

Is She or Isn't She? Two Tales of Henry James in French Translation

Some works pass through the translation process with relative ease, while others seem to lose what makes up their liveliness.¹ There are many reasons for this fact, some arising from the work itself. A work that depends on the reader's understanding of subtle distinctions in the source language and culture will be difficult to translate, while other works survive and prosper in other languages. Another important factor, of course, is the translator. Two translators may produce texts which give entirely different impressions, even when both follow the source text closely. Differences in the source text are probably to a large extent responsible for the different degrees of success in French translations of two novellas of Henry James, *The Siege of London* and *The Turn of the Screw*. Of these two works — a comedy of manners and a ghost story — the first is more dependent than the second on every decision made by the translator. A comparison of two French versions of *The Siege of London* shows that the author's stance and thus the meaning of the work are considerably changed as a result of apparently small differences in these decisions. On the other hand, a number of translations of *The Turn of the Screw*, despite their differences, have succeeded in transmitting the spirit of the work and in reaching a large public.

The balance between the translator's two loyalties — the work with its language and culture, and the translator's own culture and language — is often difficult. When the author's explicit intention is to subvert certain aspects of the target culture, the translator is placed in an even more delicate position. In a much-quoted essay first published in 1813, Friedrich Schleiermacher states that there are only two roads open to the translator: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him: or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and leads the author to him" (Schleiermacher 1977: 75). The French tradition has

1 I am indebted to Fabienne Durand-Bogaert, of the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, for information on French translations of James. A presentation on *The Siege of London*, which formed the beginning of this article, was presented in January 1997 at Dr. Durand-Bogaert's seminar on literary translation, and members of the seminar made many valuable suggestions.

usually favoured the second way, that of adapting the author to the rules of French taste. This approach was criticized by German translation theorists. A. W. Schlegel has the Frenchman in a dialogue say: "We either do not translate at all or else we translate according to our own taste. [...] We look on a foreign author as a stranger in our company, who has to dress and behave according to our customs, if he desires to please." To this the German replies, "How narrow-minded of you to be pleased only by what is native" (From "Der Wettstreit der Sprachen" (1798), quoted in Lefevere 1977: 50).

In both the tales considered here, the principal character is a woman about whom the reader must make a judgement: Is she or isn't she? In *The Siege of London*, the crucial question is whether Mrs Nancy Headway is respectable; in *The Turn of the Screw*, either the governess is sane and has seen real ghosts, or else she is insane and imagines them. While the definition of the term "respectable" calls on a knowledge of the world outside the literary work, the sanity or insanity of the governess is as isolated from the rest of the world as is the country house where the action takes place. In the latter case the translator's loyalties — and the reader's willingness to accept another point of view — will not be put to the test.

The Siege of London: from social comedy to moral tragedy

The advantages and dangers of the two contrasted approaches — bringing the reader to the author, or bringing the author to the reader — can be seen in two French versions of *The Siege of London*, the original text of which was first published in two parts in *Cornford Magazine* in 1883.² In this lesser-known work the author is, according to Leon Edel, "writing at the top of his form and quite in the comic tradition of Molière" (James 1963: 7). It is one of James's international tales, which Maqbool Aziz calls "studies in cultural anthropology, conducted in the mode of fiction" (Aziz 1993: 208).

The first of the two translations, by Auguste Monod, was approved by James himself and appeared in the *Mercur de France* in 1912 under the title *La Conquête de Londres*. In fact however, James did not really want the story translated. He writes to Monod on 1 November 1905:

Let me add that I had never been eager to be translated, holding that one's form and style are a part of one's value; that essence and thereby that value is terribly likely to evaporate in the process. And I have had a very few disconcerting adventures in French with all my poor *real* little notes replaced by the most shameless *clichés* and failures to render. (James 1969: 97)

He goes even further on 17 December 1905: "But evidently I am in the strange predicament of defying the genius of the French language *altogether*, I who adore that genius." He considers that *The Turn of the Screw* would be easier to translate, since it is a "fantaisie absolue dans le genre recherche du frisson." However, it would probably not interest the French public: "Je ne remarque pourtant chez le lecteur français aucun goût du conte de revenants, qui ne lui paraît que ridicule et enfantin" (106). Despite his reservations about Monod's undertaking, however, James continued to correspond with him, explaining various points of meaning raised by Monod and advising him on how to render particular expressions.

