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Charting the Future of Translation History

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Puritan Translations in Israel

Rewriting a History of Translation

Introduction

This essay is an attempt to review the history of translation in Israel, with special focus on the ideological norms that permeated it and on the function of (moral) censorship as a tool for shaping and delimiting culture.

The traditional history of Hebrew translation, as summarized in the Hebrew Encyclopaedia entry "Translation" (Toury 1980, 1063–1065), presented the progress of translation as an integral part of the revival of the Hebrew language, petrified by centuries of relying on written canonical sources only. It emphasized the vital role of translation in this revival, the different ways in which the translation laboratory renewed, adapted and/or invented vocabulary; it noted remnants of the petrification in the twentieth century, with the written language still maintaining its normative supremacy in translation, in spite of the growing translatability between Hebrew and European languages.

On the basis of recent research, I would like to offer not a contradictory view, but one that would allow for some self-contradictory aspects

of this complex process of language/culture building. It will shed some light on the role of puritan Zionist ideology in this revival, a role that eventually undermined it. Suppression of the erotic repertoire will be used to illustrate the point.

Two remarks before I proceed: the first concerns terms like obscene, pornographic, erotic. This essay will not use evaluative / aesthetic definitions of pornography; it will rather adopt a functionalistic attitude to pornography (Loth 1961, 8), regarding it as anything so defined by official or influential groups, that is, writings about sex or eliminative functions which past or present officials or influential groups have suppressed (or tried to) on the ground that they were morally corrupting or degrading. Loth adds that this definition includes virtually all literature dealing with sex except the technical and scientific, and even some of that, too; I include the latter as an integral part of my work. Adopting this (non-) definition is in accordance with the fact that, in the post-Foucault era, it has become impossible to view sexuality within the cultural context without considering its role in the politics of power, and that moral censorship, like any other censorship, is regarded as a cultural vehicle for defining notions of the *self* and delimiting the *other* (Greenblatt 1992, 121; Wolf 2002, 45).

The second remark concerns the risk of generalization: this being a brief summary of part of my research on the subversion of literary translation, it cannot include details or nuances and thus risks generalizations. My forthcoming book on *Sabra Puritanism: Suppression of the Erotic in Hebrew Literature from the Thirties to the Eighties* will offer a more diversified overview and analysis.

The new Hebrew

In very early stages of its revival, in the late eighteenth century, Hebrew literature acknowledged the importance of translation as the basis for any new cultural infrastructure. This tendency was enhanced with the first immigration waves to Israel, around 1880, where a new local cultural structure had to be established from the ground up. In 1930–1940,

respectable publishers such as Mitzpeh, Stiebel and Omanut were already so translation-oriented, that Hebrew writers raised voices of protest (Shavit 1998; Toury 1977, 123). Yet these publishers pre-selected either classical or socialistic-realistic material for translation. Love and sex were considered irrelevant to the national agenda, if not altogether depraved. This tendency was intensified when publishing houses of socialistic ideologies began to take over in the forties and fifties with names such as Sifriyat-Poalim (Workers' Library), Am Oved (Working People), or Sifriya-La'am (People's Library). The latter helped maintain a puritanical approach to literature that dominated Israeli culture well into the 1970s and even the 1980s.

Although Judaism is far from preaching abstinence or asceticism, puritanical attitudes have some roots in Hebrew culture. Historically speaking there have always been sects or individuals who preached partial if not total sexual abstinence for the sake of "higher" goals, such as absolute dedication to the study of the Torah (Biale 1994, 232). This tendency may have been reinforced in certain communities in Eastern Europe, where child-marriages became the custom, resulting in early and traumatic sexual encounters that may have driven many young men away from their families to join the strictly male entourage gathered around a Rabbi or a Chassidic *Tzadik* (Just). Enlightenment brought forth new dilemmas: the old image of the Ghetto Jew had to be replaced with that of the New Jew, later the New Hebrew, tanned, upright, endowed with muscles. The ideal new Hebrew woman was born as well, as reflected in popular novels of the nineteenth century: she was to enjoy a better general education, but her domain was still to be the home (Ben-Ari 1997, 234–241). When she finally emerged from this stage, the new emancipated and enlightened Jewish woman may have evoked admiration in some, but usually a sense of unease and fear: fear of assimilation, for she was free to choose among her peers, Jews or Gentiles, as well as fear of this yet-unknown being — the sexually liberated woman (Feiner 1998, 253–303).

