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From Staged to Disguised Self-Translation: Heine and Celan in France¹

Abstract: Heinrich Heine and Paul Celan have often been compared, mainly because of their shared Parisian exile and Jewish identity. Yet we should add another dimension to this comparison, by examining the authors' relationship to the French versions of their texts. In fact, although Heine and Celan have always considered themselves as German-speaking writers, their perfect bilingualism and active participation in French literary circles made it possible for them to exert an early and considerable influence upon their own reception in France. This particularly affected the translation of their works, which were intensely managed and controlled by both poets. However, their influence took very different forms: Heine alleged to be the author of the French version of his writings, hiding the work of the translator, whereas Celan never wanted to appear as a self-translator, even if he played a key role in the development of the French translations of his works. Thus Heine's French works appear to be staged self-translations, produced mostly by French translators, while many of the French translations of Celan are actually very close to disguised self-translation. In both cases the original connection between the author and his text is upheld and the movement of estrangement and disappropriation, inherent in translation, is impeded or even stopped.

Keywords: Heinrich Heine, Paul Celan, French Reception, Selftranslation.

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Introduction

Despite the incommensurable historical distance between Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) and Paul Celan (1920–1970), these two German-language authors have often been compared (see, e.g., Suied). The main reason for this comparison lies in their shared Jewish heritage. Even considering the historical background that

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divides the two, it must be noted that both authors were confronted with anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews in their work and daily lives. Furthermore, Heine and Celan shared the destiny of exile and had a divisive relationship with Germany, where they were considered as outsiders within the literary field. They both spent the second half of their lives and the greater part of their literary careers in Paris, where they were fully integrated in the society through social circles, professional contacts and their wives and families.

Although Heine and Celan are today considered as canonical authors, they both wrote from the margins of German literature (and German Language), and they were very aware of the multicultural and transnational dimensions of their oeuvre. To some extent, both led a sort of *double life* as writers. This duality has generated controversy in scholarship and conflicts about each writer's national and cultural identity and affiliation (see Décultot and Weissmann, *Celan-Rezeption in Frankreich*). Their perfect bilingualism and active participation in French literary circles made it possible for Heine and Celan to exert a considerable influence on their reception in France from a very early point in their career. This particularly affected the translation of their works, which were intensely managed and controlled by both poets. However, the influence they had on the French versions of their texts took very different forms, which we shall now examine more closely.

Heine's deliberate double life as a German and a French writer

The idea of a double life as a writer in two different literary systems mentioned above applies especially to Heine. After his emigration to Paris in 1831, Heine decided to write also for the French public. Thus he began to work consistently and with great enthusiasm on his career as a French-language author (Calvié 26; Kortländer/Siepe 913). Countless documents and testimonies demonstrate that Heine had immediate and great success in the Paris circles, where he achieved rapid recognition and where his exotic charms and witty nature brought him admiration (see generally Werner). Beginning in 1832, Heine actively participated in the literary life of the metropolis. His articles written in French appeared in most significant journals, such as *L'Europe littéraire* or the still circulating *Revue des Deux-Mondes* (Hausschild/Werner chap. 7). Like all his French texts, they are generally signed by *Henri Heine*.

In the following year, the French version of *Französische Zustände* appeared under the title *De la France*, causing quite a stir in the Paris literary circles (Heine,

De la France). With the great success of *Tableaux de voyage*, published in book form in 1834 (Heine, *Tableaux de voyage*), Heine became definitively established on the Parisian literary market (cf. Kalinowski 89; Rowe 798). These publications were accompanied by an artful cultivation of the author's public image. By lobbying amongst the leading critics and journalists in Paris, Heine could give momentum to his own reception (cf. Hörling 7; Décultot 169).

By 1835, the first French edition of Heine's complete works had already been published by Eugène Renduel in Paris (Heine, *Oeuvres*). Among other works, the book *De l'Allemagne*, a collection of his writings about Germany, appeared in this edition. During the last years of his life, which were marked by serious illness, Heine spent all his energy finishing an authorized complete edition of his works in French, including his poetry. This suggests that Heine attached crucial significance to the French edition of his works (cf. Alexandre Weill cited in Werner 363). This fact also prompted the editors of the 1972 *Säkularausgabe* to include, as the second part of this critical edition, the complete French edition in seven volumes published by Michel Lévy Frères in 1855. In this way the editors placed it on an equal footing with the German work (cf. the introduction by Grappin).

