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# Translating the Musical *Les Misérables*: A Polysystemic Approach

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ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ
Translating the Musical *Les Misérables*:
A Polysystemic Approach
Myles McKelvey

The Polysystem theory can be defined as a general model for understanding, analyzing and describing the functioning and evolution of literary systems, of which translation is one part. Developed by Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, the Polysystem's most important contribution to Translation Studies is that it has generated a methodology. This thesis uses the Polysystem theory as an heuristic tool to analyze and describe the translations of *Les Misérables* (the novel) and *Les Miz* (the musical). Chapter 1 offers an overview of the Polysystem theory. Chapter Two discusses the socio-historical and literary context of the novel *Les Misérables*, as well as its critical reception. Chapter 3 compares five excerpts from two English translations of the novel, one from the 19th century, the other from the 20th century. Chapter 4 is primarily concerned with the theoretical difficulties involved in translating lyrics. Chapter 5 analyzes four song translations from the musical *Les Miz* by applying one of the concepts outlined in Chapter 4: rhythmic constraints. Chapter 6 first offers a brief history of the musical, and then discusses the place of *Les Miz* within the "musical Polysystem." The second half of Chapter 6 reveals how and why *Les Miz* was adapted to its target audience. Finally, Chapter 7 addresses two important theoretical implications: i) the notion of adaptation; and ii) "universal" translation norms. The thesis concludes with a critique of Toury's theory, but also outlines the positive contributions he has made to Translation Studies.

On peut définir la théorie du polysystème comme un modèle général aidant à comprendre, analyser et décrire le fonctionnement et l'évolution des systèmes littéraires, dont la traduction fait partie. Le polysystème a été conçu par Itamar Even-Zohar et Gideon Toury et son plus grand apport à la traductologie réside dans la création d'une méthodologie. Ce mémoire utilise la théorie du polysystème comme un outil heuristique afin d'analyser et de décrire les traductions du roman et de la comédie musicale *Les Misérables*. Le premier chapitre présente un panorama général de la théorie du polysystème. Le deuxième chapitre examine à la fois les contextes sociohistoriques et littéraires du roman *Les Misérables* et les critiques que ce roman a reçues. Le troisième chapitre compare cinq extraits de deux traductions anglaises du roman, l'une du XIXe siècle, l'autre du XXe siècle. Le chapitre 4 porte principalement sur les difficultés théoriques présentes dans la traduction de paroles de chansons. Le chapitre 5 analyse quatre traductions de chansons provenant de la comédie musicale *Les Misérables*, en mettant en application l'un des concepts présenté au chapitre 4, les contraintes rythmiques. Le chapitre 6 présente, en premier lieu, une brève histoire de la comédie musicale et la place des *Misérables* à l'intérieur du « polysystème musical ». En second lieu, le sixième chapitre révèle également comment et pourquoi *Les Misérables* a été adapté pour son public-cible. Enfin, le chapitre 7 soulève deux questions théoriques importantes : i) la notion d'adaptation et ii) les normes universelles de traduction. On trouve en conclusion non seulement une critique de la théorie de Toury, mais une synthèse de son apport à la traductologie.

**Acknowledgement**

A special thank you to my thesis supervisor, Jean-Marc Gouanvic, for his meticulous revision and helpful suggestions.

**Dedication**

To my mom, for the unconditional love and support you have given me throughout the years.

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Before coming to the field of translation, I had studied music for the first two decades of my life. During those years, I had always been fascinated by the musicality of languages, and especially the magic of lyrics, which combined my first love, music, with my second one, language. I was especially interested in the creative process of how composers set words to music.

It was in 1982 that I saw my first "mega-musical," Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Evita*, and from that moment on, I became utterly obsessed with musicals—from *West Side Story* to *Starmania*. In 1991, I was blown away by *Les Misérables*, which played in Winnipeg, Manitoba in *both* English and French on alternate nights—with the same cast! Not only was this an incredible feat, the most amazing part was that it was equally effective in both languages. So it only seems fitting that I do this, my first thesis, on the translation of my favourite musical, *Les Misérables*.

## IN SEARCH OF A TRANSLATION THEORY

Before beginning to analyze the translation of the lyrics of *Les Misérables*, I had to decide which translation theory to use as a framework for my analysis. I would need a functional, open-ended theory that would be general enough to apply to the manifold considerations in lyric translation, in other words, a theory that would allow an *interdisciplinary approach.* Obviously, I would have to avoid traditional linguistic theories, which focus on one-to-one equivalence and look at translation in a "vacuum," that is, they focus on the words and ignore the larger socio-historical-cultural context of a translation. I was therefore looking for a descriptive theory, one which would describe actual translation practices *a posteriori* and regard the translation as an independent, autonomous text (as opposed to a prescriptive theory, which would propose one particular translation method *a priori*). Most importantly, I would need a target-oriented theory that would focus on the position and role of the translation within the norms of the target culture. In short, I required a theory that would focus on the *contextualization* of translation, that is, the idea that translation should be studied in the context of the culture receiving it.

## RATIONALE FOR THE POLYSYSTEM

In 1999, I sent an E-mail to Itamar Even-Zohar, the first promoter of the PS, to ask him how the theory could apply to the translation of a musical. This is his response:

> "Polysystem" is about *heterogeneity* [my emphasis] and the fact that at one and the same time, concurrent (and competing) options operate in culture. This general principle "applies" to any social situation. The question is: is there something about your translation case which REQUIRES taking account of heterogeneity? It all depends on what you are interested in. If you are interested in conflicting alternatives related to institutional rivalry between, say, various producers, then this perspective might be helpful. If, on the other hand, you are only interested in the procedures adopted while making the products, perhaps this is not the most important angle of view.[1]

The key word in this passage I believe is "heterogeneity." Indeed, I cannot think of a more heterogeneous translation context than the translation of the musical *Les Misérables*. There are in fact an infinite number of extra-textual issues to consider in the production and translation of a musical.

Since the PS focuses on describing actual translation practices (or norms) rather than constructing theories that advocate one particular translation method over another, I will be able to examine the translation of the musical *Les Misérables* within a much wider context than a linguistic theory would allow. Thus, rather than limiting the analysis of the translation to the nature of the equivalence that exists (or does not exist) between the source and target texts, the PS will allow me to focus on the translated text as an *autonomous* work of art existing in the target culture in its own right.

Finally, my main justification for using the PS approach rather than more traditional closed theories is that the PS offers an heuristic and methodological tool for analyzing, understanding and describing translational phenomena. In the words of José

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[1] Itamar Even-Zohar, Porter Chair of Semiotics, Unit for Culture Research, Faulty of Humanities, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 69978, ISRAEL, Nov. 13, 1999.

Lambert, "the most striking contribution of (poly)systemic thinking on translational phenomena is that is has generated a methodology" (Lambert 1995: 138). Many other translation scholars (not all of whom belong to the PS "school") agree that the PS's main strength is in its *application*. For example, Edwin Gentzler states: "The advantage of the systemic approach over previous approaches is perhaps best demonstrated by its application" (Gentlzer 1993: 135). Similarly, Milan Dimic and Marguerite Garstin assert that "by its very nature the polysystem is an open, heuristic theory, oriented towards *praxis* [my emphasis]" (Dimic and Garstin 1988: 8). The PS therefore focuses on real-world phenomena and does not force itself on reality, since, by its very nature, it is a *hypothesis* and not a thesis. Other theories have attempted to define translation according to criteria fixed *a priori*, and this has led to a rupture between research and reality (for the debate, see Toury 1980: 35-50, 63-70). The PS, on the other hand, attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice by focusing on actual translations.

What's more, while other theories have excluded adaptations, the PS has widened the definition of translation to include "imitations," "versions" and "adaptations" (Baker 1998: 178). As Even-Zohar explains, "translation is no longer a phenomenon whose nature and borders are given once and for all, but an activity dependent on the relations within a certain cultural system" (Even-Zohar 1990: 51). This is especially relevant to my particular translation case, since, as we shall see, the translations in question are indeed "adaptations." In the same vein, the term "genre" is understood in its widest sense, and is not restricted to "high" or "canonized" genres; it also includes "low" or non-canonized genres, "those norms and texts which are rejected by these circles as illegitimate" (Even-Zohar 1990: 15). The literary PS therefore includes works and genres

that have been traditionally excluded within the field of literary studies (e.g., science fiction, popular fiction, detective novels, children's literature, translated literature, etc.). A work like *Les Misérables*, though extremely popular with the "masses," is not considered a classic "masterpiece" of 19th-century French fiction and thus is often excluded from literary studies. Similarly, the popular genre of "musical" is not a revered form and is considered by some to be opera's "poorer cousin." The PS, on the other hand, rejects such value judgements and embraces these forms and genres with wide-open arms. This non-élitist approach is therefore apropos for my particular translation case.

In sum, then, the main rationale for using the PS as a theoretical framework to analyze the translation of the musical *Les Misérables* is that, as Even-Zohar points out, the PS is a general enough theory to apply to any social situation. Furthermore, in my specific translation case, the peculiar demands and diverse challenges in translating a musical definitely *require* taking account of heterogeneity.

# CHAPTER 1:

# THE POLYSYSTEM: AN OVERVIEW

According to the theory's first promoter, Itamar Even-Zohar, the PS is a general model for understanding, analyzing and describing the functioning and evolution of literary systems. As Even-Zohar explains:

> The idea that socio-semiotic phenomena [...] could more adequately be understood and studied if regarded as systems rather than conglomerates of disparate elements has become one of the leading ideas of our time in most sciences of man [...]. Viewing them as systems [...] made it possible to hypothesize how the various socio-semiotic aggregates operate (Even-Zohar 1997: 1).

Influenced by Russian formalism, Even-Zohar conceives literature as a network of relations among phenomena, both concrete and abstract. The PS attempts to explain the structure, evolution and stratification of literature:

> If the idea of structuredness and systemicity need no longer be identified with homogeneity, a socio-semiotic system can be conceived of as a heterogeneous, open structure. It is, therefore, very rarely a uni-system but is, necessarily, a polysystem—a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent (Even-Zohar 1990: 2).

In *Contemporary Translation Theories*, Edwin Gentzler summarizes Even-Zohar's PS in even clearer terms:

> He [Even-Zohar] adopts Tynjanov's concept of a hierarchical literary system and then "uses" the data collected from his observations on how translation functions in various societies to describe the hierarchical cultural system as a whole. He coins the term "polysystem" to refer to the entire network of correlated systems—literary and extraliterary—within society, and develops an approach called Polysystem theory to attempt to explain the function of ***all*** kinds of writing within a given culture—from the central canonical texts to the most marginal non-canonical texts (1993: 114).

The hypothesis underlying the PS is based on "the idea that there is a systematic distinction/opposition between various theoretical/practical concepts of literature, translation, communication and that such oppositions tend to produce hierarchies." (Lambert 1995: 110). Even-Zohar explains this hierarchy thus:

> According to what is presumed about the nature of systems in general and the nature of literary phenomena in particular, there can obviously be no equality between the various literary systems and types. These systems maintain *hierarchical* relations, which means some maintain a more central position than others, or that some are *primary* while others are *secondary* (1978: 16).

These hierarchies are between the *centre* and the *periphery*, and between the so-called "high" or "canonized"[2] literary forms and the "low" or "non-canonized" forms. The conservative, canonized forms closely reflect the most accepted institutionalized aesthetic. On the other hand, the innovative "non-canonized" genres attempt to usurp the dominant position of the former. Thus the various strata and subdivisions which make up a given PS vie for the dominant position: the centre versus the periphery; canonized versus non-canonized strata.

*Competition* is obviously an essential notion of the PS: the literary PS changes and "genetically" mutates as different forms and genres interact with each other. For example, a given national literary PS will evolve as a result of the continuous tension between various literary models, genres and traditions: conservative, "canonized" forms attempt to retain their prominent, central position, while innovative "non-canonized" genres attempt to usurp their central position (Shuttleworth, Cowie 1997: 127). Texts of a given literature thus enter into a permanent struggle for domination, mutation and evolution. As Gentzler explains:

> Throughout history, competing literary subsystems are thus constantly challenging and infiltrating higher orders, and then resolving, so the entire system evolves in a systematically "unsystematic" fashion: a sort of boiling caldron, manifest within a text as an interplay of intersecting and competing paradigms of formal elements, indicative of the conflicting heterogeneous systems struggling within the "polysystem" as a whole (1993: 116).

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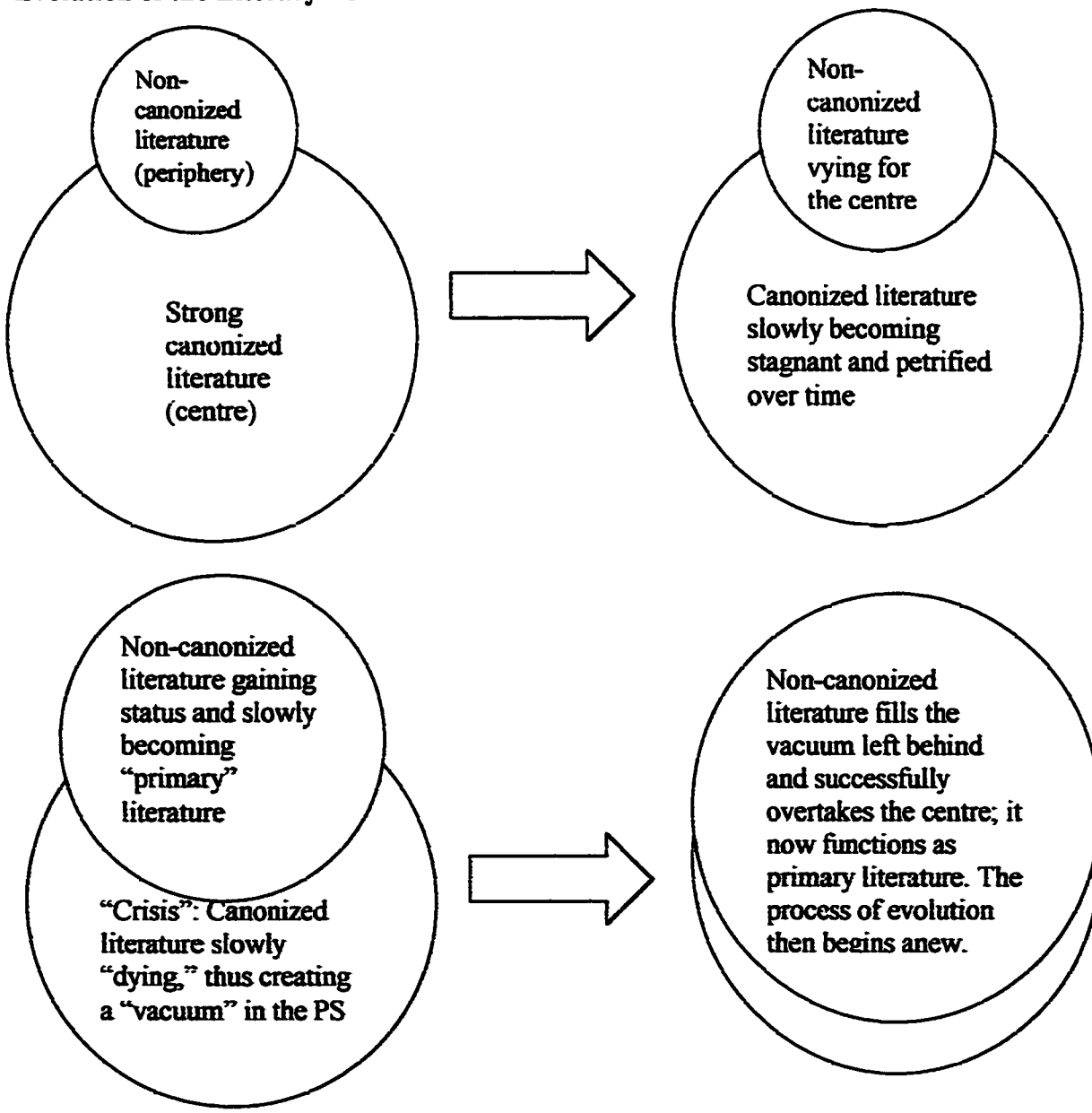
[2] According to Even-Zohar, "canonized" refers to "those norms and works (i.e., both models and products) which are accepted as legitimate by the dominant groups within the literary institution." On the other hand, "non-canonized" means "those norms and products which are rejected by these groups as illegitimate and whose products are often forgotten in the long run by the community (unless they change their status)" (Even-Zohar 1997: 15).

"Crises" in the literary PS occur when new, innovative elements attempt to overtake the petrified conservative system and are an indication of a system undergoing "healthy" renewal:

> "[C]rises" or "catastrophes" in a polysystem (i.e., occurrences which call for radical change, either by internal or external transfer), if they can be balanced by the system, are signs of a vital, rather than a degenerate, system (Even-Zohar 1997: 9).

As the following diagram illustrates, Even-Zohar conceives the PS as a Darwinian-like "survival of the fittest" or natural selection model for the evolution of literature:

**Evolution of the Literary PS**



Although it is clear from the above that the PS accounts for systemic phenomena of a general nature, it was in fact specifically designed to solve certain *translation* problems. In this regard, the PS abandons the traditional notions of one-to-one equivalence between the source and target text. Instead, it focuses on the translated texts themselves, their position and role within the target culture, and their relations with original texts of the target culture. This non-prescriptive, target-oriented approach allows the scholar to concentrate on the translated text as an entity existing in its own right, and to focus on *describing* actual translation practices (or norms) rather than constructing theories that advocate one particular translation method over another.

Based upon this (hypo)thesis and inspired from the work of Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury launched "Descriptive Translation Studies." Toury is interested in describing what translation behaviour consists of (rather than what it *should* consist of). Translated texts cease to be viewed as isolated phenomena in a "vacuum"; instead, they are thought of as manifestations of general translation procedures which are determined by the social and historical conditions within a given PS. Toury's most important contribution to translation studies is his notion of "norms." Borrowing a definition from sociology, Toury defines norms as:

> [T]he general values or ideas shared by a certain community as to what is right and wrong, adequate and inadequate—into specific performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to specific situations, specifying what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioural dimension [...]. Norms are acquired by the individual during his/her socialization and always imply *sanctions*—actual or potential, negative as well as positive (Toury 1995: 55).