The other translation of *The Siege of London* to be considered here is by Jean Pavans; it was published in 1992 as *Le Siège de Londres*, in volume 2 of Pavans's translation of the works of James. This study will concentrate particularly on Monod's version, but will quote the more recent one by Pavans for comparison.³

James wrote *The Siege of London* after seeing Émile Augier's play *L'Aventurière*, and he was influenced also by another play on the same theme, *Le Demi-monde* by Alexandre Dumas fils. In both plays, an adventuress who attempts to marry an upper-class man is foiled by the machinations of friends of the man, which match her own in deviousness. James's story is, in his words, a "little picture of an innocent adventuress and [a] vague *rappel* of the situation in Dumas's *Demi-Monde* — the situation of a man of honour who has to testify to the antecedents of a woman he has known in the past" (James 1987: 72). The "vague *rappel*" of the French theatre that James mentions is in part quite explicit, for in the opening scene of the novella, the characters are attending a performance of "that antiquated play" *L'Aventurière*, and one of them, Rupert Waterville, has seen *Le Demi-monde* a few nights earlier. Although in the case of both plays Waterville considers that the ladies deserved their fate, "he wished it might have been brought about by a little less lying on the part of the representatives of honor" (29). James's story is an attempt to show how the same subject could be handled with more delicacy (See Edel 1985: 280-281).

In the story, James Littlemore, an American living in Europe, and Rupert Waterville, an American diplomat posted in London, are in Paris at the Comédie Française when they meet by chance Nancy Headway, an American woman whom Littlemore knew years ago in San Diego. Though still in her thirties and very pretty, Mrs Headway has been through many

marriages and divorces and is now a rich widow since the death of her latest husband. She wishes to enter English society by marrying a baronet, Sir Arthur Demesne. Sir Arthur's mother, Lady Demesne, believes that Mrs Headway is not respectable, and thus opposes the marriage. Back in England, she tries to obtain confirmation of this first from Waterville and then from Littlemore, but succeeds only in recruiting to her cause Mrs Dolphin, Littlemore's sister. Although both men are of the opinion that Mrs Headway's past life and present manners leave something to be desired, neither is willing to betray her by saying so to Lady Demesne. Finally Sir Arthur asks for Mrs Headway's hand and in fact marries her secretly, at which point, since it is too late to change the outcome, Littlemore finally tells Lady Demesne that in his opinion, Mrs Headway is not respectable.

Much of the comedy as well as many difficulties for the translator come from the contrast in language used by the characters, and particularly from the fact that Nancy Headway speaks a marked English compared to the others. The English characters and the Americans Littlemore and Waterville all speak more or less the same cultured English, and almost always in the same register, while Nancy Headway differs in several respects. We do not know much about her pronunciation, aside from the fact that she sometimes speaks too loudly; the distinctiveness of her speech comes from grammar, vocabulary and register. She uses non-standard grammatical forms, of which the most striking is "ain't," which she uses this word not only as a contraction for "am not," which was acceptable in English at an earlier time, but also with second- and third-person subjects, as is even today frequently the case in non-standard English: "I may as well be frank, for I ain't at all ashamed" (34). "Ain't you in society yourself?" (34). "That ain't a description!" (40). The use of "ain't" is especially striking when it occurs twice in one sentence: "Ask Arthur Demesne if I ain't delicate — ask George Littlemore if I ain't" (79). The contrast between her claim to delicacy and the dialectal form evokes a smile. Both translators render this sentence, as well as the others quoted above, in standard French: "Demandez à Arthur Demesne si je n'ai pas de délicatesse... et à George Littlemore" (James 1912: 563). "Demandez à Aurthur Demesne si je ne suis pas délicate... demandez à Littlemore si je ne le suis pas" (James 1992: 386).

She also uses colloquial words and expressions and regional terms. At her first appearance, when she exclaims, "Well, I declare!" (18), it is obvious that she is different from the other characters. She often uses the adjective "old," sometimes referring to age and sometimes not; she writes to Littlemore that her engagement to Sir Arthur will be announced "as soon as their stupid old Parliament rises" (107). Both translators omit the "old," writing "ce stupide Parlement" (Monod, James 1912: 589) and "leur stupide Parlement" (Pavans, James 1992: 403), since the adjective "old" would make no sense if translated

3 As it happened, I read Monod's translation before reading James's complete text. My surprise on reading the original story, so different from the translation despite Monod's close following of the original, was the starting point for this article.

literally. In these and in other passages, she expresses herself in correct French; her speech is smoothed out and made more elegant. In Monod's translation especially there seems to be a definite decision to give the character a more elevated manner. Speaking of Lady Demesne, she says: "Her father used to be a banker, but he did something or other for the government" (53). Monod writes: "Son père, autrefois banquier, rendit je ne sais quel service au gouvernement" (James 1912: 339), while Pavans has her speak in less formal language: "Son père était banquier, mais il a fait quelque chose pour le gouvernement" (James 1992: 371). Following the structure of the original sentence also retains the idea that the father's status as something other than a banker is a result of his service to the government.