Victorian puritanism

Victorian puritanism, which had invaded Europe and America in the nineteenth century, could thus find an echo, if not in an outright dislike of this new erotic liberation, in the dialectic wish to break with old traditions and preserve them simultaneously. Studies of the period, including those accomplished by “victims” such as D. H. Lawrence, later acclaimed as the prophet of sexual liberation, argue that more than any other socio-political circumstance, it was widespread and already inherited syphilis that accounted for the spread of puritanism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Lawrence 1961 [1929], 60–85). Be this as it may, what is generally agreed upon is that the highest point of puritanism was the Victorian era, nicknamed “The Golden Age of Prudery and the Golden Age of Pornography” (Loth 1961, 117). It was heralded with the 1802 establishment of the “Society for the Suppression of Vice,” proceeded with Thomas Bowdler’s 1818 expurgated *Family Shakespeare* and culminated in Chief Justice Cockburn’s 1868 notorious obscenity laws. Apart from gaining entry in the dictionary with a new English verb, Bowdler opened the door to cleansing censorship of the classics. Judge Cockburn’s historical definition of pornography sealed the ban on books for a hundred years until it was lifted in a series of book trials that echoed throughout the Western world in the 1960s. His definition was so broad it encompassed all material written with the INTENTION of corrupting the minds of those OPEN to such influences and into whose hands such material MAY fall (Greenawalt 1995, 99). It banned countless books such as Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*, D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, Nabokov’s *Lolita* and many more.

Puritanism swept in various versions through most of Europe and America. It was acclaimed in Boston, where the first trial of a book took place as early as 1821 — Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*, of course, which had come to symbolize pornography at its worst. In 1872 the American “Committee (later ‘Society’) for the Suppression of Vice,” with Anthony Comstock at its head, proceeded to impose the puritan norm on all aspects of life, banning books, pamphlets, powders, and contraceptives by the pound. Comstock’s name went down in history as well, not only

as one of the most famous American vicecrusaders, but as one of the few persons outside the legislative system with a law bearing his name (Loth 1961, 144–145).

Puritanism infiltrated Israel, then part of the Ottoman Empire, at the turn of the twentieth century, with the first immigration waves from Europe. The thirty years of British Mandate up to the 1948 establishment of the State enhanced its spread, especially with the introduction of the British Obscenity Laws into Israeli Mandatory Law in 1936, but there it encountered a seemingly different ideology, borrowed from the Bolshevik revolution, that of freedom of sex and equality of the sexes. On the face of it, the promise of freedom and equality was anti-puritanical in principle, but the Bolshevik ideology abolished the erotic and regarded sex and marriage as capitalist bourgeois notions that had to be suppressed if not annihilated. This ideology permeated the early settlers and was to become a major factor in the shaping of the new culture.

Thus, Zionism started with a promise of being, among others, an erotic liberation, and in fact succeeded in maintaining this myth for decades, well after the establishment of the State. The “Woman Question” was one of the key ideological issues discussed in the first stages of this Jewish revolution. Back in 1897, the first Zionist Congress granted women the right to vote, though because of opposition from Orthodox sectors, this right was not implemented in Israel until 1926. In fact, equality for women in the Second *Aliyah* (second immigration wave, 1904–1914) became mainly the right to labor as hard as men, draining swamps, paving roads, and settling the country. Struggles for separate organizations for women pioneers and workers lagged behind until 1922, when their small faction included six hundred members. In 1934, however, they joined the general workers’ union and were duly submerged in it. A small step forward was accomplished in 1936, when pressure on the Mandatory rule resulted in changing the minimum marriage age of girls from nine to fifteen. Another small victory was gained in 1947, with bigamy prohibited by the Mandatory Law. But no pressure helped women in their struggles to withdraw marital laws from the absolute power of the religious Orthodoxy; neither did this happen

with the establishment of the State. Women, who had joined the radical Zionist movement with the hope of virtual and real gain, found themselves pushed to the side. Zionism had become an essentially “male” movement, removing erotic liberation from the national agenda.

What led to this ideological twist, apart from harsh circumstances and underlying ambivalent feelings towards sexual liberation, had to do more with internal power struggles over reshaping the new Hebrew culture than with adherence to British or Bolshevik norms.