In other words, norms are the implicit "do's and don'ts" that apply to various areas of behaviour in society. Norms also apply to "translation behaviour." "Translation norms" are defined as "the factors and constraints which shape [and constrain] standard

translation practices in a given culture" (Shuttleworth 1997: 179). Toury describes three types of translational norms: "initial norms," "preliminary norms," and "operational norms." First of all, "initial norms," involve a basic choice between adhering to the norms realized in the source text or adhering to the norms prevalent in the target culture. Secondly, "preliminary norms" concern the existence and nature of a translation "policy." In order to establish the cultural context that frames the translation process, certain preliminary questions must be answered: Why was the work chosen to be translated? What authors, historical periods, genres and aesthetics are preferred by the target culture? Lastly, "operational norms" are the actual decisions made during the act of translation. Toury identifies two types of operational norms: "matricial norms" and "textual-linguistic" norms. "Matricial norms" have to do with "the way textual material is distributed, how much of the text is translated, and any changes in segmentation, such as a result of large scale omissions [or additions]" (Baker 1998: 164). "Textual-linguistic norms" govern "the selection of specific textual material to formulate the target text or replace particular segments of the source text" (*ibid.*).[3]

Norms also determine the position of translation on an imaginary axis between two polar binaries: "adequacy" and "acceptability."[4] "Adequacy" means a functional

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[3] A text-linguistic approach has been put forward by Christina Schäffner, among others: "Textlinguistics defines the text as the basic unit of communication and, therefore, as the primary object of research. For translation studies this means that the text itself is considered to be the unit of translation [...] The basic assumption of textlinguistic approaches to translation is that SL- and TL-texts do not only differ in their sentence structures, which are determined by the respective linguistic systems, but also in regularities beyond the sentence boundaries [...]. Text-typological, or genre conventions, are culture-specific and can change over time, which makes genres relevant for translation studies. As a result of systematic comparison and description of genres in SL and TL, prototypes of text types or genre profiles can be set up. Such profiles can serve as models for the retextualisation of the SL-text according to the TL conventions. In other words, knowledge of cross-cultural similarities and/or differences in genre conventions is crucial to the translator in order to reproduce appropriate TL-texts" (Schäffner 1998: 4).

[4] This is similar to the polar binaries of "foreignizing" versus "domesticating" translation strategies discussed by Antoine Berman (1985; 1995) and Lawrence Venuti (1999).

equivalence between source and target text.[5] However, complete functional equivalence can never be achieved; the differences between the source and target language usually require substantial deviations from the source text. Even-Zohar and Toury call these deviations "non-obligatory shifts." Nearly all translations contain shifts on a micro-structural level (words, clauses, sentences). Even-Zohar and Toury are not only referring to syntactic and semantic shifts; they are also referring to pragmatic, stylistic and paradigm shifts in order to adjust the translated text to familiar models from the "home repertoire." Furthermore, "shifts come to be seen not as mistranslations or violations of rules of equivalence, but as the rule itself" (Gentzler 1993: 136). The term "acceptability" specifically refers to this tendency to make non-obligatory shifts.

Lastly, the notions of "repertoire" and "model" are essential to the PS:

> Since the PS is supposed to be a network of multirelations, it is imperative that it deal with many texts, often through sampling methods. Hence, it is the idea of the model, i.e. a potential combination selected from a given repertory upon which "proper textual relations" [...] have already been imposed which must replace that of the individual text. The latter would consequently be discussed as a manifestation of a certain model, whether conservative or innovatory (and thus unprecedented). The importance of a text for the PS is consequently determined by the position it might have occupied in the process of model creation and/or preservation. Instead of dealing with texts as closed systems, we are directed towards developing concepts of the literary repertory and model (Even-Zohar 1979: 304).

The ST may be based on an existing model/genre in the repertoire of the source culture, or, occasionally, it may challenge the norms. The TT, however, is often adjusted to a conventional model that exists in the repertoire of the *target* culture. In short, "the stronger the demand for acceptability, the greater the chance that the translated text will be adjusted to a model which already exists in the repertoire of the target system and [which] is familiar to both the translator and target audience" (Weissbrod 1998: 4).

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[5] "An adequate translation is a translation which realizes in the target language the textual relationships of a source text with no breach of its own [basic] linguistic system" (Even-Zohar 1975; cited in Toury 1995).

The notions discussed above combine to form a general theory of translation that can apply to *any* social situation and can serve as a framework to analyze and describe *all* types of translations. Moreover, the PS has many advantages over previous approaches, and these advantages are best demonstrated by its application. In the following chapters, I will do just that: I will use the PS as a framework to analyze and describe the translations of *Les Misérables* (the novel) and *Les Miz* (the musical).

## CHAPTER 2:

## SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL[6]

### 1. Historical Context

### VICTOR HUGO[7]

Victor Hugo (1802-1885) was France's most famous 19th-century poet, playwright and novelist. He was also a politician, a "prophet," and above all, a Christian moralist who inspired generations of future reformers and social activists. Hugo lived, wrote and died by his fiercely populist beliefs, a writer whose passionate idealism and deep humanitarianism created novels like *Les Misérables* and *Notre-Dame de Paris.*

### SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN 19th-CENTURY FRANCE

In 1851, Charles Louis Napoléon III seized power in a classic coup d'état and proclaimed himself President. Hugo, an acknowledged radical and prominent intellectual leader of the French Republican Left, was forced into exile. His exile lasted 20 years, during which time Hugo wrote some of his best works, including *Les Misérables* (1862). In 1870, the disastrous Franco-Prussian War forced Napoléon III in turn into exile. That same year, Hugo made a triumphant return to his beloved Paris, which was still besieged by Prussian troops, and was elected to the National Assembly of the new Republic. Then in March 1871, the Paris Commune was declared. Once more, Hugo was forced to flee

[6] For reasons of space, I do not propose to do an exhaustive analysis of the literary and socio-historical context of the novel. I merely offer this brief overview to "contextualize" the work.
[7] For more biographical information, I refer the reader to Graham Robb's excellent biography on Hugo (see bibliography).

the country. After the turmoil caused by the Commune and its brutal aftermath had concluded several years later, he triumphantly returned to Paris as a national hero.

Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, although ostensibly about the 1830s, is a work of the 1848 revolution. The images of misery, decay, destitution and desperation, symbolized in the classic images of the sewers, reflect the social problems of the time. The equally extensive depiction of secret societies, sociability and solidarity are a testimony to the hope the 1848 revolution had also brought.

## 2. Critical Reception and Importance of the Novel

Hugo's *Les Misérables* was received very poorly by critics in 19th-century France. According to Catherine Grossman, most critics fell into two major political camps:

> Generally speaking, political, social, and religious conservatives, representing the interests of the Second Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, assailed the author's intellectual integrity, his motives, and his ambitions, as well as the perceived central message of the text. In the more vitriolic attacks, critics claimed that the passionate arguments contained in the numerous digressions merely enabled a writer paid by the page to double his earnings. The tears he shed over the wretched of this world were, they said, sold most dearly. Moreover, his ethical views were defective: to blame a society for human suffering was, according to the reactionary press, to deny individual responsibility and to undermine existing institutions (Grossman 1996: 15).

The other major camp consisted of the more progressive, republican critics, who "defended the novel as profoundly moral" (*ibid.*). However, the two camps agreed on a few things. They both described the novel as "un monstre." Right-wing critics called the book "dangerous" since it seemed to be inciting a spirit of revolt—if not civil war—and they suggested that the novel should be banned.[8] Liberal democrats, on the other hand, objected to the novel's lack of concrete suggestions to improve society (*ibid.*). In short, both groups felt that politics had best be left to politicians rather than poets (Bach 1962: 602-3).

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[8] The Vatican placed the novel on its list of forbidden books in 1864 (Grossman 1996: 15).

In addition to the socio-political objections to the novel were the scathing literary criticisms. The consensus among critics was that the novel was certainly not a "masterpiece." As Grossman explains:

> With the exception of Javert, critics said the protagonists lacked either originality or psychological verisimilitude. Fantine was modelled on Esmeralda's mother in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831). Jean Valjean was but a pale version of Balzac's villain Vautrin, and his transformation from fugitive to respected industrialist and mayor and back again was completely implausible. In his personal correspondence, Gustave Flaubert seconded these opinions when he declared Hugo's characters to be "straight as a stick, as in tragedies [...] mannequins, little men made out of sugar" (Grossman 1996: 16).

The novel was especially criticized for its "chaotic" structure, an eclectic "hodgepodge" of literary styles and genres:[9] "Elements of epic are blended with dramatic and lyrical components; the grotesque with the sublime, satire with romance, comedy with tragedy, realism with romanticism, observation with prophetic vision" (Grossman 1996: 12). And since *Les Misérables* did not conform to any conventions[10] or norms[11] of composition,[12] it defied any attempt at classification (Vernier 1985: 69). It was a *sui generis* composition corresponding to no known genres or rules of rhetorical organization (*ibid.*). This unprecedented heterogeneity perhaps explains why the novel elicited such negative reactions from critics, whose (implicit) job is to preserve the status quo and uphold the institutionalized (conservative) aesthetic.

The critics' opinions, however, had no effect whatsoever on the general public:

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[9] This combination of literary style was characteristic of French Romanticism since the 1820s, Hugo being its greatest champion (Grossman 1996: 11).

[10] Christina Schäffner points out that many scholars prefer to speak of conventions instead of norms since norms are usually associated with rules, and non-adherence to them results in sanctions. "Conventions, however, are not binding, but only embody preferences" (1998: 4). Andrew Chesterman argues that "[Christiane] Nord's conventions are actually norms, not conventions. They are norms precisely because their violation gives rise to some critical comment—her own" (1993: 6).

[11] *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* says, "The difference between norms and conventions is that the latter are not binding and only express preferences" (Baker 1998: 164).

[12] The sanction for violating this literary norm was that the novel was ostracized from French "high culture" for a century thereafter (Grossman 1996: 16).

> According to reports at the time, no one had ever seen a book devoured with such fury: public reading rooms rented it by the hour; the price skyrocketed by as much as 33 percent on the very first day; by 6 April, not a single copy could be found in all of Paris (Grossman: 1996: 14).

Sales were enormous, and the initial French-language publishing success was duplicated all over the world as soon as the book became available in translation.[13] According to Pierre Malandain in his article entitled "La réception des *Misérables* ou Un lieu où des convictions sont en train de se former," the instant and overwhelming success of *Les Misérables* in France and around the world was unique in the history of printing (Malandain 1986: 1,065). Malandain concludes his article by saying:

> [Plusieurs auteurs d'articles] ont montré à la fois pourquoi ce roman ne pouvait être reçu en son temps que de la façon qu'on vient de décrire, et comment les leçons combinées de cette répudiation institutionnelle et de la faveur populaire jamais démentie en font un grand livre de notre temps (Malandain 1986: 1, 079).

After Hugo's death in 1885, France began to move increasingly towards the Right, and Hugo's social and political views fell into disfavour (Grossman 1996: 18). By the time World War I broke out in 1914, a decidedly anti-Romantic movement began to take root. French readers turned to the 19th-century "classics," such as Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir* (1830), Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) and Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) (*ibid.*). And while 16 editions of *Les Misérables* appeared in France between 1862 and 1885, not one edition was published between 1914 and 1933 (*ibid.*). For decades thereafter, it was fashionable to look down upon Hugo's works.[14] Under Nazi occupation (1940-44), Hugo was ideologically appropriated by both the Right and the Left:

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[13] For the reception of the English translations, see page 31.

[14] Grossman points out that "the exceptions are noteworthy. First the communist bloc adopted *Les Misérables* as its literary Bible. Indeed, the five-millionth copy of the 1902 translation of the novel was published in the People's Republic of China [...]. Other nations struggling with oppression were similarly disposed" (Grossman 1996: 19).

> [T]he Right used his vision of a united Europe to support the historical necessity of the Franco-German alliance; the underground Resistance, which included some of the major writers of the day, used *his* resistance to the tyranny of Napoléon III as a shining example for their own struggles (*ibid.*).

The turning point, however, did not come until the 1950s.[15] Hugo began to attract the attention of French literary scholars, and there was a renewed interest in Romanticism in general and Hugo in particular (*ibid.*). In 1962, the centennial of *Les Misérables*, reams of articles and books on the novel appeared, and Hugo was finally reinstated in French "high culture." In 1985,[16] the centenary of the author's death, "the shower of publications on Hugo [...] completed his transfiguration from cultural outcast to literary and political exemplar" (Grossman 1996: 21).

While the literary significance of *Les Misérables* is debatable,[17] its *social* significance is not: "Perhaps more than any other work of literature, Victor Hugo's novel has flourished as part of our international consciousness" (Grossman 1994: 2). Hugo's purpose in writing *Les Misérables*, to create social change, is clearly articulated in his preface to the novel:

> Tant qu'il existera, par le fait des lois et des mœurs, une damnation sociale créant artificiellement, en pleine civilisation, des enfers et compliquant d'une fatalité humaine, la destinée qui est divine [...] tant qu'il y aura sur la terre ignorance et misère, des livres comme celui-ci pourront ne pas être inutiles (Hugo 1862).[18]

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[15] "[S]tatistics show a huge jump in sales for *Les Misérables* since 1950. Thus, of the more than 5.25 million volumes sold in France between 1950 and 1984, sales skyrocketed from around 400,000 during the 1950s to more than 2.25 million copies during the 1960s. The rate for the 1970s and early 1980s held stead at about 1.7 million per decade" (Devars, *et al*: 386; cited in Grossman 1996: 21).

[16] The same year of the *Les Miz* world premier in London.

[17] Grossman's position is clearly biased.

[18] "So long as there shall exist, by virtue of law and custom, decrees of damnation pronounced by society, artificially creating hells amid the civilization of earth, and adding the element of human fate to divine destiny; so long as the three great problems of the century—the degradation of man through pauperism, the corruption of woman through hunger, the crippling of children through lack of light—are unsolved; so long as social asphyxia is possible in any part of the world; [...] in other words [...] so long as ignorance and poverty exist on earth, books of the nature of *Les Miserables* cannot fail to be of use" (Denny 1976).

In Hugo's time, the novel challenged readers to examine the social and political injustices. It tacitly subverted Napoléon III's Second Empire, and the result contributed to a bloodless revolution that led to the Third Republic (1870-1970) and social reform. In the 21st century, the novel's humanitarian concerns are equally relevant: no society on this planet has yet succeeded in eradicating poverty and social injustice. Grossman concludes her chapter on the reception of *Les Misérables* by saying:

> In a world still plagued by poverty, despair, corruption, and indifference, scholars have at last joined with general readers in appreciating not only the beauty and power but also the profound pertinence of this book to our own place and time (1996: 22).

## CHAPTER 3:

## TWO ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE NOVEL

### 1. A Comparison of Wilbour's Translation (1862) and Denny's Translation (1976)

In this chapter, I will only discuss the translations of Charles Wilbour (1862) and Norman Denny (1976), as this thesis is not primarily concerned with the translations of the novel. *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* mentions two others translations, those of F.C.L. Wraxall (1862) and Isabel F. Hapgood (1887). Both Wraxall's and Hapgood's translation are out of print. I decided to compare Wilbour's translation with Denny's version since the only other modern version that exists, by Lee Fahnestock (Signet, 1987), can hardly be considered a complete re-translation; it is merely an edited and modernized version of Wilbour's translation. Furthermore, Wilbour's and Denny's translations are the only versions readily available at most book stores and libraries.

Wilbour's 1862 translation of *Les Miséreables* contained no editorial remarks, introduction nor translator's note (Lebreton-Savigny 1971: 31). Everyman's Library's 1997 reprint has a lengthy introduction, an annotated bibliography and a chronology—but only one sentence on the translation. I will not discuss Wilbour's approach at this point. Suffice it to say for now that Wilbour's translation sticks to the original very closely on both the micro- and macro-structural levels.[19]

[19] For example, he keeps the same titles of the five sections, and he completely translates even the longest digressions in their entirety which is quite surprising since American translations often abridge works to adapt them to the public's taste.

Norman Denny's 1976 translation, on the other hand, contains an informative introduction to the work followed by a revealing discussion of his translation approach. In his translator's note, Denny begins by first criticizing previous translations:

> There are three earlier English renderings of Hugo's novel, of which I have seen only one. I shall not disclose which one, or make any comment except to say that I found it very heavy going. It was made at the turn of the century and the translator, conscientiously observing the principles of translation at that time, has made a brave attempt to follow Hugo in the smallest detail, almost literally word for word. The result is something that is not English, not Hugo and, it seems to me, scarcely readable. It reads, in short, like a translation and it does no service to Hugo. I am told that the other English versions, which I have not seen, are not very different (Denny 1982: 11).

Denny then discusses the principles of translation during the 1960s and 1970s:

> The principles of translation have greatly changed in the past twenty or thirty years. It is now generally recognised that the translator's first concern must be with his author's *intention*; not with the words he uses or with the way he uses them [...] but with what he is seeking to convey to the reader [...]. The author—each and every author—writes because he wants to be *read*. Readability must be the translator's first concern. Sometimes he is set an impossible task. There are writers who may fairly be termed unreadable. But Victor Hugo is not one of them. He is in many ways the most exasperating of writers—long winded, extravagant in his use of words [...] sprawling and self-indulgent. At times [...] he was, with all his high-minded earnestness, extra-ordinarily lacking in self-criticism. There are passages of mediocrity and banality in *Les Misérables*, as in all his work [...]. The translator can [...], I maintain, do something to remedy these defects without falsifying the book, if he will nerve himself to treat Hugo not as a museum piece or a sacred cow but as the author of a very great novel which is still living, still relevant to life, and which deserves to be read. He can 'edit' –that is to say abridge, tone down the rhetoric, even delete where the passage in question is merely an elaboration of what has already been said. I have edited in this sense throughout the book, as a rule only to a minor degree, and never, I hope, so drastically as to be unfaithful to Hugo's intention [...] (12).

He then concludes by telling the reader what to expect to see in his translation:

> This foreword is unavoidable if the reader is to know exactly what he is getting—not a photograph but a slightly modified version of Hugo's novel designed to bring its great qualities into clearer relief by thinning out, but never completely eliminating, its lapses. It must stand or fall not by its literal accuracy, although I profoundly hope that I have been guilty of no major solecisms, but by its faithfulness to the spirit of Victor Hugo. He was above all things, and at all times, a poet. If the fact is not apparent to the English reader then this rendering of this work must be said to have failed (13).

In sum, Denny's translation plan is to abridge the text, tone down the rhetoric, and transfer the book-length digressions to appendices.