In Monod's version, the character appears to be convinced of her faults and ready to correct them. In one scene she sends Sir Arthur away, for she and Littlemore "are going to talk American; you wouldn't understand us!" After Sir Arthur leaves, she remarks to Littlemore: "He speaks in the English style" (31). Monod translates: "Il parle un anglais très pur" (James 1912: 319), while Pavans follows the English wording: "Il parle dans le style anglais" (James 1992: 358). The expression chosen by Monod, *un anglais très pur*, seems to imply that there is on the one hand a pure English, and on the other hand an impure way of speaking that is not real English. However, although there are certainly class differences in English speech, this character is not easily intimidated, and does not suffer feelings of inferiority. Nancy is not necessarily paying a compliment to Sir Arthur; by referring to his English style of speaking she is being slightly ironic, and supposing that he would be unable to understand the culture and experience of Americans as well as their language.⁴

When Nancy is finally accepted into English society, people find her American expressions amusing: "I can't open my mouth but they burst into fits" (90). On realizing the value of her quaint expressions, she astutely drops the effort to blend in. "When she found out what was expected of her, she

undertook to supply the article in abundance; and the poor woman really worked hard at her Americanisms" (90). The reader of either translation may have some difficulty in understanding exactly what is meant by this passage. However, whereas Pavans reduces her speech to the norm only where it is difficult to do otherwise, Monod displays a positive will to "correct" her faults of language and manners.

While showing Nancy's charm as well as her social ambitions and her faults, James displays a similar evenhandedness towards her adversaries. Her chief enemy, Lady Demesne, is not of aristocratic origin. As Nancy points out, she was a banker's daughter who married a baronet; and it is clear that her fortune was an important factor in the marriage. Lady Demesne's ally Mrs Dolphin, Littlemore's sister, is of American origin but has also married into upper-class English society. The two women join forces to try to prevent the dubious Mrs Headway from doing what they themselves have done. As James observes, "Mrs Dolphin wished the class to which she belonged should close ranks and carry its standard high" (98-99).

For James, Sir Arthur Demesne has no social faults even if his intellectual capacity is not exactly outstanding. His "great quality" is his "smooth and rounded, his blooming, lily-like exemption from social flaws" (92). Monod changes this slightly comic quality into moral purity: "sa tranquille, sa douce, sa virginal, sa liliale candeur dont rien au monde n'avait pu ternir la pureté" (James 1912: 575). For Pavans, the quality is "la douce et ronde absence en lui, comme sur un lys immaculé, de toute tache sociale" (James 1992: 394).

All the changes we have seen in Monod's translation — the elimination of Nancy Headway's colloquial and non-standard speech, of her occasionally disrespectful attitude, and of narrative irony towards the English upper-class characters — are samples, among many others, of the translator's displacement of the reasons for which she is not acceptable. These reasons are made even more explicit where, speaking to Waterville, she expresses her indignation at her social failure in New York: "Not good enough for New York! What do you say to that?" (56). Monod stresses sexual conduct, having her exclaim, with italics added by the translator himself: "*Pas assez vertueuse pour New York!*" (James 1912: 343). In Pavans, she says, "*Pas assez bien pour New York!*" (James 1992: 373). In the original English text, social class and manners are at least as important as personal conduct. Nancy Headway does not belong to

⁴ Monod makes Nancy more respectful of European culture and convinced of her own inferiority. One effect of this change may have been to make her more acceptable to European readers.

James had been criticized on both sides of the Atlantic, for Americans and English readers were equally susceptible to wounded vanity. In a study of Hawthorne, James had enumerated things lacking in the United States at the time of Hawthorne, including "no literature, no novels, no museums." He summarized the polemic aroused by these remarks as "a very big tempest in a very small teapot, the clucking of a brood of prairie hens" (Edel 1985: 247-248). On the other hand, when some readers of the story *An International Episode* accused the author of caricaturing British nobility, James remarked: "It is an entirely new sensation for them (the people here) to be (at all delicately) ironized or satirized, from the American point of view, and they don't at all relish it" (Edel 1985: 220).

The value that James attributes to being "smooth" and "round" can be seen in his discussion of Alexandre Dumas fils, who according to him has a "very small" but "very perfect" mind. "The reader will find it [*Le Demi-monde*] all form, compactness, roundness, smoothness, polish, art; but he will not find in it, without a rare amount of good will, a single word that echoes in the soul, that provokes the shadow of a reverie" (James 1957: 117-118).

the right group: "she was in no sort of society; she had only a local reputation" (24). Her ambitions to climb the social ladder are irritating to Littlemore: "Littlemore said to Waterville that it was stupid of her to wish to scale the heights; she ought to know how much more she was in her place below" (42).

In the story *Pandora*, James is even more explicit on the matter. The German Count Vogelstein asks an American lady about the social position of the young girl Pandora. Mrs Dangerfield replies: "Oh, social position! [...] Do you think everyone in the world has a social position? You can't have a social position in Utica, any more than you can have an opera-box. Pandora hasn't got any; where would she have found it?" (James 1963: 374). Like Pandora, Nancy Headway has no social position in the United States, as is confirmed by the last sentence of the story: "A little later [Littlemore] heard from New York that people were beginning to ask who in the world was Mrs Headway" (110). These people are not scandalized on moral grounds; for them, Nancy Headway simply does not exist.