The Jewish revolution had to assume a more “virile” character as it grew more nationalistic. In fact, as Mosse (1985) pointed out, the national movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tended to be predominantly “virile,” and this particular movement had to confront accusations such as those of Sigmund Freud or of his followers like Otto Weininger, that Jews were effeminate and neurotic. Growing tension in the 1930s, then impending war with the Arab population in the 1940s, intensified the need for a more virile image of the New Sabra: the *Shomer* ideal was adopted, that of the Bedouin-like tough, silent Sabra, upright on his horse, ready to sacrifice all for his country and as one with his tough surroundings. Utopian communes advocating the abolishment of old notions of family or couples, such as the settlement of Upper-Bitanya in the Galilee, created much controversy and soon died away, faced with the small number of (reluctant) women and excruciating material hardships — malaria, hunger, lack of work, to name just a few. Yet notions of marriage, family, and children had to be sacrificed for the sake of a better future. Communal education, such as undertaken in the Kibbutz, striving to apply Zionist ideology to everyday life, mobilized all its efforts into creating what Spiro called the “Puritan Sabra” (Spiro 1965): it stripped sex of its mystery with methods of coeducation and cohabitation, and tolerated couples as long as their presence did not interfere with community life. The Freudian slogan of “Sublimation without Repression” was heralded with enthusiasm by youth movements and pedagogues like Shmuel Golan: the sexual urge was natural and creative, and should, by no means, be repressed, but culture decrees that it must be channelled into “higher” goals (Golan

1941, 24, 61). The new principles of "Sabra purity" were formed, and they were all-encompassing: purity of thoughts, words, and deeds. The tenth commandment of the "*Shomer-Tzair*" Youth Movement required the Sabra to abstain from smoking and drinking, and to maintain sexual purity. The War of Independence further helped exclude women and sexuality from the cultural scene. War was a man's affair and the woman was a distant image from back home, to long for and dream about. The *Palmach* youth, the young volunteers preceding the regular army of the State of Israel, was said never to have used foul language and to have regarded sex as impure and unimportant compared with "higher" national values. They were in fact puritanical to such an extent that, as one of its members claimed in her memoirs, ninety-nine percent of the combatants must have died virgins (Ben-Yehuda 1981, 266). When violence ceased to be the dominant issue in the 1950s, it was replaced with the unequivocal demands of the melting-pot ideology. The "erotic revolution" had become utterly irrelevant.

With the massive waves of immigration (especially from Arab countries) between 1948 and 1953, the image of the "other" was firmly established in opposition to the Sabra: the new immigrant, the speaker of Yiddish who refused to promptly sever his ties with the Diaspora; the Oriental Jew who would not give up his past traditions to be remodelled in this radical secular mould. The latter retained an overtly erotic hue, negatively connected with a Levantine culture of cards, cafés, and brothels. Much like the Arab (or rather, his image), the Levantine immigrant was suspected and feared for his sexuality; unlike the Arab, though, he had a rightful claim on whatever female the Sabra considered his own, which made him a bigger menace.

Norms of representation in central literature

Literature, both original and translated, joined in this ideological indoctrination. Hebrew literature, from its early start in Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century and up to its rebirth in Israel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reflected the

so-called Oedipal break with the Diaspora and the "Old Jew" image. This break, repeated in later years but still maintaining the periodic sons-against-fathers rebellion, had become a central theme in Israeli literature, with the image of the New Jew, New Hebrew and, later, New Israeli-born Sabra at its very core. Up to the 1970s, Hebrew literature maintained the Zionist, predominantly "male" narrative of the Oedipal break with the fathers' generation. The names these literary trends were given — retrospectively — reflect their ideological involvement: The *Meyasdim* (Founding Fathers) generation, for instance, broke away from the Diaspora; the *Tashach* (1948) generation broke away from the Founding Fathers; the *Medina* (Israeli born) generation broke away from the 1948 predecessors. By 1973, with the end of massive immigration and the prospect of relative normalization, the *Yom Kippur* war threw the country (and its culture) into yet another traumatic period of reassessment of national values (Miron 1993). By now the New Sabra protagonist of central Israeli writers like Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua had grown old and tired, and his erotic (literary) endeavours, if any, were pathetic, but he and his rebellious rejection of his ancestors were still the focus of attention.