## 2. **Analysis of Wilbour's and Denny's Versions**

The first part of my analysis discusses excerpts from Part IV of *Les Misé*rables, which is entitled "L'idylle rue Plumet et l'épopée rue St-Denis." I decided to look at the chapter entitled "Les bouillonnements d'autrefois" from Part IV for several reasons. First of all, this chapter is typical of the book-length digressions for which the work has been so severely criticized—and which have been cut from most abridged additions. Secondly, this chapter also represents Hugo the poet at his best: there are places in this chapter where "his sharp, short resonant sentences follow one another with the rapidity and precision of blows struck upon the smith's envil [*sic*]" (Lebreton-Savigny 1971: 16). Lastly, and most important, I chose this chapter for its historical significance, as well as its relevancy to the novel as a whole. The second part of my analysis is from the penultimate chapter of *Les Misérables* entitled "Nuit derrière laquelle il y a le jour." I chose this chapter for its obvious climatic position in the work: the *dénouement* of the plot. The other reason why I decided to analyze this chapter is because it contains examples of how Wilbour and Denny (mis)treat the original.

### EXCERPT #1:

> LES BOUILLONNEMENTS D'AUTREFOIS
>
> Rien n'est plus extraordinaire que le premier fourmillement d'une émeute. Tout éclate partout à la fois. Était-ce prévu? oui. Était-ce préparé? non. D'où cela sort-il? des pavés. D'où cela tombe-t-il? des nues. Ici l'insurrection a le caractère d'un complot; là d'une improvisation. Le premier venu s'empare d'un courant de la foule et le mène où il veut. Début plein d'épouvante où se mêle une sorte de gaieté formidable. Ce sont d'abord des clameurs, les magasins se ferment, les étalages des marchands disparaissent; puis des coups de feu isolés; des gens s'enfuient; des coups de crosse heurtent les portes cochères; on entend les servantes rire dans les cours des maisons et dire *: il va y avoir du train!* (Hugo III: 88).[20]

[20] This and all subsequent excerpts are from *Les Misérables*, Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1979.

THE EBULLITIONS OF FORMER TIMES

> Nothing is more extraordinary than the first swarming of an émeute. Everything bursts out everywhere at once. Was it foreseen? yes. Was it prepared? no. Whence does it spring? from the pavements. Whence does it fall? from the clouds. Here the insurrection has the character of a plot; there of an improvisation. The first comer takes possession of a current of the multitude and leads it whither he will. A beginning full of terror with which is mingled a sort of frightful gaiety. At first there are clamours, the shops close, the displays of the merchants disappear; then some isolated shots; people flee; butts of guns strike against porte-cochères; you hear the servant girls laughing in the yards of the houses and saying: *There is going to be a row!* (Wilbour: 1,045).

Earlier occasions

> Nothing is more remarkable than the first stir of a popular uprising. Everything, everywhere happens at once. It was foreseen but is unprepared for; it springs up from pavements, falls from the clouds, looks in one place like an ordered campaign and in another like a spontaneous outburst. A chance-comer may place himself at the head of a section of the crowd and lead it where he chooses. This first phase is filled with terror mingled with a sort of terrible gaiety. There is rowdiness and the shops put up their shutters; people take to their heels; blows thunder on barred doors, and servants within enclosed courtyards can be heard gleefully exclaiming, 'There's going to be a bust-up!' (Denny: 896).

First of all, it is interesting to notice how the translators render the titles. Wilbour renders the original "bouillonnements" as "ebullition," which, according to the Collins dictionary, means "a sudden outburst of intense emotion" (1991: 492). Denny's title, "Earlier occasions," sounds rather bland and does not convey the vitality of the original. In the first sentence, Wilbour replaces "fourmillement" with its bilingual dictionary surrogate: "swarming." Denny instead chooses a communicative equivalent based on the context: "stir." Next, Wilbour uses the same word as the original: "émeute." However, Denny chooses the modern usage of the word, which means a riot or popular uprising. Wilbour renders the second sentence with an equally powerful one: "Everything bursts out everywhere at once." Denny's version, on the other hand, lacks electrical charge: "everything, everywhere happens at once." In the next few sentences, it is interesting to see how the two translators treat Hugo's text: Wilbour closely follows the same syntax, capitalization, punctuation and question and answer structure of the original: "Was it foreseen? yes. Was it prepared? no. Whence does it spring? from the pavements. Whence

does it fall? from the clouds. Here the insurrection has the character of a plot; there of an improvisation." But Denny treats this passage quite freely: "It was foreseen but is unprepared for; it springs up from pavements, falls from the clouds, looks in one place like an ordered campaign and in another like a spontaneous outburst." In the next sentence, Wilbour's rendition sounds very awkward: "The first comer takes possession of a current of the multitude and leads it whither he will." Denny, however, chooses not to translate the individual words; rather, he chooses to interpret their collective meaning: "A chance-comer may place himself at the head of a section of the crowd and lead it where he chooses." The translation of the final sentence of this paragraph clearly illustrates the general trend seen so far. Wilbour renders this sentence as "At first there are clamours, the shops close, the displays of the merchants disappear; then some isolated shots; people flee; butts of guns strike against porte-cochères [*sic*]; you hear the servant girls laughing in the yards of the houses and saying: *There is going to be a row!*" His version follows the same syntax as the original, contains neither additions nor omissions and employs a form of exoticism called *emprunt*, that is, using the word "porte-cochères" in English. Denny's version, however, is the antithesis of Wilbour's: "There is rowdiness and the shops put up their shutters; people take to their heels; blows thunder on barred doors, and servants within enclosed courtyards can be heard gleefully exclaiming, 'There's going to be a bust-up!'" Denny's version of this passage contains a gaping omission: "les étalages des marchands disparaissent; puis des coups de feu isolés" is completely deleted.

The next passage from this chapter I will analyze is an excellent example of Hugo's "extravagant" use of words. His style is often criticized as long-winded, heavy

and verbose;[21] it is not unusual to find eight or nine adjectives appended to a single noun. In the following sentence, Hugo describes a man in vivid detail, using not less than seven (!) adjectives.

**EXCERPT #2:**

> Rue Nonaindières, un bourgeois bien vêtu, qui avait du ventre, la voix sonore, le crâne chauve, le front élevé, la barbe noire et une de ces moustaches rudes qui ne peuvent se rabattre, offrait publiquement des cartouches aux passants (III: 89).

Wilbour predictably renders every word in the same order as the original:

> In the Rue des Nonaindières, a well-dressed bourgeois, who was pursy, had a sonorous voice, a bald head, a high forehead, a black beard, and one of those rough moustaches which cannot be smoothed down, offered cartridges publicly to the passers-by.

Denny, however, reorders the adjectives, reshapes the sentence, deletes one item ("le front élevé"), and makes the sentence flow more easily:

> In the Rue des Nonnains-d'Hyères a well-dressed citizen, bald and round-bellied, with a black beard, a bristling moustache and a loud voice, was openly offering cartridges to the passers-by.

The next excerpt has been subjected to a thorough analysis by Sandy Petrey in his article entitled "Must History Be Lost in Translation?" (1984: 86-93).

**EXCERPT #3:**

> Rue St-Pierre-Montmartre, des hommes aux bras nus promenaient un drapeau noir où on lisait ces mots en lettres blanches: *République ou la mort.* Rue des Jeûneurs, rue du Cadran, rue Montorgueil, rue Mandar, apparaissaient des groupes agitant des drapeaux sur lesquels on distinguait des lettres d'or, le mot *section* avec un numéro. Un de ces drapeaux était rouge et bleu avec un imperceptible entre-deux blanc (III: 89).
>
> In the Rue Saint Pierre Montmartre, some men with bare arms paraded a black flag on which these words could be read in white letters: *Republic or Death.* In the Rue des Jeûneurs, the Rue du Cadran, the Rue Montorgueil and the Rue Mandar, appeared groups waving flags on which were visible in letters of gold, the word *section* with a number. One of these flags was red and blue with an imperceptible white stripe (Wilbour: 1,046).
>
> Bare-armed men were parading the Rue Saint-Pierre-Montmartre with a black banner on which was inscribed in white letters the legend, 'Republic or Death', and in the Rue des Jeûneurs, the Rue de Cadran, the Rue Montorgueil, and the Rue Mandar there were groups waving flags bearing the word '*section*' and a number in letters of gold. One of these flags was red and blue, separated by a faint white stripe (Denny: 897).

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[21] *Les Misérables* is in *The Guinness Book of Records* for the second longest sentence in all of Western literature: 823 words, 93 commas, 51 semi-colons and 4 dashes (Robb 1997: 602).

Petrey only discusses Wilbour's translation, but his comments are equally applicable to Denny's version as well. Before he analyzes Wilbour's translation of this paragraph, Petrey first explains its historical significance:

> Almost every word [in this paragraph] makes precise reference to the definite historical situation created during the early years of the July Monarchy, the regime headed by a king who acquired power over France thanks to a revolution intended to terminate kings' power over France [...]. The flag with an imperceptible white stripe between red and blue fields has an equally concrete political identification [...]. A rebel flag on which red and blue are squeezing royal white into imperceptible tenuousness is a emblem for the flagbearers' commitment to abolish the monarchy and institute a regime from which all kings, even citizen kings, are irrevocably expelled (87-88).

Petrey then criticizes Wilbour for translating "section" as "section":

> The word with an exact English cognate [...] is the word written on several flags, *section*, which Wilbour with every justification translated as "section." But here the graphic identity and semantic near-identity of the two cognates are immaterial, for the meaning of *section* in Hugo's text is culturally specific in a way that "section" is not [...]. But historical electricity is in "le mot *section* avec un numéro," only topographical blandness is in "the word *section* with a number" [...]. In order to preserve the key element of Hugo's original, the English version must go beyond the French words' *lexical* equivalents and find ways to suggest their *historical* power. If this requires including in the translation words or phrases that have no correspondents in the original, so be it. The paragraph in question insistently evokes the *events* in which its words have figured, and it is a painful misrepresentation to treat those words as if they existed only in *dictionaries*. A version like "the words *Revolutionary Section* with a number" is a more accurate translation of "le mot *section* avec un numéro" than the version produced by reverent abstention from adding anything to the text. That proposed revision still does not capture Hugo's precise historical allusion, but it at least indicates that the sections which flags enumerate are political troops organized in defiance of the current regime (88-89).

Finally, Petrey offers an alternate version of this historical paragraph. (I have underlined the words that Petrey adds.)

> In the Rue Saint Pierre Montmartre, some bare-armed <u>workers</u> paraded a flag <u>similar to those seen during the Lyons weavers' rebellion</u>, a black <u>banner</u> on which these words could be read in white letters: *Republic or death*. In the Rue des Jeûneurs, the Rue du Cadran, the Rue Montorgueil and the Rue Mandar appeared groups waving flags on which were visible in letters of gold the words *<u>Revolutionary</u> Section* with a number. One of these flags was red and blue with an imperceptible white stripe between: <u>the color of royalty was being eliminated from the nation's tricolor symbol</u> (ibid.: 90-91).

In sum, Petrey believes that the only way to convey the historical charge of Hugo's original is by adding explanatory words and phrases.

**EXCERPT #4:**

NUIT DERRIÈRE LAQUELLE IL Y A LE JOUR

Quand un être qui nous est cher va mourir, on le regarde avec un regard qui se cramponne à lui et qui voudrait le retenir. Tous deux muets d'angoisse, ne sachant que dire à la mort, désespérés et tremblants, étaient debout devant lui, Cosette donnant la main à Marius.

D'instant en instant, Jean Valjean déclinait. Il baissait; il se rapprochait de l'horizon sombre. Son souffle était devenu intermittent; un peu de râle l'entrecoupait. Il avait de la peine à déplacer son avant-bras, ses pieds avaient perdu tout mouvement, et en même temps que la misère des membres et l'accablement du corps croissait, toute la majesté de l'âme montait et se déployait sur son front. La lumière du monde inconnu était déjà visible dans la prunelle.

Sa figure blêmissait, et en même temps souriait. La vie n'était plus là, il y avait autre chose. Son haleine tombait, son regard grandissait. C'était un cadavre auquel on sentait des ailes (III: 487).

NIGHT BEHIND WHICH IS DAWN

When a being who is dear to us is about to die, we look at him with a look which clings to him, and which would hold him back. Both, dumb with anguish, knowing not what to say to death, despairing and trembling, they stood before him, Marius holding Cosette's hand.

From moment to moment, Jean Valjean grew weaker. He was sinking; he was approaching the dark horizon. His breath had become intermittent; it was interrupted by a slight rattle. He had difficulty in moving his wrist, his feet had lost all motion, and, at the same time that the distress of the limbs and the exhaustion of the body increased, all the majesty of the soul rose and displayed itself upon his forehead. The light of the unknown world was already visible in his eye.

His face grew pale, and at the same time smiled. Life was no longer present, there was something else. His breath died away, his look grew grand. It was a corpse on which you felt wings (Wilbour, 1,429).

Night with day to follow

When a person dear to us is about to die we fix him with an intent gaze that seeks to hold him back. They stood beside him in silent anguish, having no words to speak, Cosette clasping Marius by the hand.

Jean Valjean was visibly declining, sinking down towards that dark horizon. His breath was coming in gasps, punctured by slight groans. He had difficulty in moving his arms, and his feet were now quite motionless. But as the weakness of his body increased so his spirit grew in splendour, and the light of the unknown world was already visible in his eyes. His face became paler as he smiled. There was something other than life in it. His breath failed but his gaze grew deeper. He was a dead body which seemed to possess wings (Denny, 1,198).

This excerpt is from the penultimate chapter of *Les Misérables* in which Jean Valjean is reunited with Cosette and Marius, who soon learn that Jean Valjean is dying. Hugo's symbolic title for this chapter can be interpreted on several different levels. But this is not what concerns me here; what interests me is the fact that Hugo chose "Nuit *derrière*

*laquelle* il y a le jour"[22] rather than simply "Nuit *suivie du* jour." Denny's translation of the title as "Night with day to follow" misses the nuance of Hugo's poetic language.[23] But Wilbour's literal translation, "Night behind which is dawn," conveys the same sense of poetry as the original.

Nevertheless, Denny's plan, simplification in the name of readability, is sometimes justifiable. In the above excerpt, for example, he tightens up and condenses Hugo's text. He reduces "Quand un être qui nous est cher va mourir, on le regarde avec un regard qui se cramponne à lui et qui voudrait le retenir" to "When a person dear to us is about to die we fix him with an intent gaze that seeks to hold him back." Here, Denny does not delete any essential information; he simply conveys the *global meaning.* However, in the second sentence, he *does* omit essential information. Hugo's "Tous deux muets d'angoisse, ne sachant que dire à la mort, désespérés et tremblants, étaient debout devant lui, Cosette donnant la main à Marius" is abridged to "They stood beside him in silent anguish, having no words to speak, Cosette clasping Marius by the hand." The words "à la mort, désespérés et tremblants" are nowhere to be found in Denny's version. Denny's second paragraph, however, is wonderfully translated with freedom and flourish—*without* chopping out any essential information (see excerpt above).

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss the closing passage of this chapter.

**EXCERPT #5:**

> Je vais donc m'en aller, mes enfants. Aimez-vous bien toujours. Il n'y a guère autre chose que cela dans le monde : s'aimer. Vous penserez quelquefois au pauvre vieux qui est mort ici...Mes enfants voici que je ne vois plus très clair, j'avais encore des choses à dire, mais c'est égal. Pensez un peu à moi. Vous êtes des êtres bénis. Je ne sais pas ce que j'ai, je vois de la lumière. Approchez encore. Je meurs heureux. Donnez-moi vos chères têtes bien-aimées, que je mette mes mains dessus.

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[22] In my mind, "Nuit derrière laquelle il y a le jour" depicts a picture in which a dark, lugubrious foreground is juxtaposed against a luminous background, as in a Romantic painting.

[23] It must be remembered that Hugo was a prolific poet and an accomplished drawer and painter as well.

Cosette et Marius tombèrent à genoux, éperdus, étouffés de larmes, chacun sur une des mains de Jean Valjean. Ces mains augustes ne remuaient plus.

Il était renversé en arrière, la lueur des deux chandeliers l'éclairait; sa face blanche regardait le ciel, il laissait Cosette et Marius couvrir ses mains de baisers; il était mort.

La nuit était sans étoiles et profondément obscure. Sans doute, dans l'ombre, quelque ange immense était debout, les ailes déployées, attendant l'âme (III: 489).

So I am going away, my children. Love each other dearly always. There is scarcely anything else in the world but that: to love one another. You will think sometimes of the poor old man who died here...My children, I do not see very clearly now, I had some more things to say, but it makes no difference. Think of me a little. You are blessed creatures. I do not know what is the matter with me, I see a light. Come nearer. I die happy. Let me put my hands upon your dear beloved heads."

Cosette and Marius fell on their knees, overwhelmed, choked with tears, each grasping one of Jean Valjean's hands. Those august hands moved no more.

He had fallen backwards, the light from the candlesticks fell upon him; his white face looked up towards heaven, he let Cosette and Marius cover his hands with kisses; he was dead.

The night was starless and very dark. Without doubt, in the gloom some mighty angel was standing, with outstretched wings, awaiting the soul (Wilbour: 1,431).

And now I must leave you, my children. Love one another always. There is nothing else that matters in this world except love. You will think sometimes of the old man who died in this place...Children, my sight is failing. I had more to say, but no matter. Think of me sometimes. You are fortunate. I don't know what is happening to me, I can see a light. Come closer. I die happy. Bow your dear heads so that I may lay my hands on them.'

Cosette and Marius fell on their knees on either side of him, stifling their tears. His hands rested on their heads, and did not move again. He lay back with his head turned to the sky, and the light from the two candlesticks fell upon his face (Denny: 1,200).

I do not propose to analyze this passage. However, the reason why I chose it as one of the characteristic passages is because it represents an approach that Denny uses throughout his translation. Here, he chooses to delete the entire last two and a half lines of Hugo's text. This is one of the most beautiful passages and arresting images in *Les Misérables*, and a translation that would delete such a passage is a bowdlerization—which brings me to the next section of this chapter: critique of the translations.

## 3. Critique[24]

In Graham Robb's biography on Victor Hugo, he calls Denny's translation of *Les Misérables* a "Swiss cheese of unavowed omissions [...] [which] bears out Hugo's comments on translation as a form of censorship" (Robb 1998: 382).[25] Robb asserts that translators and editors often use the novel's supposed "faults" as an excuse to doctor the text (382). Indeed, most abridged versions of the novel criticize Hugo's style in their introductions. As we saw earlier, Denny criticizes the novel's supposed "lapses" in his introduction: "wholly unrestrained," "no regard for the discipline of novel-writing," "moralizing rhetoric," "exasperating," "self-indulgent," "passages of mediocrity and banality," and so forth (Denny 1984: 11). Similarly, in James Robinson's introduction to his abridged version of the novel (which reduces the 1,500-page tome to only 334 pages), he accuses the novel of being diffuse and wordy:

> [... ] too much philosophizing slowed down the movement of the narrative and that digressions of various sorts were often so lengthy that the narrative thread was sometimes lost. Digressions on the glass industry, on the Picpus Convent, on money, on Paris slang, on revolutionary thought, on the use of sewage as fertilizer have little to do with the central action. Accounts of the Battle of Waterloo and the Insurrection of 1832 are interesting, even brilliant, but they are only remotely relevant (Robinson 1989: 9).