Regarding the genesis of Heine's writings in French some facts can be ascertained, although opinions differ on this research topic (Laveau; Porcell, *Les textes français de Heine*; Derré).² The most important fact is that Heine published almost all of his French texts as original works, meaning that they were published and sold as genuine French texts and not as translations from German. Apart from some translations of his poems by Gérard de Nerval, the name of the translator was completely concealed or deleted after 1835 (cf. Grappin 12; Kalinowski, 91; Laveau, 267). Heine wanted to appear as the sole creator of his French texts rather than be known as merely a translated German writer (cf. Grappin 11).

The mediation of a third person in the form of a translator was not compatible with Heine's desire to appear as a direct actor within the French literary scene. At the same time, however, it is regarded as proven that Heine's French texts were in no way solely penned by him alone. In fact, they were developed in collaboration with one or more translators, whose participation in the final product is most likely of considerable extent (cf. Edouard Grenier and Saint-René Taillandier cited in Werner, 1:495 and 2:390). The nature of this collaboration could take very complex forms, and it changed with almost every work, just as the individuals involved in the French versions changed (Grappin 10–11).

When trying to appreciate Heine's participation in the development of these French versions, the question of Heine's linguistic competence in the French

² More generally, see also Porcell, *Heine écrivain français*?

literary language plays a crucial role. Heine was, from childhood on, in contact with the French language and his oral fluency in the language astounded many contemporaries (Derré 58); but there is consistent evidence to support the notion that Heine faced substantial problems in the realm of French literary language.

In today's scholarship there is almost complete consensus regarding the fact that Heine needed the help of a language assistant or an editor in order to prepare the final version of his French writings. Although many contemporaries attest that he had the *génie de la langue française* (e.g. A. Weill cited in Werner 2:76), Heine's gaps in the realm of grammar certainly prohibited him from working without the help of a native speaker.³ Thus, Heine's writings in French cannot be treated as self-translations in the narrow sense, but rather as *authorial transpositions* with the help of a third person.

Yet the question remains open as to the exact importance that should be assigned to the work of all that translators, editors and secretaries in the genesis of the French texts. There is some evidence to suggest that their contribution was generally hidden and concealed by Heine. For many, the impression became obvious that Heine maintained a sort of writing and translating bureau with anonymous workers, whose production he appropriated.

One must understand that, at the time, no translation contracts were signed with a publishing house. Instead, the translator was in general directly selected and paid by the author (Porcell, *Les textes français de Heine* 14). Some of Heine's collaborators, such as his temporary assistant Richard Reinhardt, complained about this mode of appropriation and exploitation (Reinhardt), although these methods were in no way unusual. On the other hand, it was Heine who always performed the final edits on all texts and often heavily revised those partial French versions presented to him.

From our perspective the main issue is the fact that Heine wanted to make an appearance all around Paris as the creator of his French writings. This is why we want to propose the notion of *staged self-translation*. For Heine, any mention of a secondary author – as the translator is often designated today – would narrow his *auctoritas* and compromise his autonomy as an actor upon the French literary market and intellectual scene. This mystification might be contrary to our understanding of the translator's role in today's literary communication process. However, one must be wary of anachronism, as the employment of anonymous translators, who aided famous writers with their translations, was still common practice well into the twentieth century (e.g. Wilfert-Portal).

³ See Porcell, *Les textes français de Heine* 13; Derré 63–64; Saint-René Taillandier cited in Werner 2:390. But cf. Laveau, 264; Rowe 798–799.

Celan's forced literary monolingualism

As in the case of Heine, Celan's emigration to Paris in 1948 also led to swift contact with the Parisian literary scene (Weissmann, *Celan in Frankreich*). But in contrast to Heine, Celan arrived in France not as a known author, but rather as a totally unknown stateless refugee. Yet he managed to take advantage of contacts made previously in Bucharest and Vienna, in order to introduce himself to important French authors, who quickly realised the young poet's immense talent.