James suggests that in the old days in San Diego, Littlemore and Nancy were friends, not lovers: "He had not been in love with her — there never was anything of that sort between them" (24). Monod's rendering, in a discreet — indeed Jamesian — manner and without saying anything definite, seems to imply on the contrary that they had sexual relations without love: "Il n'avait pas été amoureux d'elle; aucune sentimentalité entre eux" (James 1912: 314). Pavans translates more literally: "Il n'avait jamais été amoureux d'elle — il n'y avait rien eu de la sorte entre eux" (James 1992: 354). No longer James's innocent adventuress in Monod's translation, Nancy has become a cold, calculating woman from whom society must be protected.

An examination of the scene where Lady Demesne tries to draw information from Rupert Waterville, reveals James's even-handedly ironic treatment of Mrs Headway and of members of the society she wishes to enter. Waterville is alone in the library, admiring book bindings, when Lady Demesne comes in. The conversation begins with a misunderstanding caused by an ambiguous word: "Are you looking at our books? I'm afraid they're rather dull." Waterville replies, "Dull? Why, they're as bright as the day they were bound" (82). Lady Demesne does not read much and considers the contents of the books to be boring, whereas Waterville thinks only of the handsome bindings. It would perhaps have been difficult for a translator to keep the ambiguity of the adjective "dull" (though the word "terne" has been suggested). By having Lady Demesne say, "Je crains qu'ils ne soient un peu ternis" (James 1912: 565), Monod simply eliminates the misunderstanding, as well as the slightly comic moment and the suggestion that the two interlocutors do not understand each other.

A view from the window of the library shows that "the trees had an air

of conscious importance, as if nature herself had been bribed somehow to take the side of country families" (82). Monod omits the idea of bribery: "les arbres semblaient pénétrés de leur importance comme si la nature elle-même avait été entraînée à faire cause commune avec la noblesse rurale" (565). Thus a subtle reminder that Lady Demesne owes her position to her father's money is eliminated.

Lady Demesne lacks spontaneity, and conducts herself with a rather conventional simplicity. "You might have pitied her, if you had seen that she lived in constant unrelaxed communion with certain rigid ideals" (82). Monod makes a remarkable change, introducing a negative into the second clause of the sentence: "On aurait, peut-être, eu pitié d'elle, si on n'avait su qu'elle vivait l'esprit tendu continuellement vers un idéal très austère" (James 1912: 565-66). This is not a slip on the part of the translator, for he has made other more subtle changes in the same clause. According to James, Lady Demesne deserves pity because of her rigidity, perhaps even her obsession with an artificial ideal. The word *austère* chosen by Monod is much more favourable; she deserves not pity but admiration, and thus the verb in the dependent clause must be negative. Oddly enough, Pavans retains the rigidity of the ideals, but like Monod he changes the second clause to the negative: "On aurait pu la plaindre, si on n'avait pas senti qu'elle se trouvait sans relâche en communion avec des idéaux rigides" (James 1992: 388). The one change without the other makes the meaning of the sentence difficult to understand.

Waterville finds himself in an awkward position, since he sympathizes with Lady Demesne but at the same time wants to protect Nancy Headway: "[Lady Demesne] made him believe in the reality of her grievance, and he saw the gulf that divided her from a pushing little woman who had lived with Western editors" (86). Again, Monod makes two significant changes: "elle lui faisait toucher la réalité de ses griefs et il vit quel abîme la séparait de l'intrigante petite femme qui avait vécu avec des directeurs de journaux en Californie" (James 1912: 570). While James maintains some doubt about whether Lady Demesne's grievance is real (she "made him believe" in its reality), Monod eliminates the doubt (she made him "toucher la réalité"); and the frankly pushing Nancy Headway becomes "intrigante," thus by implication dishonest. The translation by Pavans keeps the author's neutral stance: Lady Demesne "lui faisait croire à la réalité de son grief," and Nancy is "une petite femme entreprenante" (James 1992: 390).

When Lady Demesne complains that men have no pity, Waterville replies that her son should have pity on her. She exclaims: "Oh, but he does! And with a majesty that was more striking even than her logic, Lady Demesne moved towards the door" (88). Her majesty is *even* more striking than her (bad) logic. Both translators omit the adverb, and thus the irony; for both of them she leaves "avec une majesté plus frappante que sa logique" (James 1912:

571, James 1992: 391).

