From World to World. An Armamentarium for the study of poetic discourse in translation
Koster, C.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 9

FINAL WORDS:
OVERCOMING A BAD CASE OF DESPERATION

At the end of the second chapter I posited as the ultimate aim of this book the formulation of a coherent proposal for an armamentarium, a set of instruments, for the description of poetic discourse in translation, that is, the development of a comparative procedure, and an operable set of concepts that may be instrumental in describing the results of that comparison. The time has come to ask the question whether this aim has been met. I have to add immediately that I do not consider myself as the person most qualified to answer it. This is not the kind of book of which the result is easily evaluated, simply because the main result (the armamentarium) is based on a series of theoretical assumptions which have been justified already. At the basis of the armamentarium lies a series of postulates: that a translation constitutes a semiotic interpretation of a source text, and that that interpretation can be made visible by comparing the text worlds of target and source texts. Any statement by me about the operability of the armamentarium necessarily would be the result of circular reasoning. I’ve shown that the procedure may work, but this will need further confirmation (and possibly refinement) by a lot more case studies.

Still there are some ‘loose ends’ that may be fastened, such as the methodological status of the armamentarium vis-à-vis other methods and comparative procedures and the relationship between the historical dimension of translation description, represented in this procedure by the preliminary data, and the actual source and target text comparison. I will finish this book with some further comments on these two points.

Methodological status of the armamentarium
Let me start this evaluation by looking at the armamentarium in terms of the distinctions that emerged from the study of existing methods in Chapter 4: product-orientedness versus process-orientedness, distinctive feature analysis versus repertory method, microstructure versus
Chapter 9: Final Words

macrostructure (or means versus functions), source-orientedness versus target-orientedness, and second degree comparison versus direct comparison (cf. Chapter 4, 'Summary').

The armamentarium is clearly a product-oriented procedure, it is not devised for the purpose of reconstructing translational considerations, it is concerned rather with describing the effects of translational choices.

The armamentarium is a repertory method, but not in the strict sense of the word. The 'repertory of features always to be analysed' is not entirely fixed, as for instance it is, or is supposed to be, in the Göttingen approach. There is some order in the steps distinguished, but within these steps a large degree of flexibility is allowed for.

As to the methodological relationship between micro- and macrostructure the armamentarium takes up a middle position between a top-down and a bottom-up procedure. It doesn't work in just one direction, as the methods of Linn and Van Leuven-Zwart do, but it takes into account the circularity of any hermeneutic enterprise. It starts top-down and at any further stage may move bottom-up and top-down dependent on what is relevant at that particular point.

As to the other two distinctions, second degree versus direct comparison and source- versus target-orientedness, the situation is a little more complicated. To the extent that the armamentarium is a repertory method it performs direct comparison. At certain stages the comparison is directed at the relationship between pre-defined textual elements, at other points a description of textual properties of both texts precedes the comparison. The debate about the desirability of one approach above the other, to my mind, is undecidable. It is impossible to compare texts without a certain amount of description of textual elements of single texts.

As we have seen throughout this book the distinction between source text-orientation and target text-orientation is at the centre of one of the major discussions in modern translation studies. In the first chapter of this book I have claimed to consider myself part of the target-oriented paradigm. This implies the endorsement of the theoretical assumption that translation basically is a teleological activity, and that the point of departure of any study into translation has to be the function of translation in the target culture. Methodologically
speaking, as far as the effort of target text-source text comparison is concerned, the situation is less clear. As a consequence of the double, hybrid status of the translation, target text-source text comparison is to a great extent both teleologically and archaeologically oriented at the same time. Perhaps this is the ‘theoretical desperation’ (cf. the motto of this book) pervading this branch of Descriptive Translation Studies. One of the main points of discussion is the inherently normative character of target text-source text description, particularly when shifts are used as an instrument. The desperation follows from the necessary conclusion that if one wishes to exclude normativity, one has to abandon the enterprise of target text-source text comparison altogether. I don’t think anyone would want to do that. I hope to have shown, in Chapter 6, by distinguishing between two levels of normativity, one inherent and not to be helped, the other methodologically unnecessary and undesirable, that it is mainly a matter of attitude whether one wishes to ignore or acknowledge, to institutionalize or minimize the normative aspects of translation description. I have chosen to acknowledge them, and to try to minimize them.

In general one might say that with respect to the more substantial distinctions, I have taken up positions between extreme ends. In that sense, methodologically speaking, the armamentarium itself is a hybrid construct. Throughout this book I have freely used several terms to refer to roughly the same concept: ‘descriptive enterprise’, ‘comparative procedure’, ‘armamentarium’. At the end of Chapter 1 I hesitated to use the term ‘method’, because the procedure proposed would only be formalized to a certain extent. It is formalized to the extent that it distinguishes several procedural steps in a more or less fixed order, but it is not formalized to the extent that within these steps it leaves considerable room for every individual describer to lay out her own itinerary. It is formalized to the extent that it prescribes the use of specific terms in describing the relationship pertaining between the text pair(s), it is not formalized to the extent that it does not prescribe a specific classification of shifts, as for instance Van Leuven-Zwart does.

In that sense, some people may very well reason that the armamentarium does not constitute a method at all. In devising the method I have taken up a relativistic-pragmatic position. I have never lost
Chapter 9: Final Words

sight of the purpose of the *armamentarium*, and have kept in mind qualities as flexibility and practicability. I have tried to steer a middle course between the lack of instruction to be found in Toury’s later proposal for target text-source