Language politics, translation, and American literary history

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The article deals with the problem of linguistic alterity in American literary histories. The debate over the 'foreignness' or the 'domesticity' of a text or translation is usually conducted in a rather polarizing fashion, as in the case of Venuti (1995). Venuti's conceptual framework fails to provide adequate criteria for differentiating domesticating and foreignizing translation strategies, which easily results in inflated claims about the linguistic hegemony of the Anglo-American world. In reaction to this, the article reconceptualizes the two translation strategies as part of the paradoxical internal logic of culture in order to highlight how every culture is continually in the process of (re-)translating itself. Therefore, the analysis is broadened to include the domesticating aspects of the foreignizing strategy, and vice versa, the foreignizing potential of domesticating translations. The domestication of the foreign is evident in the ambiguous inclusion of non-English or bilingual texts in American literary histories. The foreignization of the domestic, by contrast, appears from a persistent tendency on the part of literary historians to describe their forerunners or competitors as excessively Anglo- or Eurocentric. Through this reflexive application of Venuti's strategies, the article draws attention to the paradoxical togetherness of the foreign and the domestic inside American literary culture.

Keywords: translation, domestication/foreignization, multilingualism, American literary history, Anglocentrism, language politics

0. Introduction

The issue of language in relation to the politics of identity is conventionally approached in terms of oppositions like assimilation and resistance, similarity and difference, or particularism and universalism. It has often been noted that such pairs simplify the debate by creating false polarities. Yet, their appeal seems to

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be undiminished. Thus, in *The translator's invisibility* Lawrence Venuti (following Schleiermacher) has introduced a distinction between domesticating and foreignizing translation methods, or between "bringing the author back home" on the one hand, and "sending the reader abroad" on the other hand (1995: 20). While Venuti's preference clearly goes out to the latter option, his book is built on the thesis that since the Second World War the former strategy has predominated in the Anglo-American world. According to Venuti, most English translations of 'foreign' texts perpetuate a form of cultural manipulation by domesticating the original to the values of the dominant target culture. Such translations suggest an illusion of 'transparency' and 'fluency'. The translator then becomes, as it were, *invisible*.

Venuti's case has met with strong criticism from within Translation Studies. The problem seems to lie with his rather loose argumentative style as well as the 'fluency' of his concepts. For one thing, Venuti rather unproblematically confounds the English-speaking world with the US and Great Britain, which he describes as "aggressively monolingual" countries that are highly "unreceptive to the foreign" (15). Venuti thus simply assumes that a 'foreign' text is a text in a language other than English, and in a sense perpetuates rather than questions the 'ethnocentric violence' he ascribes to English-language translation practices. In general, there seems to be no self-evident link between domesticating strategies and a 'transparent' view on translation, or vice versa, between foreignization and a more 'resistant' attitude. As Maria Tymoczko puts it: "any translation procedure can become a tool of cultural colonization, even foreignizing translation" (2000: 35). Nowhere, moreover, does Venuti supply watertight criteria to differentiate foreignizing from domesticating translation methods. In what way does the choice of the source text play a role? Or the cultural context in which the translation is produced?

Probably in reaction to such objections, and drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's conception of minor literatures, Venuti has more recently shifted his terminology to "major" and "minor" translating (Venuti 1998a, b). These labels, however, seem to run into similar problems. How minor, for instance, does a minor literature have to be to be recognized as such? The point to note is that the 'ethnocentric violence' that Venuti ascribes to standard translations into English only becomes *visible* when the domesticating strategy has already been turned against itself, in other words, when it has been foreignized/minoritized. One could say that the violation retroactively calls itself into existence, like a trauma that manifests itself long after the occurrence that caused it. When applying concepts like domestication and foreignization, therefore, and this dual seems as good or bad as any other, we should also consider the possibility of

applying these concepts to themselves. In other words, we should try to deal with them *reflexively*. What counts as 'domestic' or 'foreign' is always already decided within a specific cultural constellation. Similarly, translation practices, however 'resistant', will to some extent reflect such a constellation.