Graham Robb, however, strongly disagrees:

> These interpolations were invitations to grasp the whole picture, to see that the Battle of Waterloo, for instance [...] can be subsumed in the great strange attractor of destiny, the ineluctable equilibrium of everything (Robb 1998: 383).

What's more, Hugo's digression on sewage is "organically attached to the rest of the novel and can be read on its own as an allegory of the whole work: Jean Valjean pulling himself out of the slime of moral blindness into which society has plunged him" (*ibid*).

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[24] It is easy to criticize translations; infinitely more difficult to produce a good one. My critique of Wilbour and Denny's translations should not be viewed as a denigration of their efforts, but rather as a tribute to the importance of their contribution.

[25] In the preface to his son's translations from Shakespeare, Hugo suggests that people generally perceive translation as an act of violence against already established poetic conventions (1865 iii-iv).

Denny's version, which deletes these digressions, therefore constitutes an objectionable violation of the author's original intention.

Denny's translation violates Hugo's text on the micro-structural level as well. Omissions of a word or phrase here and there may seem insignificant, but they end up painting a completely different picture for the reader over the long run. In short, although Denny's version does what Antoine Berman calls "faire œuvre," it does not adhere to Berman's ethic; it lacks respect for the original and does not attain the highest ideal in translation, what Berman calls "faire-œuvre-*en-correspondance*" (Berman 1995: 94).

Wilbour's version, on the other hand, has "correspondance," but does not "fait œuvre." We can assume that Wilbour's intention was to create an extremely faithful translation on both the micro- and macro-structural levels, conscientiously following the principles of translation at the time.[26] But Petrey would probably say that Wilbour's version is just as disloyal to the original as Denny's capriciously free and abridged translation. However, Petrey's alternate version of Hugo's historical passage, which adds entire sentences, might also be seen as a violation of an important translation ethic described by Berman: "le *contrat* fondamental qui lie une traduction à son original [...] interdit tout *dépassement de la texture de l'original*" (1984: 118).

[26] In all fairness to Wilbour, he was simply following the 19th-century principles of translation. For more on the 19th-century Romantic conception of authorship and the devaluation of the role of the translator, see Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995). Had Wilbour written a translator's note, it might have been something like Wraxall's: "No other merit is claimed for the following version of *Les Misérables* than the most scrupulous fidelity and my chief anxiety has been to *keep myself out of sight* [my emphasis], and give the precise meaning of every word as written by the author" (Wraxall 1879: III; cited in Lebreton-Savigny 1971: 33).

## 4. Reception of the English Translations

In the United States, the publication of *Les Misérables* coincided with the second year of the American Civil War, where it was a favourite of Civil War soldiers, "who perhaps found solace in the resolution of Jean Valjean's moral dilemmas and France's civil conflict" (Grossman 1996: 17). There were very few 19th-century critiques in the American press that talked about the *translations* of *Les Misérables*; perhaps people viewed the English version simply as a "blueprint" of the original and not a translation *per se*. Among the few comments that the press made, most praised Wilbour's:

> It is worth while noticing that by far the best English version is the American translation of Mr. Charles E. Wilbour, published by Carleton and now out of print, but since "pirated" in England. The sale was enormous. (*The Critic*, vol. 3, no. 74, May 30, 1885; cited in Lebreton-Savigny 1971: 30).

One of the few criticisms of Wilbour's translation was in a reprint in 1863:[27]

> The translation which has been adopted as the bases of the present reprint, although in the main faithful and spirited, is disfigured by numerous errors and misapprehensions of peculiar French idioms, some of them even of a ludicrous nature (*Les Misérables* [*The Wretched*], 1863: iv; cited in Lebreton-Savigny 1971: 32.).

In the 20th-century, critiques of Wilbour's translation were also a rarity. More often than not, comments on his translation are confined to a mere sentence or two, often in footnotes. For example, in her annotated bibliography, Kathryn Grossman writes: "Very accurate, literal, complete rendition that does not quite capture the poetic power of the original" (Grossman 1996: 133).[28]

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[27] In this edition, which appeared in Richmond 1863, the name of the translator (Wilbour) was omitted (Lebreton-Savigny 1971: 31).

[28] Grossman is referring to the Lee Farnestock and Norman MacAfee version, which is based on Wilbour's version.

Norman Denny's 1976 translation,[29] on the other hand, has elicited numerous comments ranging from acclamation to contempt. First of all, here are a couple of balanced (scholarly) critiques:

#1: The one modern version is described by its translator Norman Denny as 'not a photograph but a slightly modified version of Hugo's novel, designed to bring its great qualities into relief by thinning out, but never completely eliminating, its lapses'. So Denny abridges the text, 'tones down' the rhetoric, and transfers digressions to appendices. The prose is simplified, and the syntax often remodelled in the name of readability (France 2000: II.g.9).

#2: Carries much of the beauty and force of Hugo's language but abridges some interesting longer passages (Grossman 1996: 133).

And now a very opinionated review:

#3: A Swiss cheese of unavowed omissions [...] [which] bears out Hugo's comments on translation as a form of censorship (Robb 1997: 382).

Finally, here are three reviews written by the general public at www.amazon.com.[30]:

#4 A literary masterpiece and ongoing classic

The Norman Denny is by far the best translation. The wording is like poetry, or music, instead of prose. Other translations are word-for-word, and while that is commendable, French sometimes is awkward translated into English. Norman Denny translates the spirit of Hugo's original work (Jean Prouvaire, May 24, 1999).

#5 Incredible translation

Norman Denny's translation lives up to its promise. If you are a purist you will read this version, all 1200 pages of it (Anonymous, March 22, 1999).

The next review argues that Denny's translation is an *abridged* version:

#6 Perhaps the best novel ever; but not Denny's translation

Most people consider Norman Denny's translation (Penguin Classics) to be unabridged. This is NOT THE CASE. Read the introduction and you will see that Denny admits to editing content for length. This is the definition of abridging. I compared Denny's translation to the translation I read first, the Lee Fahnestock (Signet Classics) translation [based on Wilbour], and some of my favourite parts are missing. Denny moves a couple chapters to the back of the book as appendixes. Sorry, but I want to read the novel in the order the author intended. Denny's is better than most abridged versions, but it is still an abridged version ("Gavroche," Aug. 11, 1999).

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[29] From 1982 to 1993, Penguin sold 255,895 copies worldwide of its one-volume edition of Norman Denny's translation, and by the end of 1994 the book had been reprinted 20 (!) times (Grossman 1996: 22). These statistics suggest, all the same, that Denny's translation was very well received.

[30] Interestingly, of the 175 reviews of *Les Misérables* at this web site, only three (!) mention the fact that what they are talking about is a *translation*.

## CONCLUSION

In view of Collins' definition of "abridge," "to reduce the length of a written work by condensing or rewriting," the last reviewer is right: Denny's translation is indeed an abridged version. Interestingly, Collins also gives an older meaning of abridge: "to deprive of." This archaic meaning of "abridge" is especially relevant for the translation of *Les Misérables* since abridged versions of the work *deprive* the novel of its full force. As Kathryn Grossman aptly puts it:

> As the nucleus of *Les Misérables*, the story of Jean Valjean has dominated many abridged versions of the novel as well as most film renditions. This is a great misfortune. To exclude the historical commentaries, or the digressions on argot, religious faith, and the sewers [...][31] is to rip the hero's moral struggles out of the context that gives them meaning. It is to transform *Les Misérables* into something like *Le Misérable*, to reduce a vast fresco of individual and collective destinies into the relatively trite tale of an ex-convict on the run. Hugo's poetic imagination ceaselessly weaves analogies between Jean Valjean's spiritual progress and humanity's striving toward freedom, harmony, and social justice. What we lose, then, through external abridgement or our own impatience to get on with "the story" is the highly uncommon interconnectedness of the whole (Grossman 1996: 45).

On the macro-structural level, then, Denny's translation definitely deprives the original of its "interconnectedness" within a larger context; on the micro-structural level, it effaces hundreds of arresting images and bears out Hugo's comments on translation as a form of censorship (Robb 1997: 382). The omission of the final two sentences of the novel, for example, is similar to the kind of censorship that *Les Misérables* suffered when Wilbour's translation was reprinted in 1863 in the Southern Confederate States.[32]

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[31] For reasons of space, I have to "abridge" Grossman's comments.

[32] "A few scattered sentences, reflecting on slavery [...] it has also been advisable to strike out [...]. The extraneous matter omitted has not the remotest connection with the character or the incidents of the novel, and the absence of a few anti-slavery paragraphs will hardly be complained of by Southern readers" (*Les Misérables* 1863: p. iv.; cited in Lebreton-Savigny 1971: 32).

Not only does Denny substantially abridge the original, he also over-simplifies Hugo's style: he lightens the prose and remodels the syntax in the name of readability, evacuating Hugo's characteristically heavy, long-winded sentences. Moreover, Denny's metamorphosis of Hugo's style is like re-composing an opera by Wagner so that it sounds like it had been written by Mozart. In the end, unilingual English readers get a false impression of what Hugo "is like." Furthermore, Denny's version strikes me as the "dumbing down" and over-simplification of an extremely complex work. Indeed, some would say the same thing about the musical *Les Miz*, which I suspect was based on Denny's translation. This brings us to the next chapter: from novel to musical.

# CHAPTER 4:

# FROM NOVEL TO MUSICAL

## 1. Intersemiotic Translation

In "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Roman Jakobson introduced his well-known distinction of three kinds of "interpreting a verbal sign":

1) Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
2) Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
3) Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems (Jakobson 1959: 233).

Jakobson's third distinction is particularly relevant for this thesis:

> Intersemiotic translation was understood by Jakobson to refer to the one-way metalingual operation in which linguistic signs are recodified into non-linguistic codes. Typical examples of this type of recoding are the translation from verbal language into visual languages (for instance, in the plastic arts, painting, sculpture, architecture, and photography); into kinesic languages (for instance, ballet and pantomime); into auditive languages (for instance, music and song); and into intermedial languages (for instance, cinema and, last but not least, opera) (Gorlée 1997: 241).

In "Intercode Translation: Words and Music in Opera," Dinda Gorlée discusses at length the theoretical considerations involved in intersemiotic translation as they pertain to opera translation.[33] In a nutshell, what distinguishes opera and musical translation from other kinds of intersemiotic translation is the fact that they are *hybrid arts* involving the synchronization of several different media of artistic expression. What's more, in opera and musicals, words and music form a *collaborative union*:

> This [intermedial transcodification] is one variety of intersemiotic translation, and one by which the sound elements are sound effects in the opera lyrics become susceptible of being translated ("transmuted", borrowing the signifier from Jakobson) by the composer into a variety of musical forms which [...] are interpretant-signs in sound [...]. Since music is ideally equipped to express and elicit feeling, the connotative aspect of the meaning of the words [...] can effectively expand into a musical tone, intonation, a melodic line or harmony, expressing an equivalent emotion [...]. While the dramatic power of words thus receives a musical intensification, what necessarily remains untranslated [...] is the referential, or denotative, meaning aspect of the verbal text [...]. It enters into vocal music as an aesthetic component in its own right (Gorlée 1997: 243).

[33] These considerations are outside the scope of this thesis.

## 2. The French-language version of the musical (1980)

It was not until 120 years later that Hugo's novel was adapted into musical theatre. In 1979, the French lyricist, Alain Boubil, began to transform the 1500-page tome into a libretto of three acts and seven scenes. French composer Claude-Michel Schönberg then set Boubil's libretto to music. The first French recording of *Les Misérables* was released in 1980. Then in September of the same year, the first version of *Les Misérables* appeared as a "stage spectacle" (in French) at the *Palais des Sports de Paris*.

## 3. The English-language version of the musical (1985)

In 1982, the English translator-lyricist Herbert Kretzmer was asked to create an English version of the musical. Three years later, in October 1985, the English version appeared on the stage at London's Barbican Theatre. It was nearly an hour longer than the original French version, and included many new songs. There were fundamental difficulties involved in adapting the French-language version. The libretto in French was difficult for English audiences to understand because it was full of French colloquialisms and literary allusions. What's more, it was framed in a way that was comprehensible only to the French audience who was intimately aware of the story. In order to adapt the original to the target audience, it was clear that major changes were needed. I will discuss these "macro" considerations (e.g. adapting the genre) in Chapter 7. In the following section and subsequent chapter, however, I will address the most important "micro" consideration: translating the lyrics.

## 4. The Difficulty of Translating Lyrics

### THE COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS OF SETTING WORDS TO MUSIC

In nearly all musical compositions that have words, the text is composed *before* the music. Composers first carefully examine the text, paying close attention to its stress and burden.[34] Next, the words are set to music: important words are placed on strong beats of music while unimportant words are placed in between the beats. In short, composers aim to create music that naturally reinforces the text's rhythm and feeling in what is, ideally, an intimate marriage of words and music.

### PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN TRANSLATING LYRICS

The translation of lyrics is a complex enterprise subject to multiple constraints. These problems arise because the creative process is turned upside down:

> [L]a difficulté vient du fait que la traduction va à l'inverse du processus normal de création [...]. Le compositeur s'inspire d'un livret d'où il tire sa musique. Le traducteur est au départ limité par la musique sur laquelle il cherche à fixer des mots. L'inversion de l'ordre premier est une source d'embûches perpétuelles pour le traducteur (Bernier and Rosseel 1967: 102).

A given of lyric translation is that, except in some rare circumstances, the music must not be changed to accommodate the translated text. In other words, the music cannot adapt to the rhythm of the words; the words have to adjust to the rhythm of the music. The fact that the original text is embedded in the musical score poses a range of problems for the translator—problems that are not encountered in any other kind of translation.

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[34] "Burden refers to the time it takes to say a syllable in normal speech. The longer a syllable takes to say, the longer or heavier its burden is said to be" (Apter 1985: 316).

These difficulties are called "constraints."[35] In a "constrained translation," certain circumstances greatly limit the translation of the source text:

> When translation is required not only of written texts alone, but also of texts in association with other communication media (image, music, oral sources, etc.), the translator's task is complicated and at the same time constrained by the latter (Mayoral, Kelly and Gallardo 1988: 357).

Thus, when the text is influenced by the concurrence of intersemiotic communication systems, such as music, the translator no longer has the freedom to create the greatest degree of dynamic equivalence in the translated text. According to Mayoral, Kelly and Gallardo in their article "Concepts of Constrained Translation: Non-Linguistic Perspectives of Translation," the translation of song has one of the highest degrees of constraint among the different types of communication acts. What's more, in a musical, songs are *dramatized.* This adds a further complication to the translation process (*ibid.*).

## TECHNICAL PROBLEMS THAT ARISE WHEN MUSIC IS ADDED TO THE TRANSLATION EQUATION

In his seminal work *Toward a Science of Translating*, Eugene Nida clearly described the problems involved in translating song:

> The translator of poetry without musical accompaniment is relatively free in comparison with one who must translate a song—poetry set to music. Under such circumstances the translator must concern himself with a number of severe restrictions: (1) a fixed length for each phrase, with precisely the right number of syllables, (2) the observance of syllabic prominence (the accented vowels or long syllables must match correspondingly emphasized notes in the music), (3) rhyme, where required, and (4) vowels with appropriate quality for certain emphatic or greatly lengthened notes (Nida 1964: 177).

This research, of course, is now dated, but Nida's remarks are still pertinent today. More recent articles and theses by Honolka (1978), Rodda (1981), Apter (1985; 1989; 1995), Graham (1989), Rudder (1992), Gorlée (1997) and Apter and Herman (1999) describe the

[35] "Constraints" are the peculiar difficulties of a given text that the translator must take into consideration in order to achieve a successful translation.

same problems involved in the translation of vocal music and illustrate these challenges with copious examples from actual translations. In "The Impossible Takes a Little Longer: Translating Opera for Performance in English," Ronnie Apter summarizes the problems thus[36]:

> [...] opera translators must be concerned with overall style, dramatic pacing, and characterization through diction. But opera translators must also operate under another stringent set of constraints: the physical limitations of the vocal apparatus, the metrical patterns of a pre-set prosody, and the need to match verbal sense to musical color (Apter 1989: 27).

I will discuss three of these problems—vocal, prosodic and rhythmic constraints—in more detail in the following paragraphs.

## VOCAL CONSTRAINTS

The physical limitations of the human voice, which are due to the anatomy of the oral cavity, severely restrict the translator's word choice. As a general rule, high notes should be assigned to words that have the vowels /a/ and /i/, while low notes should be assigned to words containing the vowels /o/ and /u/. As Gorlée explains:

> The size and shape of the mouth as well as the position and movements of the lips, tongue, palate, jaw and teeth, both enable and limit the production of sound by the human voice. Translating for high pitches is thus different from translating for low pitches. To greatly simplify (perhaps oversimplify) a complex situation, high pitches are best sung on stressed syllables and combined best with the vowels /a/ and (to a degree) /i/ (as in English "*fa*ther", "m*a*st", "f*ee*", "f*i*sh," and phonetic variants in English, as well as their counterparts in other languages), while low pitches are ideally found on unstressed syllables and with the vowels /o/ and /u/ (as in English "b*o*ss," "b*oo*st", "b*oa*t, "b*ough*t", and phonetic variants in English, as well as their counterparts in other languages). Consonants can often be sung both high and low, and should be chosen for how well they shape the oral cavity for the following vowel and pitch (Gorlée 1997: 246).

[36] Although Apter is referring to opera, her comments are equally applicable to the translation of musicals.

## PROSODIC CONSTRAINTS: METRE AND RHYME

As I mentioned earlier, when composers set a text to music, they aim to reinforce the rhythm of the lyrics. In other words, musical metrics must match verbal metrics.[37] The problem for translator-lyricists, then, is that they are stuck with a pre-determined prosody that may prove to be very awkward in the target language. As Gorlée explains:

> The prosodic patterns [...] are fixed by the linguistic structures in tandem with the musical rhythms. This makes them particularly hard to reproduce in a foreign tongue without upsetting the meaning of the words (Gorlée 1997: 246).

In addition to metrical constraints, the translator-lyricist has to deal with the problem of rhyme. In their article on translating Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, Ronnie Apter and Mark Herman argue that, because English is a relatively rhyme-poor language, rhymes cannot be used in the same way that they are used in other languages (Apter and Herman 1999: 2). In fact, a hallmark of bad lyric translations is their attempt to re-create exactly the same rhyme scheme of the original. Too much rhyme in English can actually have a comic effect, à la Gilbert and Sullivan, thus imparting completely the wrong tone to a serious opera (*ibid.*). They suggest two ways to avoid the pitfalls of using standard rhyme: 1) rhyming, but according to a different scheme than in the original, and 2) using "rhyme's cousins—off-rhyme (*line-time*), weak rhyme (*major-squalor*), half-rhyme (*kitty-pitted*), and consonant rhyme (*slit-slat*)—alone or in combination with other devices like assonance and alliteration" (*ibid.*).

