

錢鍾書：林紓的翻譯

Lin Ch'in-nan Revisited

By Ch'ien Chung-shu

Translated by George Kao

This reevaluation of Lin Shu 林紓 (1852-1924), courtesy name Ch'in-nan 琴南—considered the greatest Chinese translator of Western fiction, certainly the most prolific—was published in 文學研究集刊 (Anthology of Literary Studies), vol. 1, Peking, 1964. Ch'ien Chung-shu, a multi-lingual, Oxford-educated scholar, was active in the years immediately before and after World War II as essayist, critic and fiction-writer. An excerpt of his novel The Besieged City appeared in Renditions No. 2, Spring 1974.

We present here a partial translation of Mr. Ch'ien's article. Omitted are portions dealing with Lin Shu's sloppiness and careless mistakes, and the entire last section devoted to analyzing Lin's use of the ku-wen (古文), or classical literary style, in his translations (not unadulterated) and to recounting Lin's perverseness in old age about the relative ranking of his many talents (ku-wen writing, painting, poetry, and translation). A number of the original footnotes that are somewhat extraneous and specialized in interest have been dropped or abbreviated.

HSU SHEN 許慎, the Han dynasty philologist, has given us a note on an ancient character having to do with translation that is rich in connotations. In his 說文解字 (*The Origins of Words and Characters*), volume VI, under the heading 詘, the entry for the 26th character reads as follows: “詘, meaning *translation*, with 詘 as its radical, and 化 its phonetic. When the bird-catcher uses a live bird as decoy, it is called 詘, pronounced 譌.” Since Southern T'ang times, the word 譯 has been explicated as “to transmit the talk of the four barbarians and the birds and the beasts”, much in the same manner as the bird-decoy “entices” his feathered friends. The characters 譌, 訛, 化 and 詘 are interchangeable (see 說文解字詁林, *A Collection of Commentaries on “the Origins of Words and Characters”*, fascicule 28, page 2736-8). The interrelated and interacting meanings in such characters as 譯 *translate*, 誘 *entice*, 媒 *transmit*, 訛 *misrepresent*, and 化 *transform*, constituting what a student of poetic diction would call *plurisignation*, tend to bring out the functions of translation, its unavoidable shortcomings, as well as the highest state of attainment to which it can aspire.

The highest standard in literary translation is 化, transforming a work from the language of one country into that of another. If this could be done without betraying any evidence of artifice by virtue of divergences in language and speech habits, while at the same time preserving intact the flavor of the original, then we say that such

a performance has attained “the ultimate of transmutation” 化境 . This kind of achievement in language has been compared in the seventeenth century to the “*transmigration of souls*”,¹ replacing of the external shell and retaining the inner spirit and style without the slightest deviation. In other words, a translation should cleave to the original with such fidelity that it would not read like a translation, for a literary work in its own language will never read as though it has been through a process of translation.²

Nevertheless, there are inevitable gaps—between one national language and another, between the translator’s comprehension and literary style and the form and substance of the original work, and frequently between the translator’s appreciation of the work and his ability to express it. It is an arduous journey that takes off from one language and, after inching its way and negotiating many gaps, arrives safely in the midst of another.³ One is bound to encounter obstacles in transit and suffer certain losses and damages. For this reason, translations cannot avoid being somewhat unfaithful, violating or not exactly conforming to the original in meaning or tone. That is what we call “misrepresentation” 訛 . There is a Western saying, “The translator is a traitor” (*Traduttore, traditore*). The Chinese ancients also said something to the effect that the *fan* 翻 in *fan-i* 翻譯 *translate* amounts to *fan* 翻 *to turn over*—as in turning a piece of embroidery inside out.⁴ The words *transmit* and *entice* explain, of course, how translation functions in cultural interchange; it acts as a middleman, a liaison, introducing foreign works to the readers and enticing them into a fondness for these works, as though playing the role of matchmaker and bringing about a “literary romance” between nations.

Since complete and thoroughgoing “transformation” is an all but unrealizable ideal, and some degree of “misrepresentation” in certain connections are all but unavoidable, the act of transmitting and enticing takes on a new significance. Translation was to save people the trouble of learning foreign languages and reading the original works, but now it entices the readers into doing that very thing. It arouses the readers’ curiosity, causing them to yearn for the original: it lets them have a taste of the real thing, whetting their appetite without satisfying their hunger. The readers of a translation will always feel as if gazing at flowers through a fog. Thus Goethe rather unceremoniously likened the translator to a professional go-between (*Kuppler*)—because he half-reveals and half-conceals the features of the original, causing his

¹See letter from George Savile, First Marquess of Halifax, to the translator of Montaigne’s essays, Charles Cotton, in W. Raleigh’s complete edition, p. 185. There is a contemporary reference to translation as a “linguistic transmigration of souls” (*une métépsychose linguistique*), cited in *Revue de Littérature comparée*, January-March 1961 issue, p. 18.