My objective in this article is to confront the problem of linguistic alterity in American literary history. How hostile or receptive is the field toward 'foreign' languages and literatures (however defined)? In what ways has it accommodated non-English literary texts? How (in-)visible are such texts in the narrative presented by American literary histories? In tackling such questions, I have tried to steer free from, on the one hand, a too naïve or too rhetorical use of disjunctive concepts and, on the other hand, the categorical rejection of such concepts *per se*.[2] Instead, the goal has been to make them amenable to analysis and draw them into the object of study. In my opinion, oppositions like domestic/foreign, same/other, resistance/submission, and so on, trigger specific expectations that drive forward the discourse about linguistic otherness in two ways. On the one hand, they indicate what in a given context it is deemed normal (which may very well collide with the *ab*normal) by suggesting a preference for one side of the opposition, which is thus catapulted beyond doubt. On the other hand, they keep open the possibility of reverting to the other side, thus licensing what Edward Said would call "returns" to culture (1994: xiii–xiv).

1. Paradoxes of culture

Dichotomies like domestic/foreign can be said to articulate the basic observation schema of culture. Their function is to create a coherent worldview by setting the known off against the unknown, or those who belong against those who don't. In doing so, however, such binaries at the same time open up the possibility for comparison between different cultures, and in this way allow self-criticism to sneak in. Any formerly colonized nation or group insisting on its cultural autonomy (which, in a sense, applies to *all* nations or groups) has to do so in relation to the colonial power that at once obstructs and enables this process of autonomization. Such cultures usually assert their independence from an imperial center by emphasizing that they are not (yet) independent enough. Their cultural identity thus becomes evident in the search for it. One might call this dynamic the *paradoxical logic* of culture. Simply put, it entails that the identification of differences is only possible on the basis of the identity of alterity and identity. The opposition domestic/foreign thus makes up the

paradoxical unity that symbolizes cultural identities by indicating the togetherness of things that do not normally go together.

I should note that this article is less concerned with concrete translation practices, which are always embedded in a specific cultural context, than with the broader translational work of American literary history as a field or discourse. What continues to trouble me in relation to Venuti's framework is the casualness with which it tends to classify 'foreignizing' or 'minoritizing' translations as newer, more creative, more valuable, etc. than 'domesticating' or 'major' ones, which are thereby packed into an amorphous residual category comprising anything that does not live up to Venuti's standards. If anything, this reveals Venuti's blindness to the polyvocality of his own culture.[3] Thus, even while eloquently arguing for the importance of translations in intercultural communication, Venuti rather problematically homogenizes his own and other cultures' linguistic make-up by diametrically opposing the Anglo-Saxon power block to the rest of the world and thus confirming instead of dismantling prevalent myths about the growing predominance of the English language. I think such myths cannot be the basis of systematic analysis but have to be drawn in the object of study.

From my perspective, domestication and foreignization constitute opposite but complementary strategies for the accommodation of linguistic differences.[4] While the domesticating strategy accommodates cultural items (authors, texts, periods, movements, or whatever else) by indigenizing or assimilating them, the foreignizing strategy does so by underscoring their particularity. Although they go in opposite directions, both strategies in the end fill a similar social function: they ensure that the item enters into the discourse of belonging or identity by which a specific culture describes itself in relation to the rest of the world. Even a highly 'resistant' translation explicitly designed to take down the institutionalized values of the target culture may therefore articulate that culture's identity by challenging domesticated assumptions about it and by promoting a *return* to what are perceived as the basics of that culture. Identifying an item as being 'foreign', even while underscoring its radical otherness, necessarily involves an attribution process that largely remains *invisible* to those involved.[5]

One way of bringing such translation processes to the fore is by making concepts like 'domestic' and 'foreign' applicable to themselves. In principle this results in a four-fold typology:

– *Domesticating the foreign*: indigenization of items that were previously excluded or disregarded for being too removed from canonized culture

- *Domesticating the domestic*: reinterpretation of established items on the basis of changing values or academic thought styles
- *Foreignizing the domestic*: ostracism of established items that have come to appear too parochial or self-involved to be still representative of the whole culture
- *Foreignizing the foreign*: exclusion or obliteration of items that appear too alien to be registered in the discourse of belonging