Translated literature could well have introduced changes in this atmosphere of erotic restraint, since it could introduce other, different models of representation without necessarily being criticized for violation of the norm. As modern research has illustrated time and again, translated literature can afford to disobey the norm (and sometimes even the law) with the excuse of being a reflection of "foreign" values or of being too negligible to meddle with. In this case, however, translation chose to join the national mobilization, carefully pre-selecting texts according to their idealistic value, and scanning and manipulating other texts, models, or genres to fit TL norms. It was, however, much more self-censorship than any fear of legal action that motivated cultural "agents" to forfeit the innovative and possibly subversive function of translation in favour of the mainstream doctrine. True, there were the 1936 Mandatory obscenity laws to contend with. They were, in fact, made even stricter in 1965, when the Israeli law decreed that the penalty

for obscenity should be increased to three years' imprisonment (more than the three-month period in the Mandatory Law, more than the two-year maximal penalty in British law; see Cohen 1973, 82–86). Yet this seemingly severe attitude applied mainly to the theatre and the cinema, where a pre-censorship committee determined the fate of every single play or movie. With the exception of two or three minor "book trials," literature was spared.

Literature was spared, yet it functioned as if it had been subjected to pre-censorship as well. No attempt was made to publish one of the notorious banned books in a central publishing house, nor was any public outcry raised against this suppression. A small voice of protest was raised in 1966, when the leftist Hebrew writer and journalist Dan Omer published his scandalously pornographic *On the Road* and went through all instances of appeal to reverse a ban on the book; but from the judge's final verdict it is obvious that Omer's virulent attacks on the Orthodox parties was the underlying reason for the enforcement of the obscenity law in his case. In fact, in 1968 a committee with Judge Vitkon at its head recommended that Israeli obscenity laws be reviewed, in favour of the free development of art, literature, and science, though the recommendations never had any legislative follow-up. Even when the ban on books had been lifted in the Western world, the books were slow to penetrate this self-inflicted puritanism; some were translated in the seventies and eighties, others doomed to oblivion.

Marginal alternatives: pulp fiction and sex guides

Yet a literary system, like any other cultural system, tends to be stratified, must, indeed, be stratified for fear of stagnation, and erotic literature, too, found an outlet. As is typical of puritan cultures, it was allowed to flourish on the periphery, in three main alternative forms: erotica read in the original source language or in various translations, erotic pulp fiction, and pseudo-scientific sexual texts. It should be noted that the margins were on the one hand the "natural" background for these subversive genres to flourish in, yet on the other hand they were also the right place for

them to be channelled to. There they could be observed and, if necessary, controlled, and could, no less vitally for culture shapers, be labelled "obscene," "perverted," "dirty." Indeed, the rare public surveys of reading habits done in Israel after 1948 that did enquire about habits of "pulp" readership encountered almost zero results; people were reluctant to admit to such non-normative behaviour.

The option of reading in other languages may appear obvious in an immigration culture, but it opposes cultural shaping, especially in the periods of transition, even more so in view of the significant gap between the generations in such communities. Most newcomers settling in Israel before and after the establishment of the state had access to books in their own languages. In fact, many maintained cultural organs such as newspapers, lending libraries, and theatres in their own tongues. This phenomenon was relatively short-lived, however, for it undermined the melting-pot ideology, and was to be rejected by their more chauvinistic Israeli-born offspring.

The second alternative, that of pulp fiction, was, on the whole, considered "filthy" and "depraved," though this category included both translations of the banned books, in other words, "higher" forms of literature, and (pseudo-) translations of the "lowest" forms of pornography. All were driven under the counter; they came out of cheap printing houses, with minimal investment in production, to be sold at kiosks or newspaper stands. Though there is no precise data as to the scope of this subversive production, it was obviously quite big, with the 1960s apparently the peak of pulp production. Pornographic literature anywhere is hard to trace, and the Hebrew instance was no exception: the books were printed in pirated editions with considerable effort to erase traces leading to writer/editor/publisher. Names of authors/translators were usually fictitious. Printing firms appeared and closed overnight. The books/booklets were printed on cheap paper that did not last long. Even if sales numbers could retrospectively be quoted (Eshed 2002, 234 quotes 5,000 copies of *The Captive from Tel Aviv*), they would not represent the hand-to-hand distribution scope typical of underground publishing of this sort.