[37] Like poetry, which has patterns of stressed/unstressed syllables (e.g. iambic, trochaic, dactylic feet), music is also organized into groupings of accented/unaccented beats (e.g.3/4 metre, 6/8 metre).

## RHYTHMIC CONSTRAINTS[38]

By far, the greatest technical problem faced by the translator-lyricist is how to match foreign rhythms.[39] This is one of the most difficult problems for the translator of lyrics. As Apter explains:

> The translator's most difficult problem [is] matching foreign rhythms. In language, rhythm is made up of stress and burden [...]. While music sometimes deforms language rhythms, it often follows them. A translator dealing with a rhythm highly different from that of his own language presents the translator with a different set of difficulties (Apter 1985: 316).

Herbert Kretzmer, the translator-lyricist of *Les Misérables*, also says that matching foreign rhythms is *the* perennial problem for lyric translators:

> Music may well be an international language, but fashioned to accommodate the cadences of a particular tongue, it comes to possess its own codes, which are not easily broken. The French language is full of emphatic consonants, staccato tricks of rhythm and fading syllables at the end of sentences which have no ready equivalents in the English language. Schönberg's [the composer of *Les Misérables*] score was decidedly Gallic (Behr 1989: 29).

In sum, lyric translation is one of the most difficult kinds of translation because the translator-lyricist has to deal with multiple constraints. Lyric translators must therefore not only have an understanding of the source and target languages, they must also have knowledge of music, vocal technique, musical composition, translation, prosody, rhyme, play writing and stagecraft—not to mention an awareness of the particular tastes of their target audience.

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[38] This thesis deals primarily with rhythmic constraints.

[39] For example, how can the unaccented lyric in French be translated into the long and short accents of English when the original music reinforces the unique verbal rhythms of the original French text? In French, two-syllable words in normal speech usually gently lean toward the second syllable (weak-STRONG), for example, "fran-*çais*." In English, the opposite is usually true: the majority of two-syllable words in English are strongly stressed on the first syllable (STRONG-weak), for example, "*En*-glish." What's more, many syllables that are not pronounced in *spoken* French are actually enunciated in *sung* French. E.g., "Vive la médecine !" is four syllables in spoken French, but *seven* syllables in sung French: "*Vi-ve la mé-de-ci-ne !*" This example is taken from Gounod/Barbier and Carré's *Le médecin malgré lui* (cited in Apter 1985: 316).

## CHAPTER 5:

## CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Before beginning an analysis of the song translations, I need to first explain the confusing translation history of *Les Miz*. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the first French version of *Les Misérables* appeared as a "stage spectacle" at the *Palais des Sports de Paris* in September 1980; then in October 1985, the English version appeared on the stage at London's Barbican Theatre.

In 1991, Alain Boubil took it upon himself to write a *completely new* French version of the musical. He re-cast the lyrics of the original 1980 French version and translated all the new songs from the 1985 English version into French.[40] *Les Misérables* thus underwent a complicated *three-way* translation process:

1980 original French version: three acts and seven scenes
1985 lengthy English adaptation: French-to-English translation plus new English songs
1991 new French version: English-to-French translation of the 1985 English adaptation.

**SONG #1: *Castle on a Cloud* (1985)/*Un Château dans les Nuages* (1991)**

The song *Un Château dans les Nuages* (1991) is a semantically distant intralinguistic adaptation of *Mon prince est en chemin* (1980). In fact, the only thing these two songs have in common is the same music. On the other hand, *Un Château dans les Nuages* represents a fairly literal translation of *Castle on a Cloud* (1985). Here is the first line of lyrics from *Castle on a Cloud* (1985). (Syllables that fall on accented beats of music are underlined.)

[40] This new French version débuted at the *Théâtre Saint-Denis* in Montreal in January 1991 (followed by Winnipeg and Ottawa), and then played in Paris in September of the same year.

***There is a ca – stle on a cloud.***

The rhythm of the words and music fit properly together. The syllables that are reinforced by the music, "there," "ca," "on" and "cloud," are all syllables that would receive emphasis in normal speech. Compare this with the first line of lyrics from *Un Château dans les Nuages* (1991):

***J'ai un châ – teau dans les nu – ages.***
*X*

The syllables that are musically accented are: "J'ai," "teau," "les" and "ages." The placement of the word "les"—an unimportant article—on the strong beat is a serious compositional error. One should never place an article on an accented beat of music; it should always be placed in between the beats. Thus, the first line of lyrics here already illustrates the problem of near-literal translation of lyrics: while the English text respects the natural flow of the musical rhythm, the French text violates this principle.

Here is the second line of lyrics in English and French:

***I like to go there in my sleep.***

***Il ap – pa – raît quand je le veux.***

Unlike the first line of French lyrics, the second line is perfectly in "sync" with the musical rhythm. Why? Because it is *not* a literal, word-for-word translation of the English text. Overall, *Un Château dans les Nuages* vacillates between these two extremes: some renderings are overly literal while others are quite good adaptations.[41] Other writers have also noted this observation:

> Il y a quelques occasions, tout de même, où le texte français passe moins bien. La plus voyante entre elles arrive à la pièce *Un Château dans les Nuages* [...] qui est d'ailleurs la plus <<traduite>> des pièces et qui était infiniment plus cristalline dans sa version anglaise (Roy: 1991: D7).

[41] Due to limits in space, I will not analyze the entire song.

**SONG #2: *On My Own* (1985)/*Mon Histoire* (1991)**

Here are the lyrics for the first two verses of *On My Own* (1985):

***On my own pre – ten – ding he's be – side me***

***All a – lone I walk with him til mor – ning***

***With – out him, I feel his arms a – round me and***

***When I lose my way I close my eyes and he has found me.***

***In the rain the pave – ment shines like sil – ver***

***All the lights are mi – sty in the ri – ver***

***In the dark – ness the tress are full of star – light and***

***All I see is him and me for – e – ver and for – e – ver.***

There is not one instance where the rhythm of the words is in conflict with the musical rhythm here. Compare this with the first two verses of *Mon Histoire* (1991):

**Mon his – toire c'est un rêve qui com – men – ce**
**X X**
**Comme les contes de fées de mon en – fan – ce**

**Les yeux fer – més mon prince en – fin m'en – la – ce et**
**X**
**Je prie pour que ja – mais son é – treinte ne se dé – fas – se.**

**A – vec lui je ne suis plus la mê - me**
**X**
**J'aime la pluie et quand on se pro – mè – ne**
**X**
**Je l'em – bras – se pour gard – der sur mes lèvres le**

**Goût de l'eau du ciel sur la peau de ce – lui que j'ai – me.**
**X**

The French version is not a bad adaptation of its English counterpart if one looks *only* at the two texts outside the musical context. However, when the music is taken into account, the French version has some very awkward moments indeed. As pointed out by

the "X"s under the words, there are many instances where the lyrics are fighting against the rhythm of the music. Moreover, *Mon Histoire*, falls far short of the aesthetic beauty of the English version. Why? Perhaps because the translation constraints were too great. Boubil and Schönberg should have instead kept their beautiful 1980 version called *L'Air de la Misère*.

I will now analyze a song that is, in my opinion, a brilliant adaptation.

**SONG #3: *La Devise du Cabaretier* (1980)/*Master of the House* (1985)**

**La Devise du Cabaretier**

Thénardier
*Bon aubergiste* (a) *allège les bourses grosses ou petites des touristes en route*
*cabaretier honnêtement sait monnayer la soif du passant*
*et faire tout payer par le voyageur*
*jusqu'aux mouches que son chien gobe dans le secteur*

refrain:
*Maître Thénardier, d'infinie sagesse*
*docteur ès-ivresse, et conseil en mic-mac*
*nouveau filousophe, faux apothicaire*
*faux témoin expert près la Cour des Miracles*
*qu'une destinée contraire a fait naître loin de la Suisse*
*chambre forte de la terre dont je m'sens le fils*

*Baron de Thénard petit en noblesse*
*grand par ses bassesses et noble en petitesse*
*despote idéal, seigneur conjugal, prince des valets, tyran du tiroir-caisse*
*qu'une destinée contraire a planté dans ce canton*
*quand il me faudrait la planète pour assouvir mes ambitions*

*Bon aubergiste doit* (b) *tarifer fenêtre ouverte fenêtre fermée*
*l'fauteuil la chaise le tabouret le lit de plume et la botte de paille*
*et* (c) *savoir combien l'ombre use le miroir pour saler la facture avant le départ*

refrain

Tous
*Baron de Thérnard petit en noblesse grand par ses bassesses et noble en petitesse*
*despote idéal, seigneur conjugal, prince des valets, tyran du tiroir-caisse*
*qu'une destinée contraire a planté dans ce canton*

*quand il me faudrait la planète pour assouvrir mes ambitions*

Madame Thénardier
*Ses ambitions au sergent parlons-en*
*il les a toutes laissées au berceau en naissant*

*Maître Thénardier d'infinie paresse*
*avare en prouesse et mari de justesse*
*Baron de tocard, conjugale altesse,*
*étroit de largesse et large sans espèces*
*qu'une destinée traîtresse a placé sur mon chemin*
*et qui promet toujours que la richesse est pour demain*

refrain

**Master of the House**

Thénardier
*Welcome, M'sieur sit yourself down*
*And meet the best innkeeper in town.*
*As for the rest, all of them crooks*
*Rooking the guests and cooking the books.*
*Seldom do you see honest men like me*
*A gent of good intent who's content to be*
*Master of the House dolling out the charm*
*Ready with a handshake and an open palm*
*Tells a saucy tale makes a little stir*
*Customers appreciate a bon-viveur!*
*Glad to do me friends a favour doesn't cost me to be nice*
*But nothing gets you nothing everything has got a little price!*

*Master of the House keeper of the zoo*
*ready to relieve 'em of a sou or two.*
*Watering the wine making up the weight*
*Pickin' up their knick-knacks when they can't see straight*
*Everybody loves a landlord everybody's bosom friend*
*I do whatever pleases Jesus! Don't I bleed 'em in the end!*

refrain:
Thénardier and Chorus
*Master of the house quick to catch yer eye*
*Never wants a passer-by to pass him by.*
*Servant to the poor butler to the great*
*Comforter, philosopher and lifelong mate!*
*Everybody's boon companion everybody's chaperone.*
*But lock up your valises Jesus! Won't I skin yer to the bone!*

Thénardier
*Enter, M'sieur, lay down yer load*
*Unlace yer boots and rest from the road.*
*This weighs a ton travel's a curse*
*But here* (a) *we strive to lighten your purse.*
*Here the goose is cooked here the fat is fried*
*And nothing's overlooked till I'm satisfied...*

*Food beyond compare food beyond belief*
*Mix it in a mincer and pretend it's beef.*
*Kidney of a horse liver of a cat*
*Filling up the sausages with this and that!*

*Residents are more than welcome bridal suite is occupied!*
*Reasonable charges plus some little extras on the side!*

*Charge 'em for the lice extra for the mice*
(b) *Two per cent for looking in the mirror twice!*

*Here a little slice there a little cut*
(c) *Three per cent for sleeping with the window shut!*

*When it comes to fixing prices there are lots of tricks he knows*
*How it all increases all them bits and pieces*
*Jesus! It's amazing how it grows!*

refrain

Madame Thénardier
*I used to think that I would meet a prince*
*But God Almighty, have you seen what's happened since?*

*'Master of the House'? Isn't worth me spit!*
*'Comforter, philosopher' -- and lifelong shit!*
*Cunning little brain regular Voltaire*
*Thinks he's quite a lover but there's nothing there.*
*What a cruel trick of nature landed me with such a louse*
*Living with this bastard in the house!*

Thénardier and Chorus
*Master of the house.*

Madame Thénardier
*Master and a half!*

Thénardier and Chorus
*Comforter, philosopher*

Madame Thénardier
*Don't make me laugh!*

Thénardier and Chorus
*Servant to the poor butler to the great*

Madame Thénardier
*Hypocrite and toady and inebriate!*

Thénardier and Chorus
*Everybody bless the landlord! Everybody bless his spouse.*

Thénardier
*Everybody raise a glass.*

Madame Thénardier
*Raise it up the master's arse!*

All
*Everybody raise a glass to the master of the House!*

The listener will immediately notice that the verbal rhythms are in harmony with the musical rhythms in both renditions. Furthermore, Kretzmer was able to create an equally witty, slap-stick-like text that, in some ways, surpasses the original. Interestingly, some critics think the opposite:

> Plusieurs scènes sont plus efficaces dans cette version [1980] que dans la version anglaise [1985]; celles, notamment, où on mélange l'argot et une langue plus classique dans le bouge des Thénardier, dans les cafés et les rues de Paris (Roy 1991: D1).

Yet, no critics mention how the 1985 English version appropriately transposes Paris' street language into London's cockney, the urban sociolect of London's working class. Just as the adaptation of Michel Tremblay's plays from the *joual* dialect into urban Scots is a brilliantly inspired adaptation (Simon 1995: 149-62), I think that the transposition of French *argot* into cockney in *Les Miz* is a stroke of genius. What's more, *Master of the*

*House* succeeds at bringing over the irony, sarcasm and comedy of the original—amazingly, all within the confines of rhymed verse! What about meaning? For that matter, is it even possible to bring over *both* the meaning and the aesthetic beauty in such a constrained translation? Louis Untermeyer, in *The Translation of Poetry*, poses the same question:

> Is it impossible to bring over both the meaning and the music [i.e., aesthetic beauty] from one language to another? And if it is impossible, should music be sacrificed for the sake of the meaning? Or should meaning be emphasized at the expense of the music? (1970: 13)

In order to answer this question, I will have to take a closer look at the two texts.

First of all, there are only three instances where isolated meaning has been loosely transferred from the ST to the TT. They are as follows:

*i)* *bon aubergiste allège les bourses*
*i)* *we strive to lighten your purse*

*ii)* *tarifer fenêtre ouverte fenêtre fermée*
*ii)* *three percent for sleeping with the window shut*

*iii)* *savoir combien l'ombre use le miroir*
*iii)* *two percent for looking in the mirror twice*

These three sentences are examples of what Georges Bastin calls "adaptation ponctuelle" (Bastin 1993: 477). However, the TT as a whole is an example of what he calls "adaptation globale," that is, the complete re-working of a text in order to re-establish a communicational equilibrium that would have otherwise been impossible to achieve if the text were "simply translated" (*ibid.*). Global meaning has indeed been transferred from the original to the target text. The English adaptation contains the same themes as the original: a jester-like innkeeper who takes pride in his skill of swindling money from his guests; the innkeeper's wife who titillates the audience with sardonic insults about her husband; and the guests who have a riot watching the artifice of these two whimsical

characters. In sum, *Master of the House* is a brilliant adaptation of *La Devise du Cabaretier* because it transfers both the "music" and the global meaning of the original. The adaptation is a success because Kretzmer obviously focused on transferring *macro*-meaning and *macro*-structure rather than on *micro*-meaning and *micro*-structure.

I will now briefly discuss one last song, the familiar refrain that closes Act One and Act Two of the English version of *Les Misérables*.

**SONG #4: *À la volonté du peuple* (1980)/*Do You hear the People Sing?* (1985)**

**<u>À La Volonté Du Peuple</u>**

refrain:
*À la volonté du peuple*
*et à la santé du progrès*
*remplis ton cœur d'un vin rebelle*
*et à demain, ami fidèle*
*nous voulons faire la lumière*
*malgré le masque de la nuit*
*pour illuminer notre terre*
*et changer la vie*

*Il faut gagner par la guerre*
*notre sillon à labourer*
*déblayer la misère*
*pour les blonds épis de la paix*
*qui danseront de joie au grand vent de la liberté*

refrain

*À la volonté du peuple*
*je fais don de ma volonté*
*s'il faut mourir pour elle*
*moi je veux être le premier*
*le premier nom gravé au marbre du monument d'espoir*

refrain

**Do You Hear the People Sing?**

Refrain:
*Do you hear the people sing? Singing the song of angry men?*
*It is the music of a people who will not be slaves again!*
*When the beating of your heart echoes the beating of the drums*
*There is a life about to start then tomorrow comes!*

*Will you join in our crusade? Who will be strong and stand with me?*
*Beyond the barricade is there a world you long to see?*
*Then join in the fight that will give you the right to be free!*

Refrain

*Will you give all you can give so that our banner may advance?*
*Some will fall, and some will live. Will you come up and take your chance?*
*The blood of the martyrs will water the meadows of France!*

Both texts convey the same overall message. It is more than mere patriotism; it is about the desire to defend freedom and democracy even if one has to die for this "just" cause. Both refrains speak of a positive future after the ultimate sacrifice has been made. But there is one obvious difference between the two texts: the French text employs ten abstract metaphors while its English counterpart uses six concrete metaphors:

1. *remplis ton cœur d'un vin rebelle*
2. *faire la lumière*
3. *le masque de la nuit*
4. *illuminer notre terre*
5. *notre sillon à labourer*
6. *déblayer la misère*
7. *les blonds épis de la paix*
8. *au grand vent de la liberté*
9. *s'il faut mourir pour elle*
10. *monument d'espoir*

1. *Do you hear the people sing?*
2. *Singing the song of angry men?*
3. *It is the music of a people who will not be slaves again!*
4. *When the beating of your heart echoes the beating of the drums*
5. *So that our banner may advance?*
6. *The blood of the martyrs will water the meadows of France!*

In the article "On Translating Metaphors," Antonia Alvarez outlines a scheme of procedures for the translation of metaphors:[42]

> reproducing the same image in the TL;
> replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image;
> translating the metaphor by a simile;
> transferring the metaphor by simile plus sense;
> converting the metaphor into sense. (Antonia Alvarez 1993: 482).

The metaphors in the present example fall into the second and last categories: the re-creation of a *different* metaphor in the TL; and the translation of a metaphor by its *sense*.[43] In the former procedure, a metaphor in the ST is replaced by a different metaphor in the TT. For example, the metaphor "au grand *vent* de la liberté" is replaces with "so that our *banner* may advance." Both examples are referring to the same cause: the fight for freedom and liberty. In the latter technique, a metaphor in the ST is changed into its *literal meaning*. For example, the metaphors "nous voulons faire la lumière" and "illuminer notre terre" are approximately paraphrased with "there is a life about to start when tomorrow comes" and "is there a world you long to see?" Finally, it is interesting to note that the French text is overflowing with earthy, *agricultural* metaphors: "vin rebelle," "sillon à labourer," "les blonds épis de la paix qui danseront de joie au grand vent de la liberté," and so forth. The English text, on the other hand, abounds with *musical* metaphors: "Do you hear the people *sing*? *Singing* the *song* of angry men", etc.