The second and fourth types seem to constitute something like limit cases. I can discuss them only summarily here. The domestication of the domestic can be related to the foundational literary texts that are supposed to represent core American values. As the social context changes, the founders are reinterpreted in function of this changing climate. If the dominant social theme is democracy, for example, it will usually find its most *vocal* representation in the work of the literary founders (as in Matthiessen 1941). When the typical code words are race, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality, it appears that these issues once again end up being most troubling and complex in the classic texts (e.g. Pease 1990). Behind all this is the assumption of the undisputed priority of the foundational texts as well as the sense that they are responsible for forging a culture and language common to all Americans. One could say that American literary history is thus caught in a self-validating loop, whereby the reinterpretations of the canon tend to reinforce its centrality, and vice versa.

The foreignization of the foreign, on the other hand, is evident in the complete omission or *forgetting* of texts or authors that appear too foreign to be even classified as 'foreign.' They are altogether left out of American literary histories and are not thematized in the debates dealing with the differential qualities of American literature. As an example may count the German followers of James Fenimore Cooper. Those who lived for a while in the US, like Balduin Möllhausen, Friedrich Gerstäcker or Charles Sealsfield (Karl Postl) are sometimes mentioned in early histories of American literature in sections about German-American writings. But those who only wrote about the West from afar appear nowhere, as in the case of Karl May (who *did* visit the US late in life but avoided the places where his Western novels are set). Do May's immensely popular novels (which up until recently were scarcely noticed by German literary historians either) belong in a history of American literature? What sets them apart from the work of so-called German-Americans? However interesting or relevant, such questions do not usually arise in American Studies because they exceed the institutionalized boundaries of the discipline.

The domesticity of the domestic and the foreignness of the foreign both reflect the institutional logic of American literary history. The problem of linguistic alterity, however, is more conspicuous in relation to the two remaining strategies, which are more like oxymorons than tautologies, that of the domestication of the foreign and that of the foreignization of the domestic. I will now discuss these legitimizing strategies in slightly more detail on the basis of concrete examples. I should stress, however, that in spite of being diametrically opposed, the strategies presuppose each other and are often at work together. The reason I take them apart here is thus merely for the sake of analysis.

2. Domesticating the foreign

By the domestication of the foreign I refer to the mechanism by which 'foreign' texts are included into the American canon. Paradoxically, the strategy by which the foreign is domesticated at the same time marks it as being 'foreign'. This sets it off from Venuti's conception of domesticating translations that (supposedly) completely wipe out the foreignness of the source text. Consider translations of the classic heritage. It has long been recognized that the translation of the classics by European nations was part of a larger project of nation building. Something similar happened in the US where early literary historians were eager to construct analogies between American culture and its European counterpart. Thus, Charles F. Richardson linked the beginnings of American culture, not only to the "chosen people" of Israel, but also to Tacitus, who first described the traits of the "Saxon mind" (1891: 9). According to the Duyckinck brothers, the first literary work in America was George Sandys's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. For the Duyckincks, Sandys's translation signaled the coming of a "Golden Age of Virginia" (1855: 1). If the rhetoric of later literary histories tends to be somewhat less euphoric, many of them still refer to Sandys as the first conscious literary artist in America.

In my opinion, Venuti's conceptual apparatus fails to capture the complexity of such cultural negotiations. The construction of classical roots for American literature cannot simply be regarded as a domesticating move, since this would be to disregard the fact that the Old Testament and the classics clearly functioned as models or guiding principles for American culture to follow. Probably because Venuti developed his theory of translation in response to the global dominance of the English-speaking nations in the world (that is: the US and Great Britain) during the second half of the twentieth century, it cannot seem to make sense of a target culture that is not completely in power over the

source culture. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the US had grown into a political and economic giant but still counted as a cultural dwarf. The frequent analogies with European sources in early literary histories (cf. notions like the American 'Renaissance') therefore had to bestow cultural legitimacy on the US as a nation. This was more than simply a domesticating move. American literary histories envisioned a *return* to European culture in order to assert the distinctiveness of American culture against it. The Old World was at once very close and very far, both native and 'foreign'.