Yet peripheral and central literary activities were, particularly in this case, strongly linked together: the canon could not have survived without the piratical production in the margin, which slowly began to infiltrate the centre and revitalize it in the 1970s; while the relatively self-restrained activity in the "black market" cannot be accounted for without its counterpart in the puritan canon. As is often the case, though clashing with mainstream ideology, the minor erotic genres in the margin looked to the canon for legitimization. Moreover, the names of the translators/editors involved in their production reoccur, and study of the persons behind the many pseudonyms confirms that a relatively small group of people was responsible for the production of these (pseudo-) translations. This group consisted of young writers, journalists, army soldiers, and students, who, though aspiring higher, wrote/translated erotica as secondary jobs.

Generally speaking, the translation of the various banned books, later to be acknowledged as modern masterpieces, followed more or less the same course. They first appeared in the 1960s, in cheap pocket editions, with all the characteristics of pulp fiction, including sensational captions and abundant printing errors. At some later point in the 1980s they were retranslated and published in central, respectable publishing houses. There are variations, of course: the expurgated edition of D. H. Lawrence's 1928 *Lady Chatterley's Lover* appeared in 1938 in the respectable Mitzpeh publishing house. It reappeared in the mid-sixties with the promise of being a complete and unabridged version (a suspicious formula at best), from a marginal publisher, with some of the daring parts censored as well as numerous "poetic" parts. It was then retranslated in 1971, this time fully, by a well-known writer and translator, Aharon Amir, at a central publishing house (Am Oved); in 1987, to crown this canonization process, the same translation reappeared in a hardcover edition.

Not all the banned books received the same degree of canonization. To name but a few: Henry Miller's 1934 *Tropic of Cancer*, translated in 1964, was retranslated for a more respectable publishing house in 1985 but never enjoyed great popularity. Cleland's *Fanny Hill* was translated several times, from 1963–1964 through 1999, each version claiming,

with no justification whatsoever, to be complete and unabridged. Unlike its rehabilitation in England and the US, where some critics compared it to the best eighteenth-century novels such as Fielding's *Tom Jones* or Defoe's *Moll Flanders* or even to parodies of novels like Richardson's *Pamela*, it never managed to rid itself of its notoriety as pornography. Nabokov's *Lolita* was translated in 1959, a year after the ban had been lifted, in a cheap pocket-book edition, and while it had not been censored (in fact there is no overt sexual language to censor), the translator did not cope with its vast and complex literariness; thus the novel's pornographic character was amplified. It was retranslated only in 1986, in one of the elitist publishing houses, with the full canonizing scientific apparatus: annotations, foreword by the translator, afterword by an academician. Pauline Réage's 1957 *Story of O* was not translated until 1999, when it appeared by way of a respectable publisher with all the academic apparatus. Some of Guillaume Apollinaire's turn-of-the-century scandalous erotica has been translated only recently by marginal publishers.

The efforts of the banned books to gain legitimization, seemingly paradoxical for pulp fiction, are not at all surprising considering the cultural atmosphere of the 1950s and 60s. These efforts consisted in (a) quoting high recommendations from famous personalities in the source culture, (b) cleansing the book of excessive eroticism, and/or (c) embellishing the language. In the language-embellishment process specific terms for sexual body parts and acts would be euphemized; older, Biblical and Talmudic terms would be used, where slang Hebrew terms would have been used in the spoken vernacular. Slang expressions (such as abound in Henry Miller's novels, for instance) would occasionally — and boldly — be replaced with Hebrew equivalents, only to be embedded in a highly correct, normative style, usual for translation. Excessive literariness, however, would not be indulged: outstanding "private" metaphors would be replaced with worn out "safe" clichés or similes.