To summarize this scene, James shows a woman possessing a kind of nobility, although she is rigid and obsessed by duties she has imposed on herself; while sympathizing with her, the author maintains a certain distance, and reminds us that she is not quite what she seems. For Monod on the other hand, Lady Demesne is completely noble; the reader both pities and admires her.⁶ Pavans, in his introduction to the story, states: "Une fois encore James absout, au fond, celle que tout accuse, prend le parti d'une femme en face des conventions" (James 1992: 18). This remark could not be made about Monod's version of the story, in which the conflict between Lady Demesne and Nancy Headway pits a noble and tragic character against a charming but immoral woman.⁷

It is not only with regard to Lady Demesne that Monod reduces James's irony considerably. The tone is set in the very first sentence of the story: "That solemn piece of upholstery, the curtain of the Comédie Française, had fallen upon the first act of the piece" (13). Monod eliminates the contrast between the adjective "solemn" and the prosaic noun "upholstery," and with it the contrast between pretension and reality: "Le rideau de la Comédie-Française venait de tomber solennellement sur le premier acte" (303). The shift in tone continues throughout the story, which is changed from a social comedy with a nuance of tragedy to a tragedy with a slight comic touch. The meeting of two civilizations is reduced, in part unavoidably (the translation of colloquial and dialectal expressions being particularly difficult), and in part by a decision, no doubt conscious, on the part of the translator. Nancy's frankness, openness and energy, like her vulgarity, are reduced; this increases

6 Monod also shows Mrs Dolphin in a more favourable light than she appears in the original. He questioned James about her remark concerning the mixing of classes in England: "It's like the decadence of the Roman Empire." James replies that this remark is meant to characterize the person; it is the sort of thing "qu'elle est assez naïvement sujette à dire et que neuf Américains sur dix, jugeant la société européenne toujours à l'aide de leurs *cheap* souvenirs littéraires, trouveraient d'un bon effet" (James 1969: 105-106). Although James gave Monod permission to omit the remark if it seemed ridiculous, the translator did keep it: "Cela rappelle la décadence de l'Empire Romain" (James 1912: 581).

7 The changes made by Monod are by no means the result of insensitivity to the style and intentions of the author. At times he renders the meaning better than does Pavans, who occasionally appears to misunderstand the text. Nancy Headway arranges a supposedly chance meeting in which she wishes Littlemore to speak to Sir Arthur in her favour. Later she writes to Littlemore: "I was bound you should speak!" (p. 107). Monod translates the meaning correctly: "je tenais à ce que vous, vous parliez" (p. 589), while Pavans reverses it: "j'étais tenue de vous faire parler" (p. 401). He has Nancy speak of an obligation, rather than of her own strong will as in the original.

the part played by her past sexual conduct. In addition, as we have seen, Monod makes changes — again, some subtle, some striking — which give more weight to this element.

Antoine Berman points out the dangers of the two approaches to translation described by Schleiermacher. "If the translator chooses the author, the work, and the foreign language as exclusive masters, aiming to impose them on his own cultural realm in their pure foreign form, he runs the risk of appearing to be a foreigner, a traitor in the eyes of his kin" (Berman 1992: 3). Furthermore, the attempt may fail to produce anything intelligible. On the other hand, a translator who makes a conventional adaptation aimed at bringing the author to the reader will satisfy the least demanding part of the public, but "will have irrevocably betrayed the foreign work as well as, of course, the very essence of translation" (4). Although in general Monod follows the text of James closely, he nevertheless follows Schleiermacher's second way, that of bringing the author to the reader. In doing so he produces a work of high literary quality and of admirable consistency.⁸ Pavans on the other hand, translating a writer now recognized as a classic one, chooses to bring the reader to the author; he places a high value on a rather literal faithfulness to James's words and sentences. In a note to his translation of the *Retour à Florence*, he says that "l'originalité et la respiration" of James's style come from the structure of the sentences. "Par conséquent je me suis avant tout attaché à suivre les constructions grammaticales du texte original, et j'ai voulu m'interdire les paraphrases qui sous prétexte de clarifier le récit d'en faire du français, le tuent"⁹ (James 1983: 19).

The question may be asked to what extent Monod's translation of this story, in spite of its unquestionable qualities, betrays the work. We have seen how he displaces the issue from social to moral (specifically sexual) respectability, in the manner of Dumas and Augier. In the case of Dumas in particular, sexual politics are paramount, for the man who reveals the woman's past is her former lover. The revelation destroys the reputation of the woman

8 James protested in at least one case about Monod's attempts to eliminate expressions that would not sound natural in French: "Je ne vois pas bien (après enquête) votre objection à la partie de la phrase (*antiquated play*, etc.) que vous me citez, puisque tout dans une oeuvre étrangère a sa valeur de *ton étranger*" (*Letters*, 105). Monod defers to the author, and mentions the "pièce surannée." (James 1912: 303)

9 James was satisfied by the final result of Monod's work; on 28 November 1912, he writes: "I can frankly assure you that the receipt of the *Mercur de France* [...] fairly turned the grey gloom I speak of into a rosy flush" (James 1969: 110).