This paradoxical logic is particularly evident in relation to the vast body of immigrant literatures in the US, especially those in languages other than English. An interesting example in this regard is the autobiography of Carl Schurz (1829–1906), who after the failed German Revolution of 1848 had to build a new life for himself in the US, where he became a leading politician and prominent spokesperson of the German-American community. Schurz's memoirs, on which he started working towards the end of his life but which he failed to complete, are usually approached as a plain English text written by a German immigrant, or, at best, as a German language work that was consequently translated into English. Thus, Albert B. Faust enlists Schurz's *Reminiscences* in a separate chapter on "Non-English Writings" of the first *Cambridge history of American literature* because, although widely read in English, they "were first written in German" (1921: 586).[6] In fact, however, Schurz only wrote the first volume, dealing with his youth in Europe, in German, while the two other volumes, covering his life in America, were rendered in English. As he says in the first volume (which was translated into English by Eleonora Kinnicutt):

> When I began to write these reminiscences of my youth, I attempted to do so in English; but as I proceeded I became conscious of not being myself satisfied with the work; and it occurred to me that I might describe things that happened in Germany, among Germans, and under German conditions, with greater ease, freedom, and fullness of expression if I used the German language as a medium. I did so, and thus this story of my youth was originally written in German. (*Reminiscences* I: 4)

Schurz, who quickly after his arrival in the US became fluent in English (purportedly by reading the *Philadelphia ledger*), was convinced that some things could be better expressed in German (like philosophy, poetry, and intimate conversation), while others lent themselves better to English (such as the political speeches he delivered in his later life).[7] Moreover, as a prominent ethnic leader of the German-American community he frequently stressed that German-Americans could best serve their adopted country by learning to speak

English well while at the same time retaining their mother tongue. Thus, in one of the many speeches he delivered to representatives of that community he argued:

> Nobody will dispute that the German-American in America must learn English … He owes it to his new country and he owes it to himself. But it is more than folly to say that he ought, therefore, to give up the German language. I have always been in favor of sensible Americanization, but this need not mean a complete abandonment of all that is German. (cited in Trefousse 1998: 293)

However, the eventual publication of Schurz's *Lebenserinnerungen/Reminiscences*, of which only some excerpts were published in serial form during his lifetime, has to some extent obfuscated this pronounced advocacy of bilingual citizenship. After Schurz's death, McClure streamlined the writings into a monolingual English text for the American audience, with a short sketch of his political career after 1869 by Frederick Bancroft and William A. Dunning as a substitute for the unfinished third volume. Around the same time in Berlin, Georg Reimer released the 'original' first volume in German, followed by a slightly abbreviated version in one book of the second and third volumes (later supplemented by a third book containing a selection of Schurz's political speeches). Schurz's daughter Agathe was responsible for translating the American memoirs into German. As she states in the preface to the second book:

> Es war natürlich, dass meinem Vater bei der Aufzeichnung seiner Jugenderinnerungen die Muttersprache in die Feder floss. Als er aber seine Erlebnisse in der neuen Heimat und die politischen Ereignisse in Amerika beschreiben wollte, bot sich ihm unwillkürlich die englische Sprache, die ihm in dem neuen Wirkungskreise geläufig geworden war und die es ihm gestattete, seine Gedanken über diese Verhältnisse prägnanter auszudrücken. (*Lebenserinnerungen* II: v)
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> [It was only logical that, when my father wrote down his reminiscences of childhood, he used his mother tongue. However, when he decided to record his experiences in the new homeland and the political events in America, the English language spontaneously forced itself upon him. This language, which he had come to use in his new working environment, allowed him to express his thoughts about those events more succinctly. (trans. MB.)]