²Ch’ien would have been more accurate if he had said *hardly ever*. It is a well-known and deplorable fact that present-day native writers of the Chinese language (whether in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or mainland China) often produce writing that reads “as though it has been through a process of translation”. In other

words, they write a brand of Chinese that reads like some Western language.—G.K.

³In translation, the language of the original work is sometimes called *langue de départ* and the language of the translated version, *langue d’arrivée*. See J. P. Vinay and J. Darbelent, *Stylistique comparée du Français et de l’Anglais*, p. 10.

⁴“Like turning over embroidery, we find all the designs showing on the reverse side, only the left-and-right of the designs are different.” See the concluding remarks in Tsan Ning 贊寧, *高僧傳三集*, vol. 3.

readers to wonder how beautiful it must be.⁵ In order to find out, to tear away the bridal veil and have a good look, they must try to read the original work. In this sense, a good translation is self-defeating; it leads us to the original, and as soon as we get to read the original we will toss aside the translation. A very self-confident translator may feel that, reading his translated version, one will not need to read the original, but he will be disappointed. Anyone who is able to enjoy the real thing would heartlessly abandon the substitute which the translator has labored so long and hard to fashion. On the other hand, the inferior translation would have the effect of destroying the original. Clumsy and obscure translations inevitably turn the reader away; if he cannot stomach the translation, he will have no appetite for the original. This type of translation alienates the reader; it makes him lose what interest he had in the work and, in process, does harm to the reputation of the author. The translation of the seventeenth century French priest Abbé de Marolles is a classic example. His version of the Roman poet Martial's satiric verse was dubbed by his contemporaries "a satire on Martial's verse".⁶ Most of us can come up with other examples from our own reading experience.

THAT LIN SHU's translations have served to "transmit" Western literature to the Chinese reading public is generally recognized.⁷ To a number of his readers he must also have exercised a *Kuppler's* influence in the Goethean sense, leading them to direct contact with the original works. I for one became increasingly interested in learning foreign languages reading Lin's translations. The two boxfuls of 林譯小說叢書 (Lin's Library of Translated Fiction) were a great discovery to me at age twelve; they led me into a new world, a world other than that of 水滸 (*The Water Margin*), 西遊記 (*The Journey to the West*), and 聊齋誌異 (*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*). Prior to this I had read such works as 十五小豪傑 (*Fifteen Little Heroes*), translated by Liang Ch'i-ch'ao 梁敏超, and the detective stories translated by Chou Kuei-sheng 周桂笙, and invariably had been bored by them. It was not until I came into contact with Lin Shu's translations that I realized how captivating Western fiction could be. I tirelessly perused the works of Haggard, Washington Irving, Scott and Dickens in the Lin translations. If I was in any way self-consciously motivated toward learning English, it was so that one day I could gorge myself on the adventure stories of Haggard and company without let and hindrance.

Forty years ago, in the small county that was my hometown, we rarely had the chance to see moving pictures; the kind of recreation children of later days enjoyed in watching animal movies, or in a visit to the zoo, I was able to seek only from adventure stories. Some of Lin's translations I read more than once over, and in time questions began to raise themselves in my mind. I remember distinctly this passage at the end of Chapter 5 in [H. Rider] Haggard's 三千年艷屍記 (*The Beautiful*

⁵From *Spruchweisheit*, in the collected works of Goethe published by Der Tempel, vol. 3, p. 333.

⁶See *Menagiana*, cited in I. Disraeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, in the Chandos Classics, vol. 1, p. 350.

⁷Among the many articles and books discussing Lin Shu's translations the more worthwhile references include Cheng Chen-to 鄭振鐸, "Mr. Lin Ch'in-nan" in 中國文學研究 (*Studies in Chinese Literature*), vol. III, and Han-kuang 寒光, *Lin Ch'in-nan*. See p. 26 of this issue for excerpts from Mr. Cheng's article.—G.K.

Three-thousand-year-old Corpse),⁸ in which a vivid description was given of a battle between a crocodile and a lion. To a child's mind this was a gripping scene of great drama, so tense it left him staring wide-eyed and holding his breath. In Lin Shu's translation, the paragraph ends in the following words:

然獅之後爪已及鱷魚之頸，如人之脫手套，力拔而出之。少須，獅首俯鱷魚之身作異聲，而鱷魚亦側其齒，尚陷入獅股，獅腹爲鱷所咬亦幾裂。如是戰鬥，爲余生平所未睹者。

[Translated back into English] By this time the lion's rear paws had sunken into the crocodile's neck, and he yanked them out with all his might like a man pulling off his gloves. In a little while, the lion's head was lowered to the crocodile's body where a strange noise was heard; on the other hand, the crocodile turned its teeth sidewise, embedding them into the lion's thigh, and the lion's stomach was bitten by the reptile until it almost burst. Such a battle it was as I have never before witnessed in my life.

