of the poem, or in the 'poem-audience' context (to make for rhythm or rhyme), and it does not affect the 'intentionality' of the poem.

In sum, there is no single strategy for translating poetry from English into Danish which can be used uncritically, but on the other hand it seems as if there are fairly consistent compensatory strategies which are used at the structural and linguistic layer and which will ensure that much poetry will be accepted by Danish readers, especially so if they do not have access to the original.

Poetry translation: general conclusions

In his book, André Lefevere concentrated on epic poetry, and also on a language pair with many syntactical and lexical differences. ...// 146 ... The approach I have used in my classes has a wider range

of poetry and indicates that translators will use a range of compensatory strategies that bring the poetry they translate into line with characteristic features of their national poetry. Until studies involving other binary language pairs have been conducted, this assumption, however, can only hold good for translations into Danish (I have not discussed the English renditions in similar detail since I am, after all, not a native speaker of English).

Another result is that it is possible to prompt many non-poets to produce competent poetry translation. Poetry translation is therefore not the exclusive province of a chosen few. The widely held belief that poetry cannot be translated unless one is a poet is wrong.

As I hinted at the beginning of the present article, this implies that other translation tasks considered to be 'impossible' are not always so, and that even widely held views should be tested thoroughly before they are accepted. This is certainly food for thought.⁹

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NOTES

ⁱ E. g. Islam: "[the translator should] preferably be a creative writer himself." (1995: 61). Ray: "poets are possibly the best translators of poetry, since the language of a poem is emotive and ambiguous and often exploits several levels of meaning. Only a highly sensitive poet has access to the 'sanctum sanctorum' of a poet, and will therefore never translate a poem mechanically." (1995: 245). Octavio Paz, who believes that poetry can indeed be translated, notes that not "everyone shares my view, and many modern poets insist that poetry is untranslatable." (1992: 155).

ⁱⁱ I have used poetry translations both as part of a special course on literary translation at M.A. level, and on translation courses at B. A. level at the University of Copenhagen. All examples discussed are from the B.A. classes. Students have had a minimum of eight years of English before they enter university.

ⁱⁱⁱ I introduce poems that I have used in previous classes as well as new ones. I always do a poetic translation myself,

so as to prove that it is possible.

iv. This carol was used once and only six students attempted it. One of these was actually a student who believed that poetry could not be translated and therefore gave up the attempt herself. Instead she tried to find the ‘authorised’ translation. In itself this is not quite as hopeless as it appears, for, by international standards, Danish literature is one of the most frequently translated. The student did find a translation of the hymn which we discussed in class. The entire hymn given to the class for translation consisted of six stanzas. The translation she had identified failed to translate the fourth and the fifth stanzas which are crucial to the message of the hymn.

v. In other words: blank verse is a rhythmic oddity in Danish. Yet the Danish translational tradition insists to this day that Shakespeare (and other Elizabethans) should be translated into blank verse in Danish without realising that it thus transforms fluency into cranky foreignness. The emotional involvement among translators and the general public make it impossible to discuss this phenomenon objectively.

vii. This model was first discussed in Dollerup 1986. I have since added the ‘intentional’ layer, as pertinent in a literary context. The model does not presuppose a major theory and is independent of the units covered (structural can thus cover any unit from a (referential) word to major sections in a work).

viii. This article is a slightly revised form of an article which is also to be published by the Jordanian Translators’ Association. The author recognises the grace and speed of the Jordanian Translators Association in allowing for the publication in ‘Tradterm’.