Agathe further notes that only those parts of her father's extensive writings "die ein spezifisches Interesse für den amerikanischen Leser haben" (i.e. the parts that are particularly relevant to the American reader) had been somewhat shortened to suit the needs of the German audience (vi). All these interventions on both sides of the Atlantic may explain why the bilingual nature of Schurz's

autobiography eventually got lost on its readers. On the whole, Schurz's bilingual or binational identity seems to have been difficult to swallow for literary historians. It appears that he could only become recognized as an important ethnic voice, i.e. as the spokesman of the German-American community, when his linguistic identity was erased.

Other immigrants have undergone a similar fate. Thus, Donald McQuade argues in the *Columbia literary history of the United States* that Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska, Ole Edvart Rölvaag, and Henry Roth are the "first major ethnic writers" in America, but nowhere specifies their linguistic background or whether they (also) wrote in languages other than English (1988: 726). It would be too simplistic to explain this accommodation process in terms of a wholesale domestication of the 'foreign'. Paradoxically, the otherness of these writers only becomes *visible* in translation. As Werner Sollors and others have noted, the growing emphasis on ethnic diversity during the multiculturalist age seems not to have resulted in a concomitant awareness of the linguistic diversity of the US as well as of the transnational or polyethnic character of most American literature (Sollors 1997). Venuti is right in pointing out this tendency toward increasing monolingualism, but his analysis ultimately fails to explain the phenomenon.[8] The point is that, particularly in the US, linguistic homogenization seems to be a *condition* for ethnic pluralism. Most minorities can only make themselves heard by letting go of their mother tongue (whether willingly or not).

3. Foreignizing the domestic

Every culture defines itself in opposition to itself. When Venuti observes that the US and Great Britain are aggressively monolingual countries, he is not simply stating a fact but is at the same time suggesting that things should be otherwise. This is not merely a foreignizing move. The foreignization of the domestic stresses the foreignness of the target culture, *not* that of the source culture. It thus indicates the paradoxical unity of the same and the other in the same cultural space. The institutionalization of American literature in the academy during the first decades of the twentieth century has often been read as an ideological justification of the Anglo-American majority in a quickly changing nation (a seminal essay in this regard is Baym 1989). My objective in this section is not to deny the legitimacy of such self-critiques, but to show how they serve to revitalize the field of American literary history through a process of defamiliarization. One could say that they are a way of coming to terms with a

constitutive trauma that they at the same time call into being by circumscribing it.

Most contemporary histories of American literature legitimize themselves by claiming to break open the narrowly 'ethnocentric' perspective of their forerunners so as to arrive at a more inclusive conception of the literature. What is usually forgotten, however, is that these forerunners were driven by a similar desire to be representative of the whole culture. A familiar target of critics such as Baym is Barrett Wendell's *Literary history of America* published in 1900. This work is generally classified as narrowly provincial or even racist.[9] It is indeed true that Wendell focuses excessively on the literature of New England during the middle period of the nineteenth century. Later writings, mostly employing the new "languages" of the frontier or the big cities (which were at the time 'flooded' by immigrants from South and Eastern Europe), are rather laconically squeezed into "The Rest of the Story". Wendell does his best to trace back the roots of American culture (via the puritan founders) to Elizabethan England. As he puts it toward the end of the first book (dealing with the beginnings of American culture), Americans "preserved to an incalculable degree the spontaneous, enthusiastic, versatile character of their immigrant ancestors" (1900: 55). By these ancestors Wendell clearly means the English. Everything that could not be fitted into this genealogy, it seems, falls out of the story of American literature, or is tossed off as a 'foreign' influence.

In this sense, it is not altogether wrong or unjustified to point out Wendell's hostility toward non-English elements in American culture. However, recognizing that the early histories of American literature betray an Anglocentric profile is still a far cry from supposing that they tell an 'ethnocentric' narrative exclusively designed to cement the social position of the Anglo-American community. Such a view, however suggestive, is far too monolithic to be entirely convincing. In my opinion, it is not sufficient to merely state that the field of American literary history was established to underwrite the English descent of the American nation as if this would explain all the rest. Such an explanation is itself in need of explaining because it reproduces rather than questions the basic observation schema at the basis of American culture. Criticizing the pioneers of the field for being too Anglocentric often means being *blind* to the strategies of foreignization by which it has always asserted itself. By evoking an opposition between a narrowly 'Anglocentric' perspective on the one hand, and, on the other, one that would do justice to the multifarious interdependencies between American and other literatures, critics of American literary studies tend to take for granted the dichotomies that have structured the discipline from the beginning.

