Response

In my response to André Lefevere's paper, I want to focus on what I believe are his three main sets of interrelated concepts, which could be given the short-hand labels functionalism, hegemony and refraction. Beneath Lefevere's graceful presentation of these concepts as they relate to the study of literary translation, there is a tough reasonableness which I want to address. I find the main thrust of his argument largely persuasive, which is why I feel it is worthwhile to raise questions about detail and implication.

The first question that Lefevere asks is: how can the study of literary translation be made productive? And the answer he proposes is: by radically re-situating it, that is to say, by taking translation studies out of the utilitarian or technicalist "ghetto" it has been stuck in for so long, and reinscribing it in a larger social-cultural field. For translation studies to be an *intervention* in the field, it is necessary to ask different kinds of questions, to formulate a different problematic. The productive questions, Lefevere argues, are what he calls "functional" rather than "essentialist" questions, as exemplified, say, in Wittgenstein's later style of philosophising, which is highly critical of essentialist attempts to "find the real artichoke by stripping it of its leaves."[1] Now I'm not sure that the four positions Lefevere outlines at the beginning of his paper can all be described as essentialist and unproductive, especially Hugo's and Herder's views on translation. However, the important point is the positive one made about "functional" questions: that they consider translations always in a context, and so re-focus our attention on their *conditions* of use and production. It allows Lefevere to make what I consider to be his most valuable argument: the imperative to situate translations within history and literary/cultural theory. There is one other remark I want to make here whose implication may not be immediately obvious. Lefevere attributes the productive shift in problematic specifically to philosophy and the philosophy of science, but the shift can be equally well documented elsewhere, for example in semiotic and textual theory. In this regard, it is tantalizing to discover that Wittgenstein played with the idea of using a line from *King Lear* as the epigraph for his *Philosophical Investigations,* the line being: "I will teach you differences." I will come back to this later.

If translation always exists in a social-cultural context, then the activity of translation is not autonomous, i.e., it is not a neutral self-sufficient activity. The translator is a *writer*, and translation, like other forms of writing, or other forms of social action, is subject to a number of "constraints" which affect its production. This question of constraint is the second main set of concepts Lefevere introduces. The story of the Lord and Clerk, which is his example of a productive model of translation, underlines the question of authority and the insidious forms authority can take. A constraint is nothing so clear cut as a law or a rule that is openly stated; nor is its causality easily apparent. A constraint, more often than not, is silent and invisible, but operative nevertheless, like the traveller in Blake's lyric "Never seek to tell thy love," who seduces the lady "with a sigh." Lefevere goes on to list a number of constraints that must be taken into consideration in translation studies, the most important being patronage and poetics. It is at this point that he links the concept of constraint with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and it is also at this point that I begin to have certain problems with the paper.

Curiously, Lefevere denies any "political" intent to his arguments almost in the same breath that Gramsci is invoked. Gramsci himself is introduced as an "Italian philosopher." Now Gramsci was both more and less than a philosopher. He was a political theorist as well as an active revolutionary. The theory of hegemony does not "simply state a fact"; it was designed to *explain* (and here I am using Lefevere's own distinction between "interpreting" and "explaining") why capitalist societies can continue to flourish in spite of all marxist "scientific" predictions about their imminent demise. In Gramsci, hegemony is a thoroughly political concept used to understand the world *and* to change it. What strikes me then as curious is that Lefevere can invoke Gramsci and at the same time down-play the political, especially since what is most persuasive about his own argument, as I understand it, is that there are no neutral, autonomous facts which could simply be stated outside a context of power relations. The political, it should be said, cannot be given too narrow a definition. When Michel Foucault was asked why he is so interested in politics, his reply was:

> "... why shouldn't I be interested? That is to say, what blindness, what deafness, what density of ideology would have to weigh me down to prevent me from being interested in what

> is probably the most crucial subject to our existence, that is to say, the society in which we live, the economic relations within which it functions, and the system of power which defines the regular forms and the regular permissions and prohibitions of our conduct. The essence of our life consists, after all, of the political functioning of the society in which we find ourselves.
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> So I can't answer the question of why I should be interested; I could only answer it by asking why shouldn't I be interested?"[2]

In the same vein, another detail that I would pick up is the assertion, repeated several times, that the paper does not make any value judgements, when it seems transparently clear that the paper consists of a whole series of carefully worked out value judgements: from the way translation is situated to the exposition of the constraints that affect its production and so on. It so happens that I share these value judgements but this does not persuade me of their status as "simple facts" that "emerge from the study of history." I think it would be wrong to say that Lefevere parades value judgements as facts, but his paper does indicate the difficulties that arise in trying to force Gramsci on the one hand, and Popper and Kuhn on the other, if not into the same mode, then into the same camp. We have a problem here not merely of a split intellectual allegiance. I alluded a little earlier to the privileged place Lefevere gives to the philosophy of science. What doesn't seem clearly worked out is the political implication of the philosophy of science and its hegemonic power.

The third set of issues that Lefevere raises concerns the practical value of the study of literary translation. Here Lefevere directs attention to the question of what actually gets translated in contrast to the "rules" and "tricks" of the translator's craft. What gets translated has to negotiate two hundles. One is censorship, which is the obvious hurdle; the other, less obvious and more important, is what he calls "refraction," which refers to the hegemonic process of selection and manipulation, i.e., of ideological filtering, that the translated text inevitably undergoes. What Lefevere calls "refraction" I understand as *ideology*, which is locatable not merely at the level of world view or "false consciousness"; as far as the literary text is concerned, ideology is inscribed in the nuances and overtones that we give to our language. This is where the literary theorist can help to deal with the problems of general culture. The process of refraction, its discursive regularities, can be studied in translations; but also, as Lefevere points out, in other

forms of literary activity like criticism, historiography and anthologization. Insofar as translation cannot be dissociated from ideology, I would agree with Lefevere's remark that translation can be said to lie "at the heart" of comparative literature and literary theory. However, the same point could be made about criticism, historiography and anthologization . . .

The argument about refraction and the study of its discursive regularities leads in the final section of the paper in yet another direction: towards a kind of intellectual innoculation against ethnocentrism. To compare cultures without taking the values of any one culture as central – that is the great anthropological lesson. Yet a caveat is nevertheless in order. What I have in mind can be suggested by Levi-Strauss's statement that anthropology itself is a western invention. There is an ethnocentrism of content that the liberal mind can guard against; but there is also an ethnocentrism of method which acts, like hegemony, in more subversive ways.

I hope the way I've stated my reservations does not blur the fact that we have here a very fruitful paper on literary translation. Lefevere makes some strong claims for rethinking the status and function of translation and translators in the context of general culture, and it would be particularly interesting to see what degree of assent or resistance to his arguments may be forthcoming from the "professional" translators themselves. I would like to conclude in a spirit of solidarity with the "gay science" that Lefevere calls for at the end of his paper: "a theory of cross-cultural penetration of texts."

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Notes

1. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 125.
2. See Fons Elders, *Reflexive Water* (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), p. 168.