The debate between the two positions continues. In a "Note sur la traduction," John Lee in answer to this remark accuses Pavans of a "littéralité mécanique," and gives examples of "la façon dont Pavans, sous prétexte de rarefier le français et d'en faire du James, les tue l'un et l'autre" (James 1984: 308).

but does not harm that of the man. However, it would be misleading to concentrate exclusively on the sexual behavior of the adventurers. In the case both of Dumas and of Augier, a double standard applies not only to men and women, but also to rich and poor. In *Le Demi-monde* and *L'Aventurière*, the man is from an upper-class family, while the woman's origins are modest. Augier's heroine is Spanish, and claims to be of noble birth. Much of the comedy comes from her attempts to control her brother, who, in playing the role of a proud *hidalgo* jealously guarding the honor of his sister, all too often lets slip vulgar expressions and revealing remarks. In short, though both plays present a moral issue on the surface, a closer look shows that social position and wealth are also of the utmost importance. The women are undesirable and threatening not only because of their unchastity but equally because of their lowly origins. Paradoxically, Monod's shift from social to sexual matters, of which we have seen many instances, may conceal a different sort of preoccupation; while sexuality may be hinted at, questioning the social hierarchy is taboo.

James turns the question of respectability around against the very people who are judging Nancy Headway. In his translation, Monod like Dumas and Augier does a great deal to obscure the fact that the class possessing social standing is not morally superior to the adventurers. He is far more subtle than are Dumas and Augier (no doubt because striking effects are necessary in the theatre); he realizes that upper-class status is not enough to assure the sympathy of the reader. He therefore changes the balance between the opposing sides, tipping it in favor of the ruling class. In leading the author to the reader, he brings James much closer to the works that he was criticizing in his story, and to that extent betrays him by denying the very motivation for the creation of his novel.¹⁰

The Turn of the Screw: an easier ambiguity

Monod chose not to follow James's advice to translate *The Turn of the Screw*. But James was correct in thinking that this novella, first published in serial form in 1897, was much better able to pass through the language barrier. Perhaps an early translation into French would have gained the success that

10 In this study I have looked at particular examples of changes, and may risk being accused of atomization of the work, of losing sight of the forest for the trees. However, to the examples given here one could add many others, all going in the same direction and producing a definite cumulative effect. Finally, one has only to consider the overall impression produced by the original and that produced by the translation (see note 3). This is a case where the reader feels not only that, as Dorothy Kenny puts it, "the translation is somehow tamer than the original" (Kenny 1998: 520), but that the main point of the story is changed.

this widely-read work has attained over the years, first in English and later in other languages. Since James gave his advice to Monod, the *Turn* has been translated into many languages. French translators include Maurice Le Corbeiller, whose version has been through many editions since 1929, Denise Van Moppès, and three translators whose texts were published in the 1990s: Monique Nemer, Janine Lévy and Jean Pavans.¹¹ We will concentrate on these three recent French versions, all of which have appeared in paperback editions for a wide public.

In *The Turn of the Screw* as in *The Siege of London* — and indeed generally in the work of James — the reader and thus the translator must deal with uncertainty, suggestion and ambiguity. However, the ambiguity is of a different nature in the different works. In the *Siege*, the question for the reader is what to make of Mrs Headway, how to judge her socially and morally; this judgement is dependent on the judgement one makes of upper-class society as a whole. In the *Turn*, the uncertainty concerns not the reader's moral sympathies and socio-political leanings, but rather how to understand the governess's narration. Are the ghosts that hover about the country mansion real? If so, what are their intentions? Do the children Miles and Flora see them? Or are they the product of the overheated imagination of the governess? If the ghosts are real, then the governess is fighting against the forces of evil; if they are not real, then she herself is a force of darkness and a mortal danger to the children, and it is she who in the final scene is responsible for the death of Miles.¹²

In the years since the publication of the story, critics have advanced numerous readings, most of which come down to either the reality of the ghosts or the insanity of the governess.¹³ Leon Edel suggests that readers

11 Pavans's bilingual edition, with the English text and the French translation on facing pages has the advantage of allowing readers with knowledge of English to have easy access to the original text and to the translation. On the other hand it calls attention to the translator's choices, with which readers may quibble on occasion.

12 In some of his remarks, James appears to suppose the ghosts real; the question is what their evil intentions are. He had to give the impression of their being "capable, as the phrase is, of everything — that is of exerting, in respect to the children, the very worst action small victims so conditioned might be conceived as subject to." The solution is to enlist the participation of the reader: "Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough [...] and his own experience, his own imagination [...] will supply him quite sufficiently with the particulars" (From the New York Preface, James 1966: 122-123).

13 In his critical edition published in 1966, Robert Kimbrough gives samples of the rich variety of critical interpretations up to that time (James 1966: 169-273).

coming fresh to the *Turn* should ignore all interpretations and let themselves be captured by the story itself and its multiple possibilities:

All is mystery and ambiguity. Every scene can be interpreted in several ways; only the governess feels "certitude" and the reader, uncontaminated by the obsessed exegetes, can capture the horror and ghostliness, and discover in the story all the evil he is capable of feeling. James has left him the widest margin. (Introduction, James 1964: 8)

Some readers will prefer to believe in ghosts which may or may not possess the souls of the children, while others find a "deeper dimension of horror," as Edel puts it (9), in the story of innocent children entrusted to a madwoman. A successful translation will keep open all these possibilities.