Why, one may ask, are we so determined to portray the first advocates of American literature univocally as 'ethnocentric' reactionaries? It should be stressed that scholars like Wendell were themselves reacting against what they saw as the narrow nationalism of the foregoing generation, which was all too eager to sign its declaration of literary independence. By *returning* to English literature, Wendell wanted to indicate that, in order to prove its maturity, American literature had to be measured on the basis of world (i.e. English) standards.[10] What gets lost in most critiques is that Wendell (despite his obvious ethnic bias) explicitly refused to define American literature in terms of race. Instead he stressed the importance of language as a marker of national belonging: "In a strange, subtle way each language grows to associate with itself the ideals and the aspirations and the fate of those peoples with whose fate it is inextricably intermingled" (3). Wendell thus clearly realized that the US was more and more becoming a mixed country and that its unity could not or no longer be derived from a common descent. "English or not," he states, "we Americans are English-speaking still; and English-speaking we must always remain" (8). By defining the American identity in terms of language rather than race, Wendell left the door open for Americans of non-English descent to leave their mark on the nation's literature.

The editor of Scribner's Library of Literary History series probably suggested the (misleading) title of this work. Wendell himself preferred to talk about "English literature in America" so as to refer specifically to that part of the Western hemisphere dominated by English-speaking peoples.[11] However, precisely this definition of the literature of the US as a part of English literature may appear particularly revolting to present-day observers, in that it entirely disregards the ethno-linguistic diversity of the country. It should be stressed, however, that for Wendell, as well as for many of his contemporaries, Angloconformity was not incompatible with the search for a distinctively American tradition. Stressing the linguistic bond between the two nations paradoxically brought out their differences. Wendell thought that all languages and literatures underwent a cyclical development from simple and poetic toward more complex and prosaic. When the English came to America, their literature had reached an unparalleled height. However, whereas the English had gradually lost touch with the creative potential of the renaissance, in America the English language retained the Elizabethan traits that had carried it across the Atlantic. More or less explicitly, Wendell constructed a genealogy from classical times over the Elizabethan age to the "Renaissance of New England" (which included the Concord and Cambridge groups, yet still excluded Whitman and Melville).[12] This continuous line had to differentiate American from English literature.

Even while stressing the linguistic connection with Great Britain, therefore, which allowed Americans to claim the English tradition as part of *their* heritage, Wendell tried to articulate the differential quality of American literature. In Wendell, Angloconformity was a way of out-Englishing the English. As a strategy for validating an American tradition it is functionally equivalent to the strategy of Anglodeviance that constitutes its opposite. This is not to say that both strategies are equally valuable or, for that matter, equally reductionistic. The point to note, however, is that pioneers like Wendell made use of the very same observation schemata that underlie contemporary proposals to redraw the boundaries of American literary studies. Wendell's ethnolinguistic nationalism was couched in a liberal idiom that depicted American literature as novel and makable.[13] Note that, for Wendell, the New England "Renaissance" was not yet an 'American' renaissance, as it is now known. Despite its centrality to his *Literary history of America*, Wendell still consigned the movement to the 'sectional' phase of the American tradition, while the truly 'national' period was located somewhere in the not-so-far future. This sense of promise, one may say, is what Wendell has in common with those who now declare the end of 'American' literature (Jay 1997).