[42] For a theoretical discussion on translating metaphors, see Toury 1995: 260-264.
[43] These are examples of "non-obligatory shifts" and "explicitation" described by Toury.

## CONCLUSION

We can conclude from the analyses that full "dynamic equivalence" (Nida) in this specific translation case was literally impossible to achieve. But the impossibility of exact recreation does not preclude the possibility of *approximation*—and it is precisely on approximation that good lyric translation is built. This is not only a generalization about the translatability of lyrics; it is also a judgement that the PS makes about translatability in general:

> The impossibility of translation is in a sense not debatable. If every human language is distinct (as it is) in structure, sound, and vocabulary, and if every language contains unique features, then clearly it is literally impossible to fully render anything written in one language into another [...]. The catch, of course, is the word "fully." If it is not possible to *fully* render anything written in one language into another tongue, it is certainly possible to *satisfactorily* translate [...]. The only valid standard remains: how successful is the translation as an approximation of that original? (Burton Raffel 1988: 29)

Are the translations of *Les Misérables* successful as approximations of the original? The 1991 French versions are not successful translations because they are overly literal. On the other hand, the 1985 English versions are excellent adaptations because they are not slaves to the details of the original; they transfer macro-meaning and macro-structure without compromising the overall spirit of the source text. Given the peculiar constraints, it is clear that the only possible solution—at least in this specific translation context—is *global adaptation*; literal or even near-literal translation will inevitably upset the delicate balance between the rhythm of the music and the rhythm of the text.

While the demands on lyric translators are great, unfortunately, the work is usually poorly paid (Paquin 1986:14; Apter: 1985: 318; Gorlée 1997: 265). What's worse, sometimes the translators are not given credit or even copyright for their

translations,[44] and, consequently, they receive no royalties.[45] Perhaps this is why one writer describes the lyric translator's task as "monk's work" (de Grandmont 1978: 98), an esoteric pursuit that requires much patience, devotion, and self-sacrifice, but offers very little extrinsic rewards in return. Then why translate lyrics? For the intrinsic reward: the satisfaction one feels when the harvest comes in—its fruit, a good musical translation.

[44] For example, no translation credits are given for the English adaptations of Céline Dion's songs.
[45] This has lead to many legal battles (Paquin 1986: 14).

## CHAPTER 6:

## *LES MIZ* AND THE "MUSICAL POLYSYSTEM"

### 1. The History of the Musical[46] Viewed as a Polysystem[47]

Contrary to what most people think, the musical as we know it today is *not* a descendent of opera; it in fact has its roots in the **French and Viennese operettas**[48] (PS)[49] of the mid-1800's, the two most important composers of which were Jacques Offenbach (1819-80) and Richard Strauss II (1825-99). Offenbach's *Orfée aux Enfers* (1858) and Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* (1874) were their classic operettas (PS).[50]

In the United States, two forms of musical revue were developing in the mid-1800s: **American variety and minstrel shows** (PS),[51] the precursors (PS)[52] of American musical theatre. Variety consisted of crude shows featuring circus acts, singers, dancers and vulgar humour. In minstrel shows, white men blackened their faces with burnt cork and lampooned Negroes. In short, minstrel shows were "racism as singing and dancing entertainment" (Kenrick 2001) (PS).[53]

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[46] Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this section is from John Kenrick's marvelous website www.musicals101.com, which contains an exhaustive history (100 plus pages) on the musical, representing a synthesis of dozens of books on the topic.

[47] Wherever a PS-related aspect comes up in this section, I will indicate "(PS)" and then specify in a footnote which aspect of the PS that it applies to.

[48] According to the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, an "operetta" is "a theatrical piece of light and sentimental character in simple and popular style, containing spoken dialogue, music, dancing, etc." (Apel 1972: 601).

[49] PS-related aspect: genre.

[50] PS-related aspect: model/repertoire. These two works remain in the repertoires of international opera companies (Sadie 1980: 649).

[51] PS-related aspect: new form.

[52] PS-related aspect: evolution in the "musical PS."

[53] PS-related aspect: musicals often reflect social attitudes. Some of the most popular songs of the 19th century originated from minstrel shows (e.g., Stephen Foster's "Camptown Races"). The most famous minstrel actor was Al Jolson, who immortalized his blackface skits in the first talking picture, *The Jazz Singer* (1928). Though Jolson proclaimed to be in favour of equal rights for blacks, the sight of an actor wearing blackface make-up and singing "Mammy" strikes modern audiences as an unsettling reminder of the bigoted attitudes which minstrelsy embodied (Kenrick 2001).

Variety and minstrel shows eventually gave way (PS)[54] to the more sophisticated style of **vaudeville** (PS)[55] and the rowdy character of **burlesque** (PS).[56] The highlight of vaudeville shows were the speciality acts: mind readers, escape artists, divers, strong men, contortionists, balancing acts, and so forth.[57] Burlesque, on the other hand, was a more adult form of entertainment that challenged the prudish Victorian standards (PS)[58] of acceptable behaviour for women.[59]

Meanwhile, the **American musical** was in its infancy (PS).[60] Most sources say that the first full-fledged musical was *The Black Crook* (1866) (Morley 1987: 15). While not all scholars agree, most concede that *The Black Crook* was a landmark: it was the first musical to prove how immensely profitable a hit musical could be (PS).[61]

During the late 1800s, operettas were British audiences' choice entertainment (PS).[62] By far, the most successful creators of operettas were composer Arthur Sullivan and lyricist W.S. Gilbert.[63] *H.M.S Pinafore* (1878) succeeded beyond their wildest dreams, and *The Mikado* (1885) secured their place in history as the greatest and most prolific creators of English operettas.

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[54] PS-related aspect: competition leading to evolution in the musical PS.
[55] PS-related aspect: new form.
[56] PS-related aspect: new form.
[57] W.C. Fields, Will Rogers, Judy Garland, Jack Benny, George Burns and the Marx Brothers were just a few of the entertainers who went on to stardom after appearing in vaudeville shows.
[58] PS-related aspect: musicals usually reflect current (conservative) social attitudes—but they can sometimes challenge them.
[59] Dressed up in revealing tights, women played men's roles in shows written and managed by women. For example, the popular play *Ben Hur* inspired one troupe to produce *Bend Her*, a spoof with scantily clad chorines as Roman warriors (Kenrick 2001).
[60] PS-related aspect: new genre forming.
[61] PS-related aspect: establishment of a precedent.
[62] PS-related aspect: preferred genre of a given culture.
[63] Their first success, *Trial by Jury* (1875), premiered in the same year that the American musical *Black Crook* first came to London. The two works were worlds apart: "where the American import was mindless spectacle, the G&S piece embodied sophisticated wit" (*ibid.*).

Compared beside Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas, American musical entertainment in the late 1800s looked second rate (Kenrick 2001). So European imports (PS),[64] especially *The Merry Widow* (1907), by Hungarian composer Franz Lehár, mostly dominated Broadway. Unlike Europeans, Americans viewed theatre as a *business* and not an art (PS).[65] [66] The American-style musical finally began to take root when two outstanding American composers came along: George Cohan and Victor Herbert. Herbert and Cohan established an important norm (PS)[67] in musical composition: the AABA song form.[68]

During the late 1920s, the sentimental operetta began to change into what is now called a "musical" (PS)[69] (Appel 1973: 601). Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Showboat* (1927) represented a break from conventional precedents (PS)[70]: whereas most Gershwin and Porter shows were built around songs and performers, *Showboat* had a cohesive story, with songs that contributed to the action by creating mood, revealing character and advancing the plot (Sadie 1980: 819).

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[64] PS-related aspect: when a PS is weak or in a "crisis," it may import foreign works to fill the vacuum.
[65] PS-related aspect: cultural difference.
[66] "Shows had to be commercially successful to breed imitators and form the basis for future trends—a sort of theatrical Darwinism" (Kenrick 2001). PS-related aspect: competition and evolution within the PS.
[67] PS-related aspect: norms.
[68] "Almost all showtunes have a verse and a chorus (or "refrain"). The verse sets up the premise of a song and can be of most any length, while the chorus states the main point of the lyric. It was in the early 1900's that Herbert, Cohan and others fell into the pattern of writing choruses with thirty bars divided into the AABA form:
• **A is the main melody**, repeated three times – in part, so that it can be easily remembered.
• **B is the release** or bridge, and should contrast as much as possible with A.
This format would dominate showtunes and all popular music in the century to come. While this may seem rather limiting, it is a useful discipline that forces composers and lyricists to make their points efficiently. Any number of songs use variations, but AABA remains the most common chorus format to this day" (*ibid.*). Lehár, Cohan and Herbert also established three other important norms: Cohan established the American-style flair; Herbert established its stylistic versatility; Lehár its romantic content (*ibid.*).
[69] PS-related aspect: establishment of the musical genre.
[70] PS-related aspect: successful innovation within the musical PS.

During the 1930s, Rodgers & Hart continued to develop the more creative approach modelled (PS)[71] after Kern and Hammerstein's *Showboat*. While Porter continued the song-and-dance tradition (PS)[72] of the 1920s musical with *Anything Goes* (1934), Rodgers & Hart created spectacular comic musicals that had integrated plots.

Then came Rodgers & Hammerstein's classic *Oklahoma!* (1943), which inaugurated a new era for the American musical. *Oklahoma!* was the first fully integrated musical play; it used every song and dance to develop the characters and the plot.[73] Rodgers & Hammerstein's shows dominated and transformed musical theatre over the next two decades. Their influence was so profound[74] that composers of the more traditional musicals, such as Cole Porter and Irving Berlin, were forced to begin composing integrated musicals (PS).[75] [76]

During the 1950s, the Broadway musical played a central role in pop culture (PS)[77] and the music of Broadway was the popular music of the western world (PS).[78] Rodgers and Hammerstein's shows continued to dominate Broadway, but there were three other prominent composers: Frank Loesser, Frederick Loewe and Leonard

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[71] PS-related aspect: model.

[72] PS-related aspect: conservative, institutionalized aesthetic. Cole Porter was a backward looking composer who used the late 19th- and early 20th- century musicals as his models.

[73] *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* says the following about *Oklahoma!*: "*Oklahoma!* [...] had credible characters and dialogue, and its plot was unusually well constructed. Such musical comedy conventions as the opening chorus were set aside in the interests of the play's development, the melodies were written to fit the lyrics rather than the reverse, and the songs and dances were of genuine musical substance. *Oklahoma!* began the American musical's period of greatest national and international acclaim, helped by gramophone records and film versions. It established a vogue for the more logically constructed musical play, with increasing importance attached not only to composers and lyricists but also to book authors, directors, choreographers and orchestrators" (Sadie 1980: 821).

[74] At one point, four (!) of their musicals were running simultaneously on Broadway (Kenrick 2001).

[75] PS-related aspect: influence of the periphery on the centre.

[76] Berlin's *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946) and Porter's *Kiss Me Kate* (1947) were two such examples.

[77] PS-related aspect: the musical as a social phenomenon.

[78] Today, the musicals of the 1950s still form the mainstay of the musical theatre repertory (*ibid.*). PS-related aspect: repertoire.

Bernstein. According to Kenrick, Loesser's *Guys and Dolls*[79] (1950) and Loewe's *My Fair Lady*[80] (1956) were two of the finest works of musical theatre every produced. And Berstein's *West Side Story* (1957) represented the zenith of the form known as "**musical play**" (PS),[81] a work with a more substantial plot and musical score (Sadie 1980: 815).[82]

This first British hit of the post-Gilbert and Sullivan era was *Oliver* (1960). Then between 1964 to 1966, six (!) American musicals ran for over 1,000 performances: *Hello Dolly!* (1964), *Funny Girl* (1964), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), *Man of La Mancha* (1965), *Mame* (1966), and *Cabaret* (1966) (PS).[83] During the late 1960s, popular musical tastes changed in favour of rock, and the traditional musical was left behind (PS).[84] *Hair* (1968) completely turned musical theatre upside down (PS):[85] critics were appalled by its lack of plot, nudity, hippie sensibility, and especially its rock style of music. But the songs "Aquarius" and "Let the Sunshine In" went to the top of the charts, and *Hair* packed in audiences for several years thereafter.[86]

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[79] *Guys and Dolls* won the Tony for Best Musical and became a staple in the musical repertory (Kenrick 2001). PS-related aspect: repertoire.

[80] "*My Fair Lady* won every major award, became Broadway's longest running musical (a record that stood for over a decade), and played to acclaim in numerous languages all around the world" (*ibid.*).

[81] PS-related aspect: form.

[82] To this day, *West Side Story* is still one of the most frequently produced musicals worldwide (*ibid.*).

[83] Today, these six shows are still among the most frequently performed musicals (*ibid.*). PS-related aspect: model/repertoire.

[84] "The world of popular culture had turned upside down. A chasm opened between the rock/youth culture (of 'drugs, sex and rock and roll') and the once dominant "establishment" culture. It became increasingly rare for a showtune to land on the rock-dominated pop charts. When the income from record and sheet music sales dried up, the most that composers and lyricists could hope for was the two percent of a show's gross allotted to them in a standard contract. The result? New talent went into the more profitable fields of pop music, television and film. Several veterans like Irving Berlin retired in disgust, and those who labored on found that styles and formulas which had worked for decades were suddenly unacceptable" (*ibid.*). PS-related aspect: The musical PS is clearly in a full-fledged "crisis" now.

[85] PS-related aspect: innovative new form.

[86] Although a landmark, *Hair* ushered in a period of uncertainty for musical theatre. Some people even claimed that the musical was dead. However, it turned out that "the Broadway musical wasn't dead—it was just preparing to morph" (*ibid.*).

In the beginning of the 1970s, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971) (PS)[87] became an international sensation and represented the highpoint of the **rock musical** (PS).[88] By the mid-1970s, however, audiences grew tired of rock musicals. Composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim tried to refocus the genre by introducing a new form: **concept musicals** (PS),[89] shows that were built around an *idea* rather than a traditional plot. The concept musical peaked with *A Chorus Line* (1974). However, the dominant trend in the mid-1970s was clearly the **revival** (PS).[90] Seizing upon this nostalgic trend, *Annie*[91] (1976) proved that the traditional musical could still win over audiences.[92] By the end of the 1970s, British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and American composer Stephen Sondheim were battling it out for number one spot (PS).[93] Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* (1979) was an unprecedented artistic achievement but a financial disaster (PS).[94] However, Webber and Rice's *Evita* (1979), the first **mega-musical** (PS),[95] made a fortune and represented "a flashy victory of matter over mind" (Kenrick 2001).[96]

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[87] The fact that *Jesus Christ Superstar* débuted in *New York* suggested the low standing of London musical theatre (Sadie 1980: 819). PS-related aspect: Status/prestige within a PS.
[88] PS-related aspect: apogee of a form.
[89] PS-related aspect: new form.
[90] PS-related aspect: form. "Old shows and old stars appealed to those who felt alienated by the cultural changes taking place around them" (Kenrick 2001). PS-related aspect: In times of social upheaval, societies often turn to the past for reassurance and a sense of stability.
[91] *Annie* won several Tony awards and was the first Broadway musical to gross over $100 million (*ibid.*).
[92] However, instead of starting a new trend, *Annie* was the last of its kind.
[93] PS-related aspect: competition.
[94] PS-related aspect: This work was not accepted into the musical PS probably because it was too innovative and did not reflect public taste in the 1980s.
[95] PS-related aspect: new form and model.
[96] This victory of style over substance made an indelible impression on producers and investors, and this set the course for the Broadway musical for the remainder of the 20th century (*ibid.*).

During the "greedy 80s" and early 90s, "Brit hits" were the order of the day on Broadway, including *Cats* (1982), *Les Misérables* (1985), *Phantom of the Opera* (1988), and *Miss Saigon* (1991). The revolutionary thing about *Cats* was its marketing.[97] *Les Misérables*, directed by *Cats'* director Trevor Nunn, continued the trend towards the mega-marketing of mega-musicals.[98] All four of these mega-musicals had one other thing in common: dazzling special effects. According to Kenrick, Broadway audiences did not mind paying a small fortune for a ticket when they could see the money on the stage (PS)[99] (*ibid.*).

During the 1990s, the Americans beat the Brits at their own game (PS).[100] *Beauty and the Beast* (1994), by Walt Disney Productions, ushered in the era of the **corporate musical** (PS).[101] Disney's multi-million dollar marketing campaign "quickly showed the old pros a new way to do business" (*ibid.*).[102]

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[97] "Before this, most musicals limited their souvenirs to photo programs, songbooks and T-shirts. *Cats* splashed its distinctive logo [...] on coffee mugs, music boxes, figurines, books on 'the making of' the show, greeting cards, baseball caps, satin jackets, Christmas ornaments, stackable tins, stuffed toys, matchboxes, key chains and pins, to name just a few" (*ibid.*).

[98] "The logo, with little Cosette set against the French tri-color, became familiar on every imaginable sort of souvenir including over-priced re-prints of Hugo's novel" (*ibid.*).

[99] PS-related aspect: The musical of the 80s clearly well represented "the decade of greed."

[100] PS-related aspect: competition.

[101] PS-related aspect: new form. "The Corporate Musical is built, produced and managed by multi-functional entertainment corporations like Disney or Livent. It may begin as the idea of a composer or writer, but most of the project's development is corporate sponsored. Instead of the distinctive stamp of creative individuals, corporate musicals have the anonymous efficiency of a department store [...]. What's missing is the joyous vitality that a corporate consciousness cannot provide. In such an environment, experiment was almost impossible—even when the show masqueraded as something new" (*ibid.*).

[102] *Beauty and the Beast* was replicated in dozens of cities across the planet, and souvenirs became an even bigger moneymaker than ever. Kenrick concludes: "If the British wrote the book on auxiliary marketing, Disney built the library" (*ibid.*). *Beast* was followed up by another corporate beast: *The Lion King* (1997). Now that the "McMusical" was thoroughly a part of pop culture, the Tony Awards kow-towed to the new form and gave *The Lion King* the award of Best Musical (*ibid.*).