Pulp pornography did not differ much in that respect. Unlike the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century models in England, for instance, which enriched the literary and lingual repertoires (Peakman 2003), it

was rather naive in today's terms, much more allusive and "lewd" but less specific in terminology than the banned books. It seemed to look up to higher genres for recognition, disdained slang, and adopted literary (epigonic, needless to say) models of style. Most of the texts/models masqueraded as translations, for this, too, granted them some small prestige (see pseudo-translation in Toury 1995, 40–52). Yiddish models, the damsels-in-distress type such as *Regina* or *Sabina*, in imitation of French and German models, enjoyed much popularity with titles like *Tamar*, *Smadar*, *The Captive from Tel-Aviv* and many more. The pulp translation of *Fanny Hill* inspired dozens of "continuations" such as the 1964 *Fanny Hill's Bedroom*, or *Fanny Hill's Youngest Daughter*, mostly pseudo-translations. A controversial "daring" variation, using Nazi concentration camps as background and excuse for sado-masochistic pulp fiction, was the peak of explicitness in its sexual repertoire, yet as "conservative" as the rest in language.¹ One trait characterized cheap porn: in terms of the erotic lexicon, the texts were even less brazen than the translations of the banned books.

The fact that the repertoire was cleansed of any vulgar terms and preferred euphemism to the outspoken specific term (for body parts, for the sexual act, and so on) suggests an intervention of self-censorship in this piratical production as well. All participants (producers and readers) were perfectly aware of what was "right" and what was "wrong." In this subversive market, using words like "breasts," "hips," "shameful parts," "hidden parts," "member," or "erection" was sensational enough. The repertoire of situations was pornographic, and, depending on the case, so were some of the photographs or illustrations of the prototypical "sexy" girl (this being a literature for men and by men, mostly girls and women were portrayed). The language was euphemistic, thus evasive, and pseudo-literary.

The third option in literature about sex was legitimate, though just as marginal in the literary canon. It was in fact the only legitimate genre, comprised of a variety of pseudo-medical sex guides. This genre, though enjoying great popularity from the 1930s to the 1980s, has as yet not been accounted for in any historical overview of Hebrew

translation, probably because of its minor status in literature and persistent puritan ambivalence. With the exception of August Forel's famous 1922 [1906] *The Sexual Question*, Freudian textbooks were the most prevalent among the translations and they served as models for their Hebrew equivalents. British or American texts, such as Havelock Ellis's 1897–1910 *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* or, later, Kinsey's (1948, 1953 respectively) *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male/Female* were either not translated (none of Ellis's seven volumes) or partially translated (*Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, 1954). Apart from the familiarity of Hebrew translators and writers with the Freudian school, the main reason for the predilection for this school was its preoccupation with sublimation. While aiming to sever all roots with the past, Zionism in fact maintained a continuum of suppression of the erotic for the sake of "higher values." Sex was channelled to the "safe" informative discourse, where it could be discussed, regulated, and surveyed.

The preoccupation with sex in the pseudo-clinical field is to be understood in Foucault's terms of the Western obsessive "verbalization of sexuality," but also within the realization that knowledge about sex meant power, and was, therefore, to be kept in the hands of the elite group of culture shapers (Foucault 1967, 26; Dworkin 1981 [1979], xxxiii). It is not surprising, consequently, that though the various textbooks differed in detail, they shared several basic common features. First, their approach to sex was ambivalent: they all waged war against prejudice, superstition and ignorance; yet underlying their modern tolerance, there still lurked a preoccupation with moral questions, with prostitution, disease, and hygiene. The 1962 translation of Dr. Fritz Kahn's 1937 volume *Unser Geschlechtsleben* begins with the statement, "This book was written out of two motives: experiences of suffering and sympathy for it" (Kahn 1962, 25). Not only Havelock Ellis's research but also his spirit of "enthusiasm" for sex was lacking.²

Another feature these books had in common was their style. Due to their "legitimacy," from the lexical point of view, these books were responsible for the revival/updating/invention of sexual terminology and repertoire, an enormous task, seeing that the only database was

Biblical or Talmudic. They achieved this by reviving old terms or by borrowing/imitating/literally translating foreign (usually German) terminology, the result being that their texts sounded far removed from the Hebrew vernacular. The overall style of the textbooks was "high," as was the norm, and since they lavishly quoted classic poetic sources it was in parts "literary." This combination of dry old-fashioned German-sounding pseudo-scientific terminology embedded in high-literary, old-fashioned style characterized sexual textbooks until 1970, when the translation of Dr. David Reuben's *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* broke with this tradition, gaining immense popularity. Style did not categorically distinguish the textbooks from pulp fiction or the translations of banned books, and in fact they may equally have served as a source of erotic excitement. Erica Jong describes a similar experience in the puritanical America of her youth (quoted in de St. Jorre 1994, 125):

It was impossible to obtain a copy of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* outside the rare-book room of a college library or a private erotica dealer. (I tried.) Henry Miller's *Tropics* and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* could not be purchased at your local bookstore. The raciest sex manual available to the panting adolescent was *Love Without Fear* by Eustace Chesser, MD.