From our current perspective, of course, Wendell's aesthetic standards are highly problematic. But we should refrain from all too quickly projecting our own cultural presuppositions onto the context in which the first histories of American literature were written. When looking at the logic of the discourse itself, Wendell's perspective is not so different from that of scholars who now describe themselves as "cosmopolitans" (Saldívar 1991, Hollinger 2000). The dynamic of inclusion through negation is the same. To use a concept of the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, American literary history may be called a "self-substitutive order": it manages to assert its identity by continually calling itself into question (1995: 409). From Venuti's perspective, foreignizing translation is to be regarded as a form of dissidence that challenges dominant values in the target culture. But foreignization can also be a domesticating move. Dissidence only makes sense inside a specific cultural matrix. The values of the target culture are usually not so stable as Venuti wants us to believe. Or, rather, their stability derives from the fact that they are amenable to change. It is this *paradoxical logic* that leads American literary history to fulfill its self-assumed destiny by constantly redefining itself.

4. Conclusion

My purpose in this article has been to highlight not the causes but the *paradoxes* at the basis of American literary history. Paradoxes, from this perspective, do not so much obstruct the discourse about American literature as carry it forward: they force it to continually call itself into doubt, to point out blind spots in its basic operations, all the while producing new blind spots and new sites for criticism. The most basic paradox of American literary history seems to reside in the fact that the 'foreign' or the 'other', that which falls out of American literature and against which it defines itself, is always also produced by it. It is impossible to define what is truly 'American' without also including what it excludes. There is thus a continual oscillation between these two values, the 'domestic' and the 'foreign'. Note that this opposition does not yet fix the identity of American literature, but merely spurs on the search for more adequate definitions. A distinction should thus be made between the rather stable observation schemata or cultural codes (self/other, domestic/foreign…) that structure the discourse about American literature on the one hand, and, on the other, the variable binaries that articulate them in a continually changing society (English/American, sectional/national, Anglocentric/Anglodeviant, etc.).

For Venuti, a translation is by definition a translation of a 'foreign' text. What, in my opinion, such a perspective hides from view is that every culture is constantly in the process of translating itself, either by redomesticating what has previously been foreignized (for example by rediscovering forgotten texts), or by foreignizing domesticated values at the very core of that culture (by branding formerly canonized authors for not being 'American' enough). When Venuti claims that Anglo-American translation practices are exploitative and imperialistic, thus producing readers who are culturally parochial, he is taking part in this game. In similar fashion, today's debates about the future of American literature(s) almost automatically equate Anglo- or Eurocentrism with ethnocentrism, monopoly capitalism, and the like. It may be useful to step back from such discussions and ask what triggers these emotionally and politically charged responses in the first place. As I have tried to show, this can only be explained in terms of the particular dynamic of American literary history, which paradoxically legitimizes itself by biting its own tale.

One way to arrive at a better understanding of the problem of linguistic alterity in American literary history, therefore, is by confronting the whole debate *reflexively*. Foreignization and domestication can then be regarded as functionally equivalent ways of accommodating linguistic differences. This says little about the political or ethical appropriateness of these strategies. But

such culturally specific assumptions, if we cannot entirely escape them (indeed, the whole point is that it is absurd to even try doing so), cannot be taken as the starting point for research into language politics. I think it is possible to study relatively objectively how institutions assign labels to classes, and vice versa, how classes attract labels. Why do certain translation strategies at a specific point in time count as resistant and others as exploitative? Such questions cannot be answered in advance but are part of the inquiry. Certainly, such a reflexive standpoint will not stop us from making inflated claims about the rise of Anglocentrism, or the declining knowledge of 'foreign' languages. But, at least, we will be able to situate these claims in relation to the broader legitimizing strategies of the discourse of cultural belonging.

Notes

1. Venuti seems to be aware of this problem when he says that "[a]ny translating [whether major or minor] can bring about unexpected cultural results" (1998b: 141). Yet, he fails to incorporate this insight into his conceptual apparatus. The question is: what mechanism, if not (only) the translation itself, settles the institutional value of a translated text?

2. Here, my approach differs considerably from that of Tymoczko, who categorically rejects the use of binary distinctions because they would be "ultimately problematic" (2000: 38). To stress the problematic nature of binaries, however, is not yet to explain their continuing attractiveness.

3. Moreover, by conceptualizing translation as a 'minor' form of language use, Venuti seems to want to legitimize Translation Studies as a scholarly discipline. The reasoning behind this is that the 'minor' has a right to existence because it is denied this right.

