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Johann Jacob Bodmer, Interculturalist
Cultural realignment in the 18th century and the role of a Zurich translator

Helen Baumer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The University of Auckland, 2004
Abstract

Johann Jacob Bodmer stands at the beginning of a new era that saw the establishment of major English literary influences in Germany along with the rise of English to become a language of importance of the European stage.

The particular importance of this eighteenth-century Zurich translator and literary scholar lies in his translation of a canonical work of English literature, Paradise Lost, and in his tireless efforts to develop appreciation of this work in the German debate on aesthetics and translation of the 1730s. Bodmer was strongly opposed by scholars wishing to establish in Germany the neoclassical aesthetic conventions prevailing in France, then the hegemonic power in Europe. By overcoming the advocates of French literary models he paved the way for the widescale translation of English authors such as Shakespeare, and the adoption of English models.

As a translator, Bodmer advocated norms of faithful translation that deviated from those advanced for Germany by the advocates of French literary models. This study explores the origin of the new Zurich ideas, and outlines the extensive debate on translation conducted in Germany in the 1730s, in which Bodmer and his colleague Johann Jacob Breitinger overturned the arguments of Johann Christoph Gottsched and his supporters. In a number of respects, Bodmer and Breitinger’s ideas on translation can be seen as precursors of the ‘foreignising’ approach to translation developed by German thinkers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher at the end of the eighteenth century.

My study also investigates Bodmer’s translation practice in detail, based on analyses of his German translations of Paradise Lost. It gives particular attention to the way in which the debates of the 1730s prompted changes in his thinking on translation. Of especial interest here are his ideas on the translation of metaphor, to which he appears to have devoted more attention than any thinker before him.

My study applies a new approach to studying translation history currently being developed by translation scholar Anthony Pym. Pym’s ‘professional interculture’ ideas focus particular attention on individual translators and groups of translators, and the importance of their debates and discussions for negotiating translation norms.
Acknowledgements

I would like to take the opportunity of thanking everyone who has helped me with this research project. First, Professor Hannelore Lee-Jahnke, at the School of Translation and Interpreting in Geneva, Switzerland, for sparking the flame of interest in Bodmer’s importance as a translator. Also the staff at the Zentralbibliothek in Zurich, Switzerland, for all their help in gathering source material, and in particular Marlis Stähli in the Handschriftenabteilung for her valuable assistance in deciphering some of the more intractable examples of Bodmer’s handwriting.

My thanks also go to the organisers of the CETRA summer programme in Misano, Italy, in particular to Professor José Lambert, for the solid training they provided in both Descriptive Translation Studies methodology and doctoral research, and to the New Zealand government for providing me with financial support through the award of a Top Achiever Doctoral Scholarship.

I consider myself particularly fortunate to have been able to count on the invaluable assistance of Professor Anthony Pym, of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona, Spain, particularly with regard to theoretical aspects of the work. He devoted considerable time to my project at important stages in its evolution, provided the right direction at the right moments, and read many of the chapters.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank Dr Sabine Fenton, my supervisor at the University of Auckland Centre for Translation and Interpreting Studies, who guided me into doctoral research in translation studies in the first place, who encouraged me in every possible way along the route, and provided invaluable input and ideas at every stage.

Helen Baumer
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(illustrations supplied by the ‘Zentralbibliothek’ in Zurich and reproduced with the library’s kind permission)
GREIFENSEE, BODMERS GEBURTSORT.

Nach einem Kupferstich von F. Hegi.
Monseur et bon Courage! Answer.


Mein Dank und meine Treue.

Siegfried Friedrich Hahn

25. März 1745

Dotted.