In an introductory chapter, a group of people spending Christmas in an English country house entertain themselves by telling ghost stories, and are promised an extraordinary one contained in an old manuscript written by the principal character herself. The narrator in this introductory chapter sets the scene: a young woman, the daughter of a country clergyman, takes her first job as a governess for two young children in the country mansion Bly. She has full responsibility and is instructed not to disturb her employer, the children's uncle, who lives in London. On the basis of her account, which follows the introduction, the reader of the story must form some judgement of her dependability as a witness to the events. One is meant, according to James, to accept "her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities — by which I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter" (James 1966: 120-121). The reader has been prepared to view her favourably, for the person to whom she confided her story had the highest opinion of her. On the other hand, many passages may be read as showing that she is unbalanced.

In some respects the *Turn* is harder to translate than the *Siege*, particularly because of the many long, complex sentences whose meaning is not immediately clear. At one point the governess mentions the presence of certain eighteenth-century novels in the library at the house where she is employed:

There was a roomful of old books at Bly — last-century fiction some of it, which, to the extent of a distinctly deprecated renown, but never so much as that of a stray specimen, had reached the sequestered home and appealed to the unavowed curiosity of my youth. (70)

The fact that the verb "to appeal" has the same form in the past and in the past participle makes for a possible misunderstanding of the sentence. Grammatically, "appealed" could mean here either "had (at that time)

appealed," or "(now) appealed"; but for the meaning, the first is correct: the reputation of the books, but not the books themselves, had reached the home of her youth, and had appealed to her youthful curiosity. Two of the translators are led astray by the verb and the meanders of the sentence. According to Lévy:

Il y avait à Bly une pièce remplie de livres, parmi lesquels quelques romans du siècle dernier dont, malgré leur réputation incontestablement fâcheuse, quelques exemplaires isolés avaient atteint cette maison retirée et ne manquaient pas d'attirer la curiosité inavouée de ma jeunesse. (James 1995: 72-73)

In this interpretation, a few of these novels, despite their bad reputation, had found their way into the library at Bly and there attracted the attention of the governess. Paving as well writes:

Il y avait à Bly une pièce pleine de vieux livres — dont certains romans du siècle passé qui, sous l'effet d'une nette réprobation n'interdisant cependant pas la présence d'un exemplaire égaré, avaient abouti dans cette maison isolée, et avaient attiré la curiosité inavouée de ma jeunesse. (James 1999: 145)

Of the three recent translations, only that of Nemer renders the sentence correctly:

Il y avait à Bly une pleine pièce de vieux livres, pour partie des romans du siècle dernier, dont seule la réputation franchement fâcheuse — mais jamais le moindre exemplaire égaré — avait atteint ma maison retirée, éveillant l'inavouable curiosité de ma jeunesse. (James 1994: 112)

Such sentences must have caused considerable torment for the translators.¹⁴

In another sense, however, their task in the *Turn* was probably easier than for the *Siege*, because in the ghost story there are fewer nuances concerning social distinctions and judgements of value. It is, as James wrote in the New York Preface, a "perfectly independent and irresponsible little fiction" which has the merit of "a perfect homogeneity, of being, to the last grain of its virtue, all of a kind" (James 1966: 117). From the beginning to the end, the reader is called on to interpret and imagine, to fill in the blanks of the narration.

14 Le Corbeller's translation also refers to the governess's home, but makes a different assumption about the reason why the books were not found there: "Assez célèbres pour que leur mauvaise réputation ne pût plus être mise en doute, ils ne l'étaient pas assez cependant pour avoir pénétré, fût-ce sous la forme d'un exemplaire dépareillé, jusqu'à mon foyer écarté."

Given the importance of the governess's state of mind, the passages where she tries to understand her situation are crucial, and so is the translation of such passages. James repeatedly shows her finding explanations for the phenomena she has experienced or believes she has experienced. Rarely does she think things through logically, or subject her hypotheses to scrutiny and doubt. Sometimes the explanation comes to her in a flash; often she finds it only in the very act of telling the housekeeper Mrs Grose about events. At one point she comes to believe, with no observable evidence, that the children are aware of the ghosts of the former servants, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel: "I made it out to [Mrs Grose], made it out perhaps only now with full coherency even to myself." (56) The expression "made it out" emphasizes the simultaneity of the realization and the telling. This is somewhat weakened in all the translations, though Lévy comes closest to the original: "je le lui expliquai, et peut-être alors seulement me l'expliquai à moi-même de manière cohérente" (Lévy, James 1995: 56); "je lui expliquai tout, me l'expliquant peut-être à moi-même à cet instant avec une totale cohérence" (Nemer, James 1994: 86); "je lui ai tout avoué, et je l'ai avoué avec une cohérence dont je n'aurais peut-être pas été capable seule" (Pavans, James 1999: 117). At another point she mentions that, "in my delusion," she did not doubt (and still does not doubt) that little Flora was aware of a ghost (62). Pavans removes the suggestion that she may have lost contact with reality: "dans mon émoi" (129), while Lévy keeps it: "dans l'état d'hallucination où j'étais" (64), as does Nemer: "même au sein de cette illusion trompeuse" (98).