Celan's work as a translator of contemporary French poets such as René Char played an important role in establishing these contacts. The strong relationships and friendships made in the Parisian literary milieu would lead, in the mid nineteen-sixties, to Celan's active participation in the French literary establishment, as he becomes co-editor of the influential literary magazine *L'Ephémère* (Mascarou). His suicide in 1970 will put a sudden end to this collaboration.

Celan was intensely involved in the French environment and the intellectual milieu of Paris. His marriage to Gisèle de Lestrange was followed by his naturalization in 1955 and his employment as German reader at the elite university *Ecole normale supérieure* towards the end of the 1950s. Celan's carefully cultivated self-portrayal as *poète maudit* led to an underestimation by critics and scholars of Celan's social network, that is his relations with French writers, intellectuals and the university milieu (Weissmann, *Poésie, Judaïsme, Philosophie* 47–77). Like Heine, Celan also controlled his own promotion in France, since, through direct contact with critics, scholars, and translators, he could contribute to the construction of his own image as a poet. Yet this seems to be the greatest difference between Celan and Heine: Although Celan emerged as a mediator between German and French literature, he did not want to appear, at any cost, as a French author and hid himself behind his translators, if he approved of a translation at all.

In this context, Celan spoke of the “fateful uniqueness” (Celan, *Antwort* 175) of the German language. For Celan, the fatefulness of the German language forbade him to write in another language. *Muttersprache – Mördersprache*, mother tongue – murderer's tongue: this word pairing illustrates the double bind conflict Celan had to go through (Buck). This double bind mainly consists of writing poems of remembrance about his mother in the language of the murderers of his mother, which is also his mother tongue. The escape into another literary language, a solution Celan's immense gift for language might have suggested, was never a real possibility for him, for Celan could be nothing other than a German-language poet.

Since the publication of the correspondence with his wife (Celan/Celan-Lestrange), and through other documents from his posthumous papers, we know

that Celan possessed an almost perfect hand when writing in French. French commentators have often emphasized the literary quality of his French style. These texts, along with the only French poem Celan ever wrote (Celan, *Ô les hâbleurs*), do not, however, belong to his authorized oeuvre. Moreover, the documents Celan prepared for the private use of his wife (e.g. glossaries and verbatim interlinear translations; Celan/Celan-Lestrange), cannot be considered as literary texts. Hence, no French document can reasonably be considered part of Celan's authorized work.

Celan's perfect mastery of the French language, however, naturally leads to a special relationship to the French translations of his texts. Even though he strictly opposed self-translating his own work for French publication, he insisted on controlling and correcting every translation before it went to press, sometimes even before signing a contract with a publisher. The first time this occurred was in 1955; the occasion was the magazine publication of a selection of texts from *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, his first volume of poetry published in Germany (Weissmann, *Poésie, judaïsme, philosophie* 1:132–148). Henceforth, with each revision of a translation, Celan encroached upon the first version submitted by the translator and imposed his own authorial vision.

Celan was extremely sceptical and demanding when it concerned the translation of his poems into French. This scepticism, incidentally, is a quality shared with Heine and indicates a general problem with the translation of German lyric poetry into French (see generally Etkind). However, the implications were not the same, as Heine was received in France primarily as a political prose writer, whereas the lyric poet Celan existed almost exclusively in his poems.

The large number of projects Celan discontinued – either because of his discontent with the translations or because of reservations about the translators themselves – is striking. Although he wanted to capitalize upon the chance to circulate his works in French, he declined numerous book-publishing projects, even those coming from such renowned publishing houses as Editions du Seuil or Gallimard (Weissmann, *Poésie, judaïsme, philosophie* 1:149–171), as if he feared his work could suffer under translation. The context of the plagiarism case launched against him by the poet Yvan Goll's widow, a case that we can't discuss fully here, plays a central role (Celan, *Die Goll-Affäre*).

Even when Celan allows a translation project to result in publication, his interference throughout the process illustrates a massive mistrust. From detailed analysis of Celan's corrections on the translator's manuscripts, one ascertains that the interference cannot simply be explained in terms of correction or improvement of the translator's work. In fact, although many of the changes to the translation are justifiable or enriching, others appear to belong to a kind of *re-appropriation* of the foreign-language text, which is an understandable but not wholly unproblematic.

matic process. In many cases, the author adopts the position of the translator, where he almost rewrites his text in French instead of accepting the translation work of another. With a certain number of texts, one can speak of a *disguised self-translation*, as almost nothing of the translator's original version remains in the final product (Weissmann, *Poésie, judaïsme, philosophie* 1:132–148).