Repertoire dwindling

The consequences of the basically self-inflicted puritanism in marginal literature were, as is to be expected, a constant dwindling of the erotic repertoire. Hebrew everyday vernacular developed independently; the frozen literary repertoire did not offer any creative Hebrew alternatives to the foreign negative-sounding spoken slang. The vernacular, on the other hand, seldom had any impact on the literary repertoire, the latter developing until well into the 1970s with marked disdain for spoken Hebrew. When central Hebrew writers attempted in the 1970s to find a

private, intimate tone, they had hardly any accessible modern erotic repertoire to fall back on. Faced with the choice of the old-fashioned petrified terms or the slang street vernacular, they usually compromised by avoiding explicit descriptions, in turn not a productive procedure.

The 1980s — and especially the 1990s — introduced belated novelties such as translated feminist writing and thought, gender studies, queer literature, literature written by women, folkloristic surrealism, and modernistic or postmodernistic trends. Their translation necessitated re-evaluation of the existing repertoire, which, in due course, supplied material for the renewal of original literature. Alternative undercurrents of the Zionist narrative could now regain vigour and find a legitimate place in the centre, sometimes replacing part of the canonical repertoire. Feministic trends, if not directly responsible for the revival of literature written by Israeli women, certainly helped young women writers develop a modern erotic voice of their own, and the last two decades have witnessed both a flourishing of women writing and a consequent refreshing change of norms.³ Yet as of January 2004, when the new publishing house “Katom” heralded the appearance of a Hebrew pornographic series and was acclaimed with reactions such as “High time! Pornography in Hebrew!” Israeli erotica is still neither self-evident nor “normalized.”

This petrification of erotic repertoire stood in direct opposition to the energetic, even hectic process of Hebrew revival that took place in the last century. None of the personalities (poets, writers, teachers, lexicographers) involved in modernizing Hebrew would have anything to do with the “obscene”. A lexicon for Gynecology was finally issued in the 1990s: a scientific essay about the possible etymology of the slang lexeme ‘zayin’ (prick) was rejected by the Language Academy organ, only to be reluctantly accepted to its humoristic Purim issue. The erotic repertory was left in the hands of amateurs.⁴

Conclusion

The seemingly “minor” case of Hebrew translated erotic literature, so far not subject to any systematic research, offers an alternative viewpoint on the development of literature and literary translation in Israel,

mobilized for decades to enhance the representation of the New Sabra. This type of analytical retrospective throws more light on the presentation of a history of Hebrew translation, and eventually the creation of Hebrew culture, in Israel. It is crucial to the understanding of censorship as a vehicle for shaping the *self* and delimiting the *other*. In this retrospective, the clash between enthusiastic revival on the one hand and manipulative suppression on the other must produce self-defeating tensions.

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Notes

1. The booklets were nicknamed the "Stalags" after the unprecedented success of the first title, *Stalag 13*, itself named after Billy Wilder's 1953 movie *Stalag 17*. *Stalag 13* came out in the early sixties and sold 25,000 copies, making it a bestseller in terms of the period as well as by today's standards.
2. Paul Robinson's epithet for Ellis is a "sexual enthusiast" (Robinson 1989 [1976], 2-3). He quotes Ellis's view of sex as "the chief and central function of life . . . ever wonderful, ever lovely" (Robinson 1989 [1976], 27; Ellis 1890, *The New Spirit*, 129).
3. Israeli women's approach to feminism is not clear-cut. The liberated woman myth makes feminism appear irrelevant. Many of the basic feminist texts have either not been translated or were translated with considerable delay. For example, only the first part of Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) *The Second Sex* was translated into Hebrew, in 2001 (!).
4. The Chinese-American writer Anchee Min describes the same phenomenon in her novels about Mao's Cultural Revolution. Japanese translators have reported similar cases, such as the case of the Japanese new translation of the Boston Women's famous *Our Bodies Ourselves: A Book by and for Women*. When, in 1988 a group of twenty-three translators and twenty-five editors set out to prepare a full translation of the book, they found that the terms used in the 1974 Japanese translation had been negatively marked and would have to be replaced.

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