By the end of the 90s, almost every show on Broadway was a corporate product. Even *Rent* (1996) was sponsored by a Broadway-based corporation.[103] The best musicals of the late 1990s, however, came from corporations that aimed for artistic integrity as well as profit. *Titanic*[104] (1997), for example, was "the best new American musical in over a decade" (Kenrick 2001). And *Ragtime* (1998) was "another example of the corporate musical at its best" (*ibid.*). What's more, both *Titanic* and *Ragtime* had superb musical scores, which incorporated musical styles from the early 1900s (PS).[105]

At the beginning of the new millennium, however, the musical was in a sorry state.[106] Some are even saying once again that the musical is an anachronistic form. Kenrick concludes his extensive history of the musical by posing the question: "Is the musical dead?" His answer is:

> Dead? Absolutely not! Changing? (PS)[107] Always! The musical has been changing ever since Offenbach did his first rewrite. And the fact that it keeps changing is the best sign that the musical is alive and still growing (PS)[108] [...]. There will be new musicals—of some kind or another. In the 21st century, theatre, television and film will take the musical to places we could no more imagine that the people of 1900 could have imagined the technology of *The Jazz Singer* or the [gay] subject matter of *Falsettoes*. That means that the musical will go places some of us may not care to follow, but so long as a song helps to tell a story, the musical will live on (*ibid.*).

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[103] Composer-lyricist Jonathan Larson died from AIDS on the night of the Off-Broadway dress rehearsal of *Rent*—an event that *Rent*'s producers exploited to the maximum (*ibid.*).
[104] *Titanic* won five Tonys including Best Musical (*ibid.*).
[105] PS-related aspect: When a PS is weakening, it often borrows styles from earlier periods. Also, at the turn of the century, it is quite common to see backward-looking works.
[106] Kenrick says: "Shows that blatantly appealed to the lowest common cultural denominator thrived, while wit, melody and originality became the property of the past, embodied in revivals" (*ibid.*).
[107] PS-related aspect: the only constant in the PS is change.
[108] PS-related aspect: "Crises" in the PS are an indication of a system undergoing "healthy" renewal: "'[C]rises' or 'catastrophes' in a polysystem (i.e., occurrences which call for radical change, either by internal or external transfer), if they can be balanced by the system, are signs of a vital, rather than a degenerate, system" (Even-Zohar 1997: 9).

## SUMMARY OF MILESTONES IN THE MUSICAL PS

| Composer/ Lyricist: | HallmarkWork: | Date: | Form: | Significance: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Offenbach | *Orfée aux Enfers* | 1858 | operetta | -precursor of the musical |
| Strauss | *Die Fledermaus* | 1874 | operetta | -precursor of the musical |
| various | | 1840-1910 | American variety & minstrels | -two forms of musical revue in U.S. |
| various | | 1880-1930 | Vaudeville & burlesque | -new form of variety in U.S. |
| Wheatley | *The Black Crook* | 1866 | musical | -first American musical |
| Gilbert & Sullivan | *H.M.S. Pinafore*<br>*The Mikado* | 1878<br>1885 | operetta<br>operetta | -completely revolutionized musical theatre in Britain and U.S. |
| Cohan; Herbert | *Little Johnny Jones* | 1904 | musical | -established important norms: AABA song form; American-style flair; stylistic versatility |
| Lehár | *The Merry Widow* | 1907 | musical | -European import to the U.S<br>-established important norm: romantic content of musical |
| Kern & Hammerstein | *Showboat* | 1927 | musical | -innovative approach: cohesive story |
| Cole Porter | *Anything Goes* | 1934 | musical | -traditional song-and-dance musical |
| Rodgers & Hammerstein | *Oklahoma!* | 1943 | musical | -first fully integrated musical play |
| Berlin | *Annie Get Your Gun* | 1946 | musical | -adopted Rodgers & Hammerstein's model of integrated musical |
| Porter | *Kiss Me Kate* | 1947 | musical | -adopted Rodgers & Hammerstein's model of integrated musical |
| Loesser | *Guys and Doll* | 1950 | musical | -classic musical; well-integrated story |
| Loewe | *My Fair Lady* | 1956 | musical | -classic musical; well-integrated story |
| Berstein | *West Side Story* | 1957 | musical play | -zenith of the "musical play" |
| Rodgers & Hammerstein | *The Sound of Music* | 1959 | musical | -fully integrated musical<br>-R&I's all-time classic |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bart | *Oliver* | 1960 | book musical | -best British book musical since Gilbert & Sullivan |
| Herman | *Hello Dolly!* | 1964 | musical | -descendent of *Oklahoma!* |
| Bock & Harnick | *Fiddler On The Roof* | 1964 | musical | -descendent of *Oklahoma!* |
| MacDermot | *Hair* | 1968 | rock musical | -first successful rock musical |
| various | various | 1970s | revivals | -"vaccuum" in PS is filled with works from the past |
| Webber & Rice | *Jesus Christ Superstar* | 1971 | rock musical | -zenith of the rock musical |
| Sondheim | *A Chorus Line* | 1974 | concept musical | -first successful concept musical |
| John Huston | *Annie* | 1976 | musical | -last old-fashioned musical |
| Webber & Rice | *Evita* | 1979 | mega-musical | -1st British mega-musical |
| Webber & Rice | *Cats* | 1982 | mega-musical | -2nd Britsh mega-musical |
| Boubil & Schönberg | *Les Misérables* | 1985 | mega-musical | -3rd British mega-musical<br>-first hit musical by a French composer since Offenbach |
| Webber & Rice | *Phantom of The Opera* | 1988 | mega-musical | -4th British mega-musical |
| Boubil & Schönberg | *Miss Saigon* | 1991 | mega-musical | -5th British mega-musical |
| Walt Disney | *Beauty and The Beast* | 1994 | corporate musical | -1st American corporate musical |
| Larson | *Rent* | 1996 | corporate musical | -2nd American corporate musical |
| Walt Disney & Elton John | *Lion King* | 1997 | corporate musical | -3rd American corporate musical |
| Yeston & Stone | *Titanic* | 1997 | corporate musical | -4th American corporate musical |
| Ahrens & Flaherty | *Ragtime* | 1998 | corporate musical | -5th American corporate musical |
| various | various | 1998-? | revivals | -"vaccuum" in the musical PS |

## 2. The Place of *Les Miz* Within the Musical PS

No cultural product exists—and therefore no musical exists—in a vacuum. Nearly all draw on the norms and conventions established by their predecessors. *Les Miz* is clearly modelled on the Lloyd-Webber-Rice mega-musical, an all-sung musical with an historical theme, mixing the tradition of Italian opera with contemporary musical and literary styles. No surprise then that the director and producer of Webber's *Cats*, Trevor Nunn and Cameron Mackintosh, also directed and produced *Les Miz*. Both shows also had at least one other thing in common: massive marketing campaigns. But unlike *Cats*, *Les Miz* has a strong libretto and does not rely on scenic or special effect gimmicks to wow its audiences. *Les Miz* also has something in common with another Webber classic: *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971), which was the first full-fledged rock opera. During the 1980s, pop music replaced rock as the mainstream style of music, so *Les Miz* instead sounds like pop-opera. Going further back in time, the subject matter and setting of *Les Miz* could easily be compared to *Oliver* (1960), which was based on Charles Dicken's *Oliver Twist* (1839). Both *Les Miz* and *Oliver* are "book musicals," i.e., adaptations of a novel, and both criticize social injustices and expose the plight of the poor. On the micro-level, too, they have striking similarities—right down to the characters.[109] Some critics have even suggested that *Les Miz* "makes it look like Dickens rather than Hugo wrote it" (Anonymous 1987: 72). While the substance of *Les Miz* has much in common with *Oliver*, its form is clearly based on Rodgers & Hammerstein's musicals,[110] especially *Oklahoma!* (1943). Like *Oklahoma!*, *Les Miz* has a cohesive story, with songs

[109] The character Oliver, for example, can be compared to Gavroche in *Les Miz*.
[110] Critics have often dismissed the sentimental stories of *Les Miz* and Rodgers & Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*, but audiences keep forking over millions to see them.

that contribute to the action by creating mood, revealing character and advancing the plot. Finally, *Les Miz* also follows the conventions and norms established by Cohan, Herbert and Lehár at the beginning of the 20th century: it has the American-style flair and stylistic versatility established by Cohan and Herbert, in addition to the romantic content of Lehár's shows; and on the micro-level, most of the songs in *Les Miz* use the AABA song form established by Cohan and Herbert.[111]

But *Les Miz* does not simply bow to the conventions of the past; it also challenges them—as do most great works within a given PS. On the liner notes of the British recording of *Les Miz*, theatre historian Sheridan Morley writes:

> Like Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* and for that matter Verdi's *Rigoletto*, it sets out to redefine the limits of music theatre [...]. *Les Misérables* does more than draw on its own theatrical and political origins: like the best of Bernstein and Sondheim it also pushes the barriers of music theatre forward (Morley 1985: 2).

Morley, however, does not spell out exactly *how Les Miz* redefines the limits of music theatre, so I will attempt to answer this question myself.

*Les Miz* was the first musical in history to bring a pop style of "grand opera" to the masses. As many have pointed out, Hugo's novel in fact lends itself to operatic treatment: "Its successful transposition into a musical presentation derives [...] from the operatic quality of the text itself, which intertwines lyrical, dramatic, and narrative elements" (Grossman 1994: 323). Several 19th-century composers, Puccini among them, toyed with the idea of turning Hugo's *Les Misérables* into an opera, but Hugo would have probably rolled over in his grave had they done so, as it would have gone against his wish

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[111] A typical example is the song "Do You Year the People Sing?" This song also represents another important convention: the finale. As Kenrick explains: "The finale should carry an emotional wallop, giving an audience a powerful last impression [...] and the most effective way to do this is to [...] reprise one of the score's strongest numbers. *Showboat* closes with a family reunion as Joe sings another rendition of "Old Man River," and *Les Misérables* brings on the ghosts of the past for an encore of "Do You Hear the People Sing?" (Kenrick 2001).

to make the novel accessible to everyone (PS).[112] The transposition of Hugo's novel into the genre of musical therefore seems most appropriate since it is consistent with the author's populist intention.

Finally, I would like to make one last point regarding the genres of opera and musical. Generally speaking, relentlessly tragic tales like *Les Misérables* would normally be better suited to grand (tragic) opera. In fact, one critic noted that "Victor Hugo's sprawling canvas of social degradation in 19th-century France doesn't exactly spring to mind as material for a popular musical" (Anonymous 1985: 446). And this is precisely how *Les Miz* deviates from the norm: whereas a large percentage of operas are tragedies, and most musicals are comedies with happy endings, *Les Miz* is an unprecedented *musical tragedy*.[113] In short, using a musical to tell a tragic tale is *the* most innovative aspect of *Les Miz*—an approach that would influence future musicals, such as *Rent* (1996) and *Titanic* (1997), shows in which most of the main characters are destined to a fatal end.

[112] Whereas opera "has traditionally been associated with the upper social strata—thus making it a 'status symbol' for the public" (Appel 1972: 592)—musicals, on the other hand, appeal to *all* social classes. PS-related aspect: status/prestige within the PS.

[113] It is interesting to note that Boubil and Schönberg called their original French version of the musical "une tragédie musicale."

## 3. Translational Norms

### PRELIMINARY NORMS

As outlined in Chapter 1, Toury's preliminary norms attempt to answer the following questions: Why was the work chosen to be translated? What models, aesthetics, authors, historical periods, genres, and themes are preferred by the target culture?[114] Why were the Americans and the British attracted to Hugo's work? Like most matters of a cultural nature, it is impossible to give definitive answers to these questions, but I will put forward a hypothesis.

First of all, I believe that Americans during the 19th century were first attracted to the novel because of what was happening in their own country at the time. The publication of *Les Misérables* coincided with the second year of the American Civil War (1861-65). The Civil War, fought between the North and the South, was sparked off by Abraham Lincoln's election as president but, most importantly, the war had deep-rooted *political* and *economic* causes, exacerbated by the *slavery* issue. A 19th-century American newspaper, *The Evening Bulletin*, makes the following comment about the popularity of the novel with Civil War soldiers:

> V. Hugo's *Les Misérables* was the only book of any importance published within the limits of the Southern Confederacy during the war and almost the only fresh literary food of those engaged in the *slave holder's rebellion* [my emphasis] was this long and eloquent tirade against the tyranny of society (*The Evening Bulletin* [Providence R.I.], May 25, 1885, p. 4, col. 1; cited in Lebreton-Savigny 1971: 31).

[114] Who is the target culture for the musical *Les Miz*? Although originally conceived for British audiences, the producers and directors of *Les Miz* hoped that the show would be successful enough to move to Broadway eventually—which it did. *Les Miz* was therefore conceived with American audiences in mind as well.

Catherine Grossman also says that the novel was a favourite of Civil War soldiers, who "perhaps found solace in the resolution of Jean Valjean's moral dilemmas and France's civil conflict" (Grossman 1997: 17). I agree, and would add that the American Civil War soldiers were perhaps specifically attracted to the novel's *revolutionary theme*: "the glory to die for one's country" or, at least, for a "just" cause. Moreover, the novel's revolutionary, humanitarian and populist themes—not to mention flag-waving patriotism—no doubt struck a chord with the soldiers. In short, the political and economic causes of the Civil War, and especially the issue of slavery, were themes that most Americans could relate to during the 1860s. *Les Misérables* was also extraordinarily popular in England during the 19th century (Grossman 1996: 17). Perhaps British readers saw shades of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* in Hugo's novel.

Some of the reasons why the Americans and the British were first attracted to the novel in the 1860s probably still hold true today for the musical: its social and political themes, democratic idealism, humanitarianism, etc. I would also add to this list a modern fascination with the Romantic era in general, and Hugo and Dickens in particular.

## OPERATIONAL NORMS AND NON-OBLIGATORY SHIFTS

The translation of the French-language version of *Les Miz* into English clearly illustrates two important PS notions: "operational norms" (whose subcategories are "matricial norms" and "textual-linguistic" norms), and "non-obligatory shifts." Boubil and Shönberg's original French version of *Les Misérables* was conceived as a stage spectacle in an arena—basically, a series of "tableaux" in the French tradition. This very French form of music theatre needed to be transposed into an English form that was popular during the 1980s: the Lloyd-Webber-Rice mega-musical. Since French audiences were intimately aware of the story, the 1980 French-language version left out major chunks of the book. According to Boubil, the French version was adapted this way because French audiences were so familiar with the book that they would grow impatient if they were taken through the entire story (Behr 1989: 74). English audiences, on the other hand, were not as familiar with the story, so the English-language version had to fill in the "missing pieces" that were left out in the French original (matricial norms).

Non-obligatory shifts were also used to adapt the musical for English audiences. The original used French literary allusions and colloquialisms that English audiences would not understand, so the English version had to transpose them.[115] However, the English translations do not resort to wholesale "cultural transplantation."[116] As in other

[115] For example, the English adaptation of the song "La faute à Voltaire," "Little People," makes no mention of Voltaire or Rousseau. The English version of this song replaces the French literary allusions with religious allusions: it mentions the Pope in Rome, and David and Goliath from the Bible.

[116] "Cultural transplantation" is "the highest degree of cultural transposition involving the replacement of source-cultural details mentioned in the ST with cultural details drawn from the target culture in the TT—that is, cultural transplantation deletes from the TT items specific to the source culture, replacing them with items specific to the target culture" (Hervey and Higgins 1994: 249).

songs,[117] there is just enough "exoticism"[118] to remind the audience that the story takes place in France.[119] As far as the adaptation of colloquialisms, the translation of the song "La devise du cabaretier," "Master of the House," is a good case in point: the French slang expressions in the original are transposed into Cockney colloquialisms such as "lifelong mate," "boon companion," "What a sorry little lot," "Isn't worth me spit," "Hypocrite and toady and inebriate," and so forth (textual-linguistic norms).

### 4. Critical Reception and Importance of *Les Miz*

The original 1980 French-language spectacle, which was staged as an epic arena show by French theatre director Robert Hossein, received scathing critical reviews:

> The show's problems begin early. The libretto, by Alain Boubil and Claude-Michel Schonberg, shrinks the novel's huge embrace to a piddling linear melodrama with only brief flashes of the surging social themes that preoccupied Hugo. Clearly it's impossible to do on stage what the writer did on paper, but the authors have attacked their task with little inspiration. Schonberg's music is inflated and unmemorable and the lyrics are flat and repetitive [...] Even in his worst work, Hossein has always managed to provide some moments of genuine theatrical emotion. With "Les Misérables" the failure is complete. (Anonymous 1980: 106).

Despite such contempt for the work, the reviewer admits that "Every night the 4,500-seat Palais des Sports hangs up its 'Sold Out' sign" (*ibid.*).

Five years later, *Les Miz* was received in London with a prolonged and emotional standing ovation on opening night. All those involved with *Les Miz* thought they had a hit on their hands. The "buzz" among those emerging from the theatre, many of them in tears, was unmistakable. However, judged by the initial press reviews, it was a flop:

> A quality score, impressive singing, superb staging, but lacklustre job of compressing a vast, diffuse classic of a novel add up in "Les Misérables" to a worthy but ultimately under-satisfying specimen of music theatre [...] (Anonymous 1985: 446).

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[117] For example, the use of the expression "bon-viveur" [*sic*] and the mention of Voltaire in "Master of the House."

[118] "Exoticism is "the lowest degree of cultural transposition of a ST feature, whereby that feature (having its roots exclusively in the SL and source culture) is taken over verbatim into the TT; that is, the transposed term is a recognizable and deliberately 'foreign' element in the TT" (Hervey and Higgins 1994: 250).

[119] For instance, in the song "Little People," the city of Versailles is mentioned.

After seeing the killer reviews, *Les Miz'* producer Cameron Macintosh seriously considered calling off the ten-week schedule. It is a good thing he did not: within three days, the show was sold-out until the end of its Barbican run. Public opinion clearly differed from the critics.[120] So much for the critics!

From that point on in its history, *Les Miz* took the world by storm, playing simultaneously in Sydney, Tokyo, Budapest, Tel-Aviv, Oslo and Stockholm, all in the mother tongue of each of these countries. By the time it came to Broadway in 1987, advanced ticket sales surpassed ten million dollars—a new record.[121] What's more, this time the critics gave it gushing reviews:

> It's a smash all right. Magnificent stagecraft is joined to an uplifting theme of heroic human commitment and to stirring music [...]. As the most exciting musical drama to hit Broadway in some years, as a visually and musically stirring spectacle, as a stellar instance of highly refined staging skill, "Les Misérables" will be the hit it deserves to be [...]. (Anonymous 1987: 82-83).

In 1987, *Les Miz* won eight Tony Awards, including Best Score and Best Book (libretto), and in 1988 it won a Grammy for Best Original Broadway Cast Recording. Seen by over 40 million people worldwide in 27 countries and in 16 languages, *Les Miz* is now widely regarded as the world's most popular musical.