With very little evidence, the governess first draws one conclusion, then an opposite one, concerning the reason why Miles is not allowed to return to his school. At first, under the charm of the boy, she decides that any possible criticisms of him are grotesque (33). Later she declares to Mrs Grose the reason why he was expelled: "For wickedness" (100). The exact nature of this term is variously interpreted by the translators: according to Nemer it is "malignité" (169), for Lévy it is "méchanceté" (112), and for Pavans it is "mauvaise conduite" (205). Given the governess's state of mind at this time, it is likely that she means to suggest the highest degree of evil, which is not quite communicated by the French words.

However, the governess herself may be suspected of being driven by impure motives, however unconsciously. It has been suggested by some critics that she has sexual feelings for Miles, and indeed her behaviour may support this interpretation. One night she goes into Miles's room and talks to the boy, who is in bed, about his desire to go back to school. She fears that he will return at the end of three months "with all this bravado and still more dishonour." Unable to bear the thought,

I threw myself upon him and in the tenderness of my pity I embraced him.

"Dear little Miles, dear little Miles —!"

My face was close to his, and he let me kiss him, simply taking it with indulgent goodhumour. "Well, old lady?" (104)

The expression "old lady" serves several functions: as an idiomatic expression it conveys both affection and irony, and at the same time the literal meaning reminds the governess "with indulgent goodhumour" of the difference in age between them (the adjective "old" does not carry here the unfavourable force of Nancy Headway's use). Only Pavans keeps the specific mention of age: "Et alors, chère vieille mademoiselle?" (215), while Lévy has Miles say, "Eh bien, ma bonne demoiselle?" (117), and in Nemer's version he says, "allons, allons, ma bonne amie..." (177). Lévy and Nemer, perhaps seeking a more suitable expression for the situation in general, eliminate the possibility that the boy may feel unwelcome sexual pressure from the young woman.

In the final scene, the governess and Miles are alone at Bly, and in a last attempt to save him from the evil ghosts she tries to get him to reveal his misconduct at school. At that moment the ghost of Peter Quint, the former valet, appears at the window and she tells Miles that "the coward horror" is there. Unable to see the apparition, "he [Miles] uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss," and as the governess holds him tight, she realizes that "his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped" (138). Pavans writes (my emphasis): "j'ai poussé le hurlement d'une bête devant un abîme" (281), making the governess, not Miles, howl in despair. Having the governess utter the cry lends more weight than does James to the hypothesis of insanity. The other translators have Miles cry out, as in the English.

An English-French translator is forced to make certain decisions that have an effect on the tone and register of the story, including the choice of second-person pronoun and the choice of past tense used in narration. In all three of these versions, adults use the *vous* form of address with each other, as do the children when speaking to adults. Nemer also has the governess use this form to the children, while in Lévy and Pavans, she uses the familiar *tu* when speaking to either one of them. All three translators use the *passé simple* in the introductory narration, and Lévy and Nemer continue to use it in the governess's own account; Pavans has the governess tell her story in the *passé composé*. The use of *vous* and of the *passé simple* give a more formal register than *tu* and the *passé composé*. However, unlike the changes of register in Monet's translation of the *Siege*, which reduce the distinctiveness of the main character, these decisions do not affect the core mystery of the tale.

Social class plays an important role not only in the *Siege* but also in the *Turn*, where James establishes with care the English country house setting. Class differences — for example, between the children and the former servants Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, between the lovers themselves, between the

new governess and her employer on the one hand and the housekeeper on the other — are stressed. Nevertheless, these social differences are not themselves the central question of the story, and if a translator should fail to render them perfectly, if the reader fails to grasp all the nuances, this will not destroy the interest of the story.

The essential ambiguity and mystery remain in all three translations, even if on occasion they may not have captured all of what Edel calls "the technical skill James has used to throw his imaginative dust in the readers' eyes" (James 1964: 8). James was right in saying that this tale was more suited to translation than was *The Siege of London*, for it requires no detailed knowledge of social distinctions, and does nothing to upset the values of the readers. While the notion of respectability is turned on its head in *The Siege of London*, the ideas of ghosts, of demonic possession, and of insanity are not subject to criticism in *The Turn of the Screw*, either in the original or in the translations. The essential question remains: Is she or isn't she? And the answer to this question, while it can be endlessly debated with great ingenuity of interpretation, can be summarized by a simple Yes or No.

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