If the lion seized the crocodile by the neck it does not seem possible that his paws would be sunken as though mired in mud. So how do you account for the phrase "like a man pulling off his gloves"? This I could not fathom no matter how much I thought about it, nor could the grownups clarify matters for me. Furthermore, how did it all end, this vicious, life-and-death struggle? Which of the two emerged victorious, or was it a case of both perishing together? I was more concerned with the fate of the lion and the crocodile than with the romance between the hero and the heroine. But the book gave no clues, leaving me on tenterhooks, wondering whether the original story was equally messy in its narrative.⁹ When, later, I started reading English books in the original I would always first look up the novels that Lin Shu had translated. Still later, as my own English comprehension improved, I also began to hear opinion that was critical of the multifarious sins of omission and commission in Lin's translations. In time I stopped reading them altogether.

RECENTLY,¹⁰ I happened to be flipping the pages of one of the novels translated by Lin, and to my surprise it had not lost its attraction. Not only did I read the book through, I went on to read another, and still another, until I had re-read a major portion of the Lin translations. I found most of them to be worth re-reading, notwithstanding the omissions and errors encountered at every turn. When I tried reading a later—and doubtless more accurate—translation of the same book, it gave me the feeling that I would rather read the original. This is most intriguing. Of course, for one who is capable of reading the original, to check through a deficient translation

⁸The original title of this novel is *She*; it has been commonly mis-identified as *Montezuma's Daughter*, another of Sir Rider Haggard's novels translated by Lin Shu.

⁹The original description goes something like this: The lion "rips" open the crocodile's throat, like tearing

up a glove; the crocodile has seized the lion's trunk in its teeth, almost biting the body in half. In the end both the lion and the crocodile are killed—"this duel to the death".

¹⁰This article was written in March, 1963.



Madame Mantalini introduces Kate to Miss Knag: a scene from NICHOLAS NICKELBY, illustrated by 'Phiz'.

might be an amusing pastime. Some say that the more outrageous the translation the more fascinating it reads: when we check it against the original, we see how the translator lets his imagination run wild and how he uses guesswork to fill out the blanks in his comprehension, freely inventing and distorting, almost in the manner of a surrealist poet. But my interest in the Lin translations emphatically does not lie in any searching for boners to make fun of. Nor are the infidelities and "misrepresentations" in Lin's translations due entirely to linguistic deficiency on the part of his assistants. Let me cite a couple of examples.

In Chapter 17 of 滑稽外史 (*Nicholas Nickleby*), it is told that Miss Knag, chief of the young salesladies in a milliner's shop, having been referred to by a customer as "an old thing", was so enraged that she was fit to be tied. Returning to the work-room all dishevelled, she made a violent scene and vented all her anger and jealousy on young and pretty Kate, the while a chorus of her underlings echoed her outcries. In Lin Shu's translation there is the following passage:

那格……始笑而終哭，哭聲似帶謳歌。曰：“嗟夫！吾來十五年，樓中咸謂我如名花之鮮妍”一歌時，頓其左足，曰：“嗟夫天！”又頓其右足，曰：“嗟夫天！十五年中未被人輕賤。竟有騷狐奔我前，辱我，令我肝腸顛！”

[Translated back into English] Knag... began by laughing out loud and ended up crying in a sort of sing-song tone. "Alas!" she said. "I have been here fifteen years and everybody in this establishment respects me as a most honored flower"—so chanting, she stamped her left foot, exclaiming "Alas, my Heaven!" then, stamping her right foot, she exclaimed, "Alas, My Heaven! In all these fifteen years, I have not once been an object of contempt. To think that this saucy vixen should have got ahead of me and humiliated me, it is enough to rack my heart!"