For the official translator, this situation is naturally very difficult and objectionable. For he has to deal with an author who does not want to translate himself, although in actuality he could or even should, but at the same time does not accept the work of the translator as independent. In Celan's papers we can find ample evidence of the difficulties with which his translators and editors had to struggle. One very illuminating comment was made by the Italian poet and translator Marianello Marianelli. In a letter to Celan, he accused him of being incapable of giving his work a life of its own and of wanting to protect it from his readers and translators (Marianelli). However, Marianelli probably knew nothing about the mental distress that brought Celan to such an engagement.

This kind of disguised participation in the translation process has also been discovered in Celan's work on texts of other German authors. In fact, Celan was actively involved in the French translations of German authors for the *L'Ephémère* magazine, without, however, wanting to be named as the translator (Weissmann, *Poésie, judaïsme, philosophie* 1:200sq.). Instead, Celan's main concern was the conservation of his identity as a lyric poet in the German language.

The fatal ramifications of the so-called Goll-Affair, based on the accusation of plagiarizing translations, deepened Celan's mistrust of the poetic bilingualism. Along with this mistrust, one could almost speak of a sort of neurotic identification with his own texts, in which the appropriation of his poems by the translator was, for him, insufferable. However, by the mid-nineteen-sixties, through the close friendship with the poet André du Bouchet, Celan's opinion of translation changed. Du Bouchet's translation team instilled in Celan a greater confidence in the process.

The history of the French translation of Celan's work is complex and full of conflict; but we cannot go into detail here. One should only note that, with his own attitude, Celan already laid the foundation for this complex history, in so far as he, at least implicitly, delayed the preparation of the French edition of his poems. Celan's very high requirements concerning poetry and poetic translation, the complexity of his work, and his poems' fateful binding to the German language are definitely a far cry from the translation and publishing practices of Heine's prose writing.

Conclusions

The attempt to compare Heine's and Celan's relation to their French translators and translations reaches a limit if one considers that, within the literary field, the perception of translators and the translation practice dramatically changed between the middle of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth century. Moreover, going too far with the comparison, or wanting to deduce general conclusions from the analysis, would mean to ignore the strong individuality of each author. Nevertheless our analysis has highlighted a number of points, which appear to be significant beyond the particular authors under consideration and which can therefore contribute to the construction of a more general theory.

We have seen that with both Heine and Celan the division between original work and translation begins to falter. For both authors the immediate proximity to a second literature, the daily contact with a second culture and language, almost automatically leads to important questions concerning the mechanisms of exporting their own works and of their translation into a language that was to become for them a second mother tongue. To put it simply: As soon as the author has a deep comprehension of the target language, he is liable to step out of his role as composer of the source text and to collide with the role of the translator.

The translations of Heine and Celan discussed above are *collective* works that have come about through the cooperation of at least two authors. While this suggests a collaborative authorship of the German writer during the translation process, one can also speak of authorized or even authorial editions. The concept of *authoriality* suggests itself as central to our area of investigation. It should be able to open a new and fertile perspective towards a problem that cannot be appropriately analyzed by using only terms such as original and translation (cf. Oustinoff).

In addition, one can use the concept of self-translation, but with reservations. Contrary to authors such as Beckett or Nabokov, one cannot speak of Heine and Celan as genuinely bilingual authors. However, the *intention* to self-translate is, in both, unmistakable. Whether it is through Heine's staging of his allegedly unmitigated double authorship or through Celan's disguised interference, each author maintains control over his work in the other language. In both cases the original connection between the author and his text is upheld and the movement of estrangement and disappropriation, inherent in translation, is impeded or even stopped. In this new situation it's up to the translator to come to terms with his own feeling of estrangement and disappropriation, as he is placed in a subaltern position, without the right to assert his own authorial (and

creative) role, although this might often be useful or necessary, especially in the case of poetic translation.⁴

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