The reception of *Les Miz* clearly illustrates an important notion of the PS: the evolution of norms via competition. Public opinion was the antithesis of the critics; eventually, though, the critics began to agree with the masses.[122] And now on to the ultimate question: *Why* was *Les Miz* so successful?

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[120] Interestingly, highly favourable reviews began to appear two weeks later.
[121] Up to March 3, 1997, *Les Miz* grossed $1.6 billion dollars world-wide (Anonymous 1997: 72-73).
[122] This complete reversal in the opinion of the critics was also the case with Hugo's novel: although initially rejected by critics in the 19th century, many critics today feel that *Les Misérables* deserves its place in history as one of the greatest 19th-century masterpieces of popular fiction (France 2000: II.g.9).

## CHAPTER 7:

## SOCIAL ASPECTS

### 1. Adapting *Les Miz* to the target culture

Exactly why was *Les Miz* was so incredibly successful? I would argue that one of the reasons for its success is because it adopted the generic and cultural idiom of its English-speaking audiences. The original French version was completely transformed into a genre that English audiences could relate to. The result? More than one critic has noted that *Les Miz* "seems more English than French"[123] (Anonymous 1985: 446) and "makes it look as though Dickens rather than Hugo wrote it" (Anonymous 1987: 72). This *seems* to suggest that a foreign work must adopt the target culture's norms and genres if it wants to be accepted by it.

But what happens when a work does *not* adopt the target culture's norms and genres? The 1991 French version of *Les Miz* is a good case in point. As the reader will recall, the 1991 French version was based on the 1985 English adaptation—not the 1980 French version. This completely new French version was created for performances in Montreal, Winnipeg and Ottawa, and then Paris in 1991. The French version was a smash hit in Canada; additional performances were added at every stop along the tour. But what would happen when *Les Miz* returned home to Paris after 11 years? In an article from 1991 entitled "Will 'Les Miz' Make French Miserable?", the author predicts that the French will not go for the show:

> Parisians will have to swallow an indignity even greater than seeing an unsuccessful French show repackaged as a Brit musical hit: the cast will sing not the original French lyrics, but a French version of the English translation of the original lyrics (Anonymous 1991: 96).

[123] The nickname "Les Miz" speaks volumes in this regard.

Yet, the initial public reaction was actually quite impressive: in November 1991, for example, one author writes "Paris Loves 'Les Miz' Second Time Around" (Anonymous 1991: 65). However, a few months a later, it was clear that the French public had snubbed the show. In April 1992, the same author of the above article writes the headline "Paris tunes out prize-winning 'Miz'":

> The show entered Paris triumphantly in October 1991, opening to packed houses and critical acclaim. But France has become the only major territory where the show couldn't stick [...] 'The French public was not ready for big musicals, after all' (Anonymous 1992: 69).

And then one month later, an article entitled "'Les Miz': Of and By But Not for the French" appeared in the *The New York Times*:

> A French epic written by a great French novelist, music by a French composer, an entirely new production with French lyrics and rave reviews [in *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*]. Surely enough, one would imagine, to break Paris's legendary resistance to Broadway-style musicals [...]. Yet after a month of sell-out performances, audiences began to thin out. And now, with losses piling up, the Paris jinx has won out again: the show will close here on May 24 after just seven months [...]. (Riding 1992: 11).

Why did Parisians reject the French version of *Les Miz*? Probably because "France really doesn't have a tradition of popular musicals" (*ibid.*). Paris averages only one musical per year, and "has traditionally treated Broadway musicals like a poor relation" (Anonymous 1991: 65). The French producer of *Les Miz*, René Cleitman, sums it up thus: "The French never brought the musical into the pop era. It was viewed as operetta and demoded [outmoded]" (*ibid.*). The above example *seems* to suggest that if a given culture does not have a particular genre in its repertoire, in all likelihood, it will not accept foreign models of that genre into its PS.[124]

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[124] This observation should not be misconstrued as a conclusion, as there are many *counter-examples*. For instance, in *Sociologie de la traduction : la science fiction américaine dans l'espace culturel des années 1950*, Jean-Marc Gouanvic shows how American science fiction was imported *en masse* into France during the 1950s and accepted by the French as a *new* literary genre.

## 2. A Case for Adaptation: Georges Bastin's Spanish Adaptation of Jean Delisle's "Analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction"[125]

In a presentation entitled "Une stratégie d'insertion sociale d'une traduction" given by Georges Bastin at Concordia University on September 26, 2000, the speaker made a strong case for adaptation. Bastin adapted Jean Delisle's classic *Analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction* to teach his students French-to-Spanish translation. In his adaptation, Bastin *re-created* exercises based on stylistic differences between French and Spanish,[126] whereas the original used exercises based on stylistic differences between English and French. In his article entitled "La notion d'adaptation en traduction,"[127] Bastin argues that his adaptation was absolutely necessary given the specific pedagogic context (1993: 473). If he had instead used "translation proper," Delisle's book would have been virtually useless for his Spanish-speaking students:

> La non-adaptation engendre la virtuelle inutilité de l'œuvre pédagogique. Exemple: le choix (délibéré) de nouvelles langues de travail et notamment de la langue maternelle du nouveau lecteur; ce choix entraîne à lui seul une adaptation globale, donc de tout l'ouvrage. Son refus transformerait la méthode Delisle en un ouvrage <<informateur>>, mais certainement pas <<formateur>> (*ibid.*).

In his presentation, Bastin mentioned how a *non*-adapted translation of a didactic work would be pointless: Delisle's *Analyse du Discours* was recently translated into Chinese—but using the same English-French examples as the original! What pedagogic relevance could Delisle's English-French examples possibly have to Chinese translation students? Certainly not much. The translator should have instead used Chinese stylistic examples.

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[125] It should be noted that Bastin's ST is of a didactic nature and therefore fundamentally different than the translation of a musical.

[126] The different language combinations necessitated adaptation.

[127] "Il s'agit d'une synthèse d'une thèse de doctorat soutenue à la Sorbonne-Nouvelle (Paris III) en septembre 1990 sur l'étude de l'adaptation ponctuelle et globale dans la version espagnole de *L'analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction* de J. Delisle" (Bastin 1993: 473).

In the above article, Bastin outlines four conditions that *demand* adaptation:

a) **L'inefficacité du transcodage.** Plusieurs parties du discours sont couramment taxées d' <<intraduisibles>>: les jeux de mots, certains idiotismes, les parlers vernaculaires, les ambiguïtés intentionnelles, le métalangage, etc. [...] Cette inefficacité est la condition qui amène le traducteur à choisir entre désignation et effet de sens ou à se transformer en adaptateur pour <<sauver les meubles>>.
b) **L'inadéquation des situations.** [L]'inadéquation des situations associe linguistique et extra-linguistique en ce qu'elle porte sur l'expression linguistique d'une réalité extra-linguistique. Le traducteur doit donc relever le défi d'établir une équivalence entre la situation de l'acte de parole premier (l'original) et celle de l'acte de parole second (le sien) [...].
c) **Le changement de genre.** [L]e changement de genre fait passer l'adaptation à un tout autre plan [...]. Le changement de genre n'est pas d'origine linguistique [...] lui, s'impose au traducteur de par un choix soit personnel, soit extérieur à lui [...]. Autre trait caractéristique du changement de genre, le fait qu'il affecte la globalité de l'ouvrage.
d) **Rupture d'équilibre communicationnel.** Nous posons que tout texte s'insère dans un acte de parole plus large mettant en jeu des interlocuteurs dans un environnement à la fois historique, géographique, sociolinguistique et cognitif [...]. Même si toute traduction engendre naturellement une modification de certains des éléments constitutifs de l'acte de parole original, [...] elle ne rompt pas nécessairement l'équilibre préexistant. [Exemple:] Les traducteurs anglais de *L'analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction*, en dépit de leurs interlocuteurs anglophones et des huit années séparant l'édition originale de leur version, n'ont eu à constater aucune rupture d'équilibre communicationnel, aucune inadéquation majeure entre les éléments constitutifs du nouvel acte de parole qu'ils entreprenaient (même milieu sociolinguistique, mêmes destinataires, même couple de langues que l'original). En revanche, notre choix délibéré de langues de travail différentes pour la version espagnole entraîne un déséquilibre évident et constitue la condition, la raison d'être de notre démarche adaptative (*ibid.*).

He concludes that adaptation is often necessary since, without it, the TT will be either useless or incomprehensible to its readers (478). His final definition is enlightening:

> L'adaptation est le processus, créateur et nécessaire, d'expression d'un sens général visant à rétablir, dans un acte de parole interlinguistique donné, l'équilibre communicationnel qui aurait été rompu s'il y avait simplement eu traduction (*ibid.*).

There are many other cases for adaptation that could be cited, such as the phenomenon of "localization" (i.e., adapting a translation to a local cultural/linguistic group), which has recently become a dominant trend in the translation world.[128] All these examples *seem* to suggest that Toury is right: non-obligatory shifts from the source text do appear to be a universal of translation—which leads me to my next section.

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[128] Another example is the "plain language" policy of the Canadian Federal Government: all Federal Government documents (e.g. tax forms) destined to the general public have recently been lowered from a Grade 8 reading level to a Grade 6 reading level so their target audience (Canadian citizens) can understand them (Brake 2001). In the same vein, the policy (read "ideology") of the Federal Government's

## 3. Gideon Toury: Towards (Universal) Laws of Translational Behaviour

In the final chapter of *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Gideon Toury formulates probabilistic laws to predict translation behaviour. These laws are based on the basic equation:

> if X, then the greater/the lesser the likelihood that Y (where Y is an observed behaviour, or a certain part/aspect thereof, and/or their observable result, and X is the conditioning factor) (265).

Toury discusses 12 universal laws,[129] whose main categories are: a) the law of growing standardization and b) the law of interference. The assumption underlying the first law is that all translations are conscious and unconscious "manipulations" of the source text.[130] The assumption underlying the second law is that tolerance of interference—"whether they manifest themselves in the form of *negative transfer* (i.e., deviations from normal, codified practices of the target system), or in the form of *positive transfer* (i.e., greater likelihood of selecting features which do exist and are used in any case)" (*ibid.*)—has to do with the *socio-cultural conditions* in which the translation is performed. Thus, it follows that

> tolerance of interference—and hence the endurance of its manifestations—tend to increase when translation is carried out from a 'major' or highly prestigious language/culture, especially if the target language/culture is 'minor', or 'weak' in any other sense (278).[131]

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Translation Bureau is "idiomatic" translation (Mossop 1988; 1989; 1990). Mossop criticizes the ideology of idiomatic translation as exemplified in Delisle's approach.

[129] In "Universals of Literary Contacts," Even-Zohar lists 13 universals (1978: 43).

[130] For more on this topic, see Theo Hermans' 1985 collection *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

[131] Or in more accessible language: "If culture A considers culture B to be more prestigious than itself, it will tend to tolerate calques and literalist translations ('interference') from that culture" (Pym 1998: 147). Anthony Pym questions the causal relation in Toury's formula: "This sounds neatly logical, even commonsensical (we imitate people we admire, since it would certainly be irrational to imitate people we did not admire). But is this relation causal? If you think about it, surely the people doing the tolerating are more or less the ones who depend on translations for their knowledge of the foreign culture in the first place. If they accord prestige to that culture, the prestige itself may be due to the way those translations are carried out. The calques and literalisms could thus be the cause of the relative prestige, and not the other way around" (*ibid.*).

## 4. Critique

Although Toury's "universal" laws of translational behaviour are fascinating, they need to be critiqued. First of all, there are very few examples. Toury does not analyze an extensive corpus of translated texts in order to establish universal laws. As Lambert (1995) points out, "[m]ore than any other model in this area, [the polysystem theory] is useless without research" (134). Similarly, Gentlzer (1993) writes:

> The first problem [...] is his tendency to propose universals based on very little evidence. A more extensive analysis of textual and cultural relations must take place before "universals" can be persuasively posited. The contradictions in his own data demonstrate the ephemeral nature of many of his hypotheses and tend to distort the theoretical importance of what he is trying to articulate (121-122).

Secondly, Toury's use of the terms "vacuum/gap"[132] is problematic since it implies something negative, (i.e., a deficiency in the target culture). This assumption is dangerous because it may lead to ethnocentric ways of thinking about cultures—which brings me to my third criticism.

Toury's notions of a "major or highly prestigious language/culture" and a "minor or weak language/culture" can also be regarded as a form of ethnocentrism. Who are these "weak" cultures being compared with? With the dominant Western culture of course. Why should Western culture be the norm with which all other cultures are compared?[133] Toury has unwittingly imbued his discourse with terminology that perpetuates a West-centred view of the world. What's more, although he accepts the "fact" that all languages/cultures are different, he suggests that underlying that difference

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[132] For example, when a society does not have a particular genre in its culture, as was the case with France and the musical, Toury calls this a "vacuum."

[133] Venuti (1999) talks about "foreignness" while Berman (1985) uses the term "étrangeté." Describing other cultures as "strange," "exotic," "marginal" or "foreign" can also be regarded as a form of ethnocentrism. Ironically, both Venuti and Berman have unwittingly imbued their discourse with terminology that perpetuates a Western-centred view of the world. Lydia Liu (1995), on the other hand, avoids such "loaded" terminology; instead, she proposes the terms "host language" and "guest language."

is a universal, homogeneous system. The assumption of Cultural Universalism, i.e., "we're all the same," is also dangerous, as it tends to efface the uniqueness of individual cultures and languages. Furthermore, Toury's "data" only documents the conformity to his universal laws; it would be interesting to look at the *exceptions* to the rule: "Toury's target-oriented approach is compromised by the discovery that there are many (mainly) source-oriented translations" (Lambert 1995: 136).[134]

The fourth criticism I have of Toury's theory is its claim to be an "objective" science,[135] explainable in terms of mathematical formulae.[136] The translation contexts of different cultures and societies, however, have an infinite number of variables. Trying to boil them down to epigrammatic formulae seems to me a futile—if not impossible—task.

Lastly, Toury's level of discourse in *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* tends to be extremely theoretical—indeed *beyond* most readers—and his style makes for very arduous reading. Although a complex style is sometimes necessary to express complex ideas, and every professional field demands that its members understand its own voice and vocabulary, I would argue that the opacity of Toury's discourse gratuitously complicates the already complex notions. In short, Toury's excruciating style numbs all but the most masochistically dedicated reader; it needs to be revised into something a little more reader friendly and more accessible to his *target audience*—after all, a target-oriented approach is his *raison d'être*.

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[134] For an example of source-oriented translations, see Catherine Sumner-Paulin's excellent article entitled "Traduction et culture: quelques proverbes africains traduits," *Meta*, 1995, 40, 4, Dec. p. 548-555. In her article, Sumner-Paulin says that African translators usually choose to translate African proverbs literally in order to respect the identity of culturally "remote" communities.

[135] In Lefevere's article entitled "Why Waste our Time on Rewrites" in *The Manipulation of Literature* (Hermans, ed., 1985), he argues that translators cannot avoid their own ideologies and suggests that fields which claim to be objective are "dishonest."

[136] For example, "if X1 and Z1, then the likelihood that Y is greater than if X1 and Z2, and even greater than if X1 and Z3" (266).

## CONCLUSION

Despite its shortcomings, the PS remains an excellent methodological tool to analyze and describe translational phenomena—as I have hopefully demonstrated in this thesis. The PS has had a significant impact on developments in Translation Studies over the past three decades. During the 1980s, the PS and Translation Studies began to merge to the point where the two were almost indistinguishable (Gentzler 1993: 106). Translation Studies eventually adopted Toury's focus on descriptive work and on socio-literary norms that govern the target culture and constrain the translation process (133), and this led to the abandonment of the notion of one-to-one equivalence. In its stead, the idea of inescapable "infidelity" is now beginning to receive wider acceptance. Toury's main argument—that translators tend to make non-obligatory shifts away from the source text because their main goal is to produce acceptable translations in the target culture—indeed seems to have a grain of truth. Norman Denny's "idiomatic" translation of the novel *Les Misérables*, Herbert Kretzmer's adaptation of the musical, and Georges Bastin's adaptation of Delisle's *Analyse du Discours* all support Toury's (hypo)thesis.

By far, Toury's most important contribution to Translation Studies is the notion of translational norms. In this thesis, I have shown that Wilbour and Denny's translations exemplify 19th- and 20th-century translation norms respectively: Wilbour's monologically semantic approach reflects the Romantic notion of authorship and the devaluation of the role of the translator in the 19th century; Denny's approach, on the other hand, exemplifies the prevailing doctrine in our time, which Brian Mossop calls "the ideology of idiomatic translation" (Mossop 1988; 1989; 1990).

I have also shown in this thesis how the 1985 English adaptation of the musical *Les Misérables* adopted the norms and conventions of the target culture. I argued that the peculiar constraints on lyric translation forced the translator-lyricist to cross the translation-adaptation borderline. If he had not adapted the lyrics, they would have been in conflict with the rhythm of the music or very difficult to understand. My conclusion was that the exceptional constraints for translating a Broadway-style musical *demand* adaptation rather than translation.

History has unfortunately not been very kind to adapters: "tantôt imitation d'un copiste, tantôt déformation d'un faussaire, l'adaptation apparaît presque toujours comme une trahison, un crime, voire un manque de respect !" (Bastin 1993: 473). Such contempt for adapters throughout the ages has its roots in a misguided belief that there is something *inherently* immoral or unethical about adapting. Indeed, "c'est sur une <<éthique de l'adaptation>> qu'il faudrait plutôt s'interroger" (Gouanvic 1999: 113).[137] How, then, can we judge if an adaptation is ethical or not? I would argue that one way is to determine whether or not the adaptation reflects the *author's intention*. Though the author's original intention is sometimes not easy to determine, in the case of Hugo's *Les Misérables*,[138] it is explicitly stated in his introduction—and, for that matter, it is hard not to notice his monologic message throughout the novel. Judged on this basis, Denny's idiomatic translation and the 1985 musical adaptation of *Les Misérables* are clearly ethical since they both convey the author's teleological goal.

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[137] Gouanvic is referring to the French adaptations of American science fiction novels during the 1950s.
[138] And *Notre-Dame de Paris*.

The PS's inclusion of adaptations and traditionally rejected genres is a positive new development for Translation Studies, offering a vast and fascinating new area for further investigation. Translation is no longer limited to the confines of linguistics; it now includes music, theatre and film as well—areas where adaptation is the *norm* and translation is the exception. In the words of Even-Zohar, "translation is no longer a phenomenon whose nature and borders are given once and for all, but an activity dependent on the relations within a certain cultural system" (1990: 51).

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[140] There are several Broadway recordings of the English version of the musical, but the Original London Cast Recording is, in my opinion, by far the best.