This is *opera bouffe* in the best singing and acting tradition, enough to provoke a laugh from any reader. It sent us scurrying to the Dickens original (in Chapter 18), where we found something of a let-down. Let me imitate Lin Shu's literary style and essay our own translation, which would come out something like this:

那格女士先笑而後嚙啣，嚙然以泣，爲狀至辛楚動人。疾呼曰：“十五年來，吾爲此間樓上下增光匪少。邀天之祐——”言及此，力頓其左足，復力頓其右足，頓且言曰：“吾未嘗一日遭辱。今日胡意落此彗計中！厥計蓋詭鄙極矣。其行事實玷吾儕，知禮義者無勿耻之，吾厭之賤之，然而吾心傷矣！吾心滋傷矣！”

[Translated back into English] Miss Knag at first laughed and then cried, weeping bitterly in a most touching manner. She exclaimed vehemently: "For fifteen years I have added lustre to this establishment, upstairs and down. Thank Heaven—" as she said this she stamped her left foot and then stamped her right foot, stamping and saying, "I have not been humiliated one single day. How could I have expected to have fallen into the trap of this little creature! What low and despicable wiles, this kind of behavior that taints us all and is beneath the contempt of all persons of morality. I have nothing but disgust and contempt for it, and yet I feel so hurt! Oh, how I feel hurt!"

[For purposes of further comparison, we append here Dickens' original.—G.K.] . . . *Miss Knag laughed, and after that, cried. "For fifteen years," exclaimed Miss Knag, sobbing in a most affecting manner, "for fifteen years have I been a credit and ornament of this room and the one upstairs. Thank God," said Miss Knag, stamping first her right foot and then her left with remarkable energy, "I have never in all that time, till now, been exposed to the arts, the vile arts of a creature, who disgraces us with all her proceedings, and makes proper people blush for themselves. But I feel it, I do feel it, although I am disgusted.*

That line "crying in a sort of sing-song tone" was Lin Shu's own addition as he let his pen carry him away, and could not have been the result of any misunderstanding or distortion on the part of his assistant. Lin must have felt that Dickens' characterization was not laying it on thick enough, and so he added a heavy-handed brush-stroke of his own in order to heighten the risibility of the character and the situation. Critics and literary historians have agreed on Lin Shu's ability to communicate Dickens' comic style, but judging from this example Lin Shu did more than that; he often contributed his own comic and satiric flourishes by way of embellishing the Dickensian humor.

Here is another example from *Nicholas Nickelby*, to be found in Chapter 33 (Chapter 34 in the original):

司圭爾先生……顧老而夫曰：“此爲吾子小瓦克福……君但觀其肥碩，至於莫能容其衣。其肥乃日甚，至於衣縫裂而銅鈕斷。”乃按其子之首，處處以指戟其身，曰：“此肉也。”又戟之曰：“此亦肉，肉韌而堅。今吾試引其皮，乃附肉不能起。”方司圭爾引皮時，而小瓦克福已大哭，

摩其肌曰：“翁乃苦我！”司圭爾先生曰：“彼尚未飽。若飽食者，則力聚而氣張，雖有瓦屋，乃不能閱其身。……君試觀其淚中乃有牛羊之脂，由食足也。”

[Translated back into English] Mr. Squeers . . . addressed himself to Ralph, saying: “This is my son, little Wackford. . . . Look how fat he is, so fat that he cannot fit his clothes. He is getting fatter every day so that his seams will burst and his buttons fly.” Then he patted his son on the head and poked a finger here and there at the boy’s body, saying: “This is flesh.” Poking again, he said: “This also is flesh, firm and solid. Now let me pinch his skin, and you’ll see there’s so much flesh I cannot get it up.” As Squeers was pinching at the skin, Little Wackford started crying with all his might, rubbing the place and crying: “Papa, you are hurtin’ me!” Mr. Squeers remarked: “He hasn’t eaten his fill. After he’s fed he’ll be so strong and bloated you won’t be able to shut him in a brick house. . . . Just look at his tears with the cow’s oil and goat’s fat in them, that comes from being well fed.”

The passage is certainly vividly rendered. But all Dickens wrote was that Squeers “poked a finger here and there at the boy’s body”; that if he has had his lunch one couldn’t have him in the room and close the door; and that there’s *oiliness* in his tears. All that about “patting his son on the head”, “so strong and bloated”, and the “cow’s oil and goat’s fat that comes from being well fed” are simply Lin Shu gilding the lily. What’s more, little Wackford as Dickens described him only “uttered a sharp cry . . . and rubbed the place” without saying anything. The words “Papa, you are



Oliver asks for more: a scene from OLIVER TWIST, illustrated by George Cruikshank.

hurting me!" was a gratuitous interpolation on the part of the translator: the scene needed something to balance it, else it would be simply Squeers talking with nothing from the boy to add to the liveliness of the situation. In other words, Lin Shu must have felt that, as good as the original was, it could do with a bit of supplementary material here and some embellishing there to make it even more concrete, lively and colorful. This reminds us of his hero Ssuma Ch'ien, whose 史記 (*Historical Records*) contains many such examples of polishing and embroidering of past biographies.