4. Armin Nassehi would probably refer to them as "Vertrautheitsstrategien" (1999: 194). As Nassehi states, even racism or ethnocentrism is a way of familiarizing the foreign by classifying it as 'foreign'. Whether such a strategy is ethically or socially desirable is of course another matter, but this should not refrain us from trying to explain it.

5. By saying this, I do not mean to suggest that 'resistant' or 'minoritizing' translating is impossible or ineffective. Rather, the point is that a translation can only oppose the values of the target culture when it is (at least in part) located in that culture.

6. Apart from Faust's contribution on German literature, the chapter on "Non-English writings I" includes separate sections on French (by Edward J. Fortier) and Yiddish (by Nathaniel Buchwald) writings. The titles of the works discussed are rendered in the original languages. The chapter is followed by a contribution by Mary Austin on "Non-English writings II: Aboriginal" which concludes the history. Here, the excerpted songs and stories are given in English without mention of who translated them.

7. Schurz thought that German was a good language to translate into but not a good language to translate. This made the study of German highly interesting for those seeking a "truly liberal education": "For German literature is not only exceedingly rich in original works in every branch of mental production, which, owing to the imperfection of the translation into other languages, cannot be fully enjoyed except when read in German, but it contains, in its superior translations, an almost complete treasury of all the literature of the world and of all ages, ancient as well as modern" (II: 13).

8. It is indeed true that interest in "foreign" languages has steadily decreased, but the limits of what counts as "foreign" have shifted too. For many Americans, for example, Spanish no longer counts as a "foreign" but as an "ethnic" language (Gonzalez 1996).

9. Recently, Marietta Messmer has argued that Wendell's "myopically Anglocentric perspective" obscures the multilingual and transnational nature of American literature (Messmer 2003: 43). This Anglocentric bias, moreover, would continue to haunt the field up to the present day.

10. As Francis Richardson put it: "the time has come for the student to consider American literature as calmly as he would consider the literature of another country" (Richardson 1891: xix).

11. In fact, the 1907 textbook version of Wendell's history was titled *A history of literature in America*.

12. The almost complete ostracism during the last half-century of the Concord poets Longfellow, Holmes, and Lowell (the so-called Boston Brahmins) for being too refined, too European, or too deferentially English clearly illustrates how the domestic is foreignized to make room for what are perceived as more representative authors and texts. The canon thus does not only get more and more inclusive; it equally forgets more.

13. Brander Matthews, another early textbook author, equally stressed the importance of language as a demarcation criterion for American literature. On the one hand, this gave access to the rich literary tradition of England. On the other hand, Matthews realized that the Americans would soon outnumber the English and be recognized as "the chief English-speaking nation" (Matthews 1896: 12).

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Résumé

Cet article traite du problème de l'altérité linguistique dans les histoires littéraires américaines. Le débat concernant 'l'altérité' ou la 'familiarité' d'un texte ou d'une traduction est d'habitude mené en termes polarisants, comme c'est le cas de Venuti (1995). Le cadre conceptuel de Venuti ne propose pas de critères adéquats pour différencier des stratégies de traduction 'ethnocentriques' et 'exocentriques' et donne lieu à des assertions exagérées concernant l'hégémonie linguistique du monde anglo-saxon. Le présent article reconceptualise les deux stratégies comme faisant partie de la logique paradoxale des cultures et démontre comment toute culture se (re)traduit continuellement. Par conséquent, il faut analyser le caractère 'ethnocentrique' des stratégies d'altérité, et vice versa, le potentiel d'altérité des traductions ethnocentriques. La domestication de l'altérité est illustrée par l'inclusion camouflée de textes non anglais ou bilingues dans les histoires littéraires américaines. L'altérisation de la domesticité, par contre, se lit dans la caractérisation continuelle des prédécesseurs ou concurrents comme excessivement anglocentriques ou eurocentriques. A travers cette mise en œuvre critique des stratégies de Venuti, l'article attire l'attention sur la co-présence paradoxale de l'altérité et de la familiarité à l'intérieur de la culture littéraire américaine.

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