Lin Shu wrote quite a few novels of his own, and with the express intention of adopting the literary techniques of the "Westerner Haggard" and "Mr. Dicken" [sic]. So in translation, whenever he encountered something in the original that to him did not ring true or showed a weakness, his creative hand would itch and he would take over the author's pen and put in a few extra strokes of his own. From the standpoint of translation, this is of course "misrepresentation". Even if the additions and emendations were all splendid, they would nevertheless have altered the original features; not to mention that his contributions were not invariably appropriate. We may grant the passage quoted immediately above as an example of successful revision, but the passage earlier cited about Miss Knag singing and crying would be questionable. To be sure, we have here a comic character, and there were elements of artifice in the violent scene she made. But supposing that she actually cried "with a sing-song tone", then she would obviously be play-acting and her tears would be seen as altogether faked, thus losing all credibility with her cohorts and her innocent adversary. Not only would we readers laugh at such a scene, but the characters in it also would laugh at its absurdity.

In Li Chih's 李贄 criticism of the Examination Scene in 琵琶記 (*The Story of the Lute*), he wrote: "Too dramatic! Not like!"¹¹ He also observed: "Granted that we have here a play, it must be life-like. It is the real-life happenings that sometimes appear like a play." Lin Shu's emendations erred on the side of over-exaggeration; perhaps they were inserted playfully to get a laugh, but they tended to injure the logic and the realism of the original—in short, a case of "Too dramatic! Not like!"

IT IS COMMON knowledge that in his translations Lin indulged in deletions and abridgement, but little attention seems to have been given to the fact that he was also in the habit of supplementing and adding to the original. Frequent instances of this are found in the products of the early stage in Lin's translation career, in which he worked with greater care and concentration, particularly in his translations of Dickens and Washington Irving. On occasion, he would supply his own metaphor to heighten the effect of the original. This sentence, for instance, in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow":

……而笨者讀不上口，先生則以夏楚助之，使力躍字溝而過。

[Translated back into English]. . . . The slower and more stupid who lagged behind in their lessons the schoolmaster would help along with the birch so that they might negotiate the word barriers by strenuous leaps.

¹¹The original reads 「太戲！不像！」 「李卓吾批評琵琶記」第八齣。

The original was reminiscent of Tu Fu's reference to "getting over difficult words" in his 漫成詩 ("Random Verse"); nothing like the novel and picturesque images suggested in the phrase "negotiating word barriers by strenuous leaps". On other occasions, he would paraphrase and add a few words of his own so that the meaning would be made clearer for the reader. For example, in *Oliver Twist*, chapter 2:

凡遇無名而死之兒，醫生則曰：“吾剖腹視之，其中殊無物。”外史氏曰：“兒之死，正以腹中無物耳！有物又焉能死？”

[Translated back into English] Whenever a child died without known cause, the doctor would say: "I have opened the body and found really nothing inside." Narrator's comment: "The child died precisely because he had nothing inside his belly! How could he have died if there were something?"

The "Narrator's comment" appeared in Dickens' original simply parenthetically with reference to the surgeon's having "found nothing inside", and may be rendered into literary Chinese as 此言殆信 (*which was very probable indeed*). As translation, this device of augmenting the original is not to be encouraged; but from the standpoint of rhetoric and writing, it may and often do have the effect of an eye-opener. Lin Shu repeatedly stated that foreign fiction "everywhere conformed to the canons of classical Chinese writing"; also that "in spite of the gap that exists between Europe and Asia, writers the world over think alike." He was not engaged in empty talk when he compared the works of Dickens and Saint-Pierre to such books as 左傳 (*The Chronicles of Tso*) and 史記.¹² According to his own lights, and with admirable restraint, he inserted in his translations such emendations as traditional Chinese critics of classical literature would call "twists and turns" 頓蕩, "ups and downs" 波瀾, "dotting the dragon's eye" 畫龍點睛 (underscoring a key point), or "adding hairs to the cheeks" 頰上添毫 (supplying details to make more lifelike)—all to the end that the translated works conformed even more to the "Canons of Classical Chinese Writing".¹³

A writer, or one who fancies himself a writer, can hardly help itching to write, as Lin Shu did, when engaged in literary translation. Based on his own standards of good writing, he would act as "best friend and severest critic" to the original author,

¹²Such comparisons are made in the Forewords and Afterwords that Lin contributed to a number of his translations. The most concrete example is found in the "Translator's Postscript" to 離恨天 (Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*), in which he referred to the passage in *Tso Chuan* describing Ch'u Wen Wang's expedition against Sui. Judging from his remarks in the Preface to 冰雪姻緣 (*Dombey and Son*), Lin's appreciation of the quality of writing in the original excelled some of his assistants'. He wrote: "Ch'ung-shu 冲叔 [courtesy name of Wei Yi 魏易, his collaborator on the Dickens translations] at first did not notice this and only came to be aware of it after hearing me repeatedly mention it."

¹³Lin Shu believed that he had considerable self-

control in this respect. In his 塊肉餘生述 (*David Copperfield*), Chapter 5, he added this note: "In foreign writing, events that occur subsequently are often told beforehand, thus startling the reader and causing him to wonder; this is where the foreign style of writing is different. In the books that I translated I would slightly re-cast the sequences so as to accommodate my readers. As for this particular passage, it is thus given in the original book and must not be shifted under any circumstance, and so I simply follow the original." Other notes found in various chapters in his translation of *Dombey and Son* read: "This is the way it is in the original, and I cannot but translate accordingly" and "The translator has no choice but to follow in the footsteps of the original".

解以何物而放厥勝而著者以少任氣人目為狂
 且以者自媿淫泆推迂佈名為知止而好名之
 心躍如者為形無而淫聲之心濼以為止欲為子
 孫歎至初尚姑務之而為其有存翰也華宜
 與唐書心以魚樹佳以富宜無江與柳何甘焉
 吳居老八白題明年七十

吳居老八白題明年七十



A page from LIN SHU'S CALLIGRAPHY, carrying his style-name and seal. Reproduced from Lin Ch'in-nan hsien-sheng hsueh hsing p'u chih (林琴南先生學行譜記), World Book-store, Taipei, 1965.

confident that he has the right, and even the duty, to do what is necessary to turn dross into gold. He, in effect, has made of translation an exercise in parasitic or fragmentary creation. The history of translation in any country, especially in its early stages, does not lack for practitioners to keep Lin Shu company.¹⁴ A person who has a correct understanding of the nature of translation and seriously pursues it, though he may be a writer himself, would exercise self-restraint and suppress any unseemly creative impulse. He may even regard with contempt Lin Shu's inability to withstand the temptation. Nevertheless, even as grown-ups with family burdens and social responsibilities would occasionally envy the youngsters' free and uninhibited behavior, I suspect that all translators sometimes catch themselves secretly wishing they could translate with the same bold abandon as did Lin Shu. . . .

WHEN IT COMES to "misrepresentations", the public has always adopted a lenient attitude toward Lin Shu but has taken his collaborators seriously to task. Lin Shu early on had divested himself of all responsibility by saying: "Not being conversant with any Western language, I could only narrate in writing [what was related to

¹⁴Cf. F. O. Matthiessen, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art*, discussing North, p. 79 et seq., and Florio, p. 121 et seq., as examples of free prose translations. Examples from poetry translation are even more numerous: the two classic translations of the Homeric

epics—that of A. Pope and V. Monti—are something in between translation and creative poetry-writing. The *Rubáiyát* of E. FitzGerald, popular in China at one time, may also be readily cited in this connection.

me orally]; if I had committed errors, it was all out of ignorance."¹⁵ Is this not tantamount to a person alibiing himself by pleading ignorance of the law?¹⁶ Unless I am entirely wrong in my foregoing analysis, the "misrepresentations" in Lin's translations cannot all be blamed on his collaborators. As a matter of fact, the more conspicuous elements in these "misrepresentations" were the result of Lin's wilful act. But it is precisely these "misrepresentations" that served as a kind of preservatives, more or less preventing Lin's translations from being toally relegated to the ash-heap. We need only look at the translation of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, done singlehandedly by Wei Yi 魏易,¹⁷ one of Lin's assistants, to realize that here are only "misrepresentations" of the "taking-out" kind found in the Lin-Wei co-translations and none of the "putting-in" kind also found in their collaborations. There are places in Lin's translations that are evidently not attributable to misapprehension on the part of his oral interpreters, but rather to the "free-wheeling pen" of the transcriber, who dashed off what he heard without any cerebation, thus missing the point of the original message.

In Chapter 14 of his *Nicholas Nickelby* (Chapter 15 in the original) we find the text of Fanny's celebrated letter. Lin Shu's transcription of its first sentences is as follows, minus the single and double circles with which he habitually underscored passages that inspired his appreciation:

先生足下：吾父命我以書與君。醫生言吾父股必中斷，腕不能書，故命我書之。

[Translated back into English]

Dear Sir,

My father commands me to write you this letter. The doctor says my father has broken a leg for sure, and he cannot write with his hand. So he bids me write it for him.

His adding the words "with his hand" here is veritably a case of superfluity—"drawing a snake and adding legs to it", as the Chinese saying goes! To those who read the original, Dickens' phraseology (. . . *the doctors considering it doubtful whether he will ever recuvver the use of his legs which prevents his holding a pen*) all but forecloses any possibility of the translator's adding the word "hand". We have a famous joke from the T'ang dynasty that makes the same point,¹⁸ had Lin

¹⁵In Preface to 西利亞郡主別傳 [an English work, original title unknown].

¹⁶The above quotation was from the 34th year of Kuang-hsu (1908). By the third year of the Republic (1914) Lin had greatly changed his tune. In his Postscript to 荒唐言 (a narrative version of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*), he stated: "As is generally known to the public, I have no knowledge of any Western language and make my translations on basis of oral narratives supplied by my friends. Where errors and misapprehensions are found, they are all the result of my carelessness and inattentiveness, letting my pen go unguided; I have only myself to blame for this, and it has nothing to do with my friends." Possibly his assistants had

protested against his previous utterances on this score, and he had found it necessary to issue the clarifying statement.

¹⁷Serialized in the magazine *Yung-yen* 庸言, beginning vol. 1, no. 13.

¹⁸In 太平廣記, *chuan* 250, in the entry under Li An-ch'i 李安期 (quoting from 朝野僉載), there is this exchange: The reviewing judge said: "The handwriting is somewhat weak." The candidate replied: "I fell off a horse yesterday and hurt my foot." An-ch'i said: "What has injuring a foot to do with not being able to write a good hand?"

Shu taken a little more time in his work he would have remembered this joke and perhaps made it something like 股必中斷，不能作書 (must have broken his legs and cannot write) or 足脛難復原，不復能執筆 (he will find it difficult to recover the use of his leg-bone, and can no longer hold a pen) and added his commendatory circles and appreciative notes to boot.¹⁹

To be sure, Lin's assistants could boast of no more than ordinary proficiency in foreign languages. There probably had not been adequate advance preparation before the one picked up a book and interpreted on sight and the other started transcribing instantaneously, without allowing any room for cogitation. "Haste makes waste": while the oral interpreter was not incapable of misreading and misinterpreting, neither was the transcriber ensured against the possibility of mishearing. Furthermore, his assistants apparently did no checking of Lin's written copy afterwards. Under these circumstances, it would have been a miracle if there had not been any mistakes.

Those who are severe with Lin's collaborators are apt to overlook one characteristic in the art of translation. When we study a literary work we oftentimes cannot, nor do we need to, understand perfectly each word and sentence in it; we could in fact write a decent review of the book without having to be so honest as to reveal our deficiencies. Translation, however, is a different matter. We cannot afford to gloss over a single word in the original, or evade a single troublesome passage. We may find a book easy and readable, but when it comes to translating it we will immediately encounter problems and difficulties, and they are ones that cannot be solved by simply looking up the dictionary. When you evade what you cannot solve you "misrepresent" through deletion; when you refuse to evade and force your own interpretation on it, you "misrepresent" through guesswork. Thus, translators are called "traitors", and they have no way of hiding their ignorance and lack of understanding. . . .

LIN SHU began his translating career when he was forty-four or -five, while in a boat on an excursion to Stone-Drum Mountain 石鼓山.²⁰ From that time on he translated incessantly until his death, having completed 170-odd works, most of which were

¹⁹As happened in his 大食故宮餘載 (*Alhambra*), where he added this note to "A Visit to Alhambra Palace": "This, again, is reminiscent of Su Tung-p'o's ode to the Yellow Crane Tower". In 撒克遜劫後英雄略 (*Ivanhoe*), Chapter 35, he noted: "This remark reminds one very much of the sayings of the Sung Confucianists"; and in 魔俠傳 (*Don Quixote*), Chapter 14, section 4, he noted: "This is precisely the same as in the [Chinese] line, 鐵騎三千隨婿去 (Three thousand bowmen followed her man to war.)"

²⁰In 花隨人聖齋摭憶, p. 238, the genesis of Lin Shu's first translation is told as follows: Mr. Wei Han 魏瀚, then head of the Marine Engineering Bureau at Ma-chiang 馬江 [in Fukien Province], was friendly with Lin Shu. One day he told Lin of the superiority

of French fiction and asked if Lin would not translate some of it. Lin declined, pleading lack of ability, but upon being repeatedly urged, finally said that he would try his hand at it if he had an invitation to excursion at Stone-Drum Mountain. To this proposition Wei assented. Among the party invited on this boat excursion he included the French-speaking Wang Tzu-jen 王子仁, and he insisted that Wang orally recount the story of *La Dame aux Camélias*. . . . Upon publication, the book created a sensation with the public, much to Lin Shu's delight. . . . This incident took place between the years Ping-Shen and Ting-Yu in the reign of Emperor Kuang-hsu (1896-1897)." Lin's translation came out in 1899. The above story is based on the research Ah Ying 阿英 in his article 關於茶花女遺事, in the October 1961 issue of 世界文學 (*World Literature*).

novels. The story had it that he also came close to translating the Christian Bible.²¹ On basis of my recent somewhat sketchy review, his close to thirty years' translation career evidently fell into two periods. The line of demarcation between the two periods was 離恨天 (*Paul et Virginie*), completed "in the Third Month of the Year K'uei Ch'ou", or the second year of the Republic [1913]. Up to this point, the majority of Lin's translations were brilliantly done; but from here on, his prowess went into a gradual decline—the works became dull and colorless, often leaving his readers bored. This was not due to a lack of outstanding works for Lin to translate; prominent among the books he translated during his latter period were Cervantes' *Don Quixote* 魔俠傳 and Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* 魚雁扶微, for instance. Unfortunately, under the weary pen of a post-sixty Lin Shu, they read veritably like these theological works satirized in *Lettres Persanes*, exercising on the reader an effect akin to that produced by a sleeping pill. Cervantes' writing, so full of life in its torrential flow, placed alongside Lin Shu's dead and deadening translation, formed a cruel contrast; so was the case when Lin Shu's stunted brush was pitted against Montesquieu's "magic pen".²²

Strangely enough, speaking of the works of Haggard, those that Lin translated in his later period such as 鐵匣頭顱 (*Eric Bright Eyes*) made tedious reading when compared with any of the Haggard opuses that he rendered in his prime. An old talented hand no longer had the desire or the strength to give his best, only falling back on the skills accumulated through the years to eke out his assignments. His early translations pictured for us a Lin Shu at the height of his powers and concentration, who was having himself a heap of fun, ready at any moment to show off his own writing technique. On the other hand, the impression one gained from his later translations was that of a tired old man, weary fingers mechanically pushing a blunted pen, striving to fulfil his quota of "a thousand words per hour". He no longer had any appreciation for the works that he translated, or took any interest in them, unless it was the interest of gaining his translator's fee.

We can tell from one thing the difference in attitudes that Lin held toward his tasks, before and after. Among his earlier translations a preponderant number began with a Foreword, his own or someone else's, or ended with an Afterword. Others contained "precedes", "exegeses", "translator's guidelines" or "translator's post-scripts". Still others carried "short commentaries" or poems inscribed by the translator or his friends. Interspersed in the translated text we frequently find his own annotations or critical comments. All these recorded his appreciation or explication of the original work, its theme and its art. With all his pedantic and juvenile reactions, what emerged was an attitude at once serious and enthusiastic. That which Lin Shu translated had dwelt in his mind and been immersed in his emotions. He had so closely identified with the works he was translating that at times he was

²¹ According to 辰子說林, p. 7: "A certain missionary society in Shanghai had the idea of commissioning Lin Ch'in-nan to make a translation of the Bible; a fee of twenty thousand dollars was discussed, but agreement was not reached."

²² Lin's words in his preface to 魚雁扶微 (*Lettres Persanes*), in 東方雜誌 (*The Far East Miscellany*), vol. 12, no. 9.

moved to arrest his flying brush and take a few moments off to wipe away his tears.²³

In his later translations these frills and addenda were greatly curtailed. Gone without a trace were his verses; and the "Translator's Prefaces" such as graced the opening pages of 孝友鏡 (a Belgian work, original title unknown). Commentaries such as the series of interjections—"What a laugh!" "What a big laugh!" and "Enough to make you laugh!" etc.—found in Chapter 2 of 烟火馬 (*Swallow*, by H. R. Haggard) also became extremely rare. Even such a work as 金臺春夢錄 (co-authored by a French writer and a Russian, original title unknown), which had Peking as its background and dealt with China's own flora and fauna, failed to stimulate him into expressing his sentiments. He no longer treated the works he translated with his wonted intimacy and seriousness; his whole attitude had become casual, one might even say cold and indifferent. If we recognized the translator's work as "literary romance", we might say that Lin Shu's later translations had, to borrow his own words, skidded into 冰雪姻緣—"a romance of ice and snow".

²³Commentary in 冰雪姻緣 (*Dombey and Son*), translation I had already wept three times!" Chapter 59: "By the time I reached this point in my

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The voluminous output of the great translator Lin Shu included a good deal of modish trash. But the people who read his elegant classical renderings of Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle were not in search of merely entertainment. They were in conscious pursuit of the Occident, and were constantly reminded in the prefaces to these translations of the morals they might be expected to draw from them. In introducing *Allan Quatermain* 斐洲烟水愁城錄 Lin Shu lectures his readers on the white man's love of adventure and innovation; and in his preface to *People of the Mist* 霧中人 he reflects that if an Englishman would endure the sufferings and hardships that its hero underwent for the sake of a bag of rubies, the outlook for China with her vast resources of gold, silver, silk, and tea was very poor indeed.

—DAVID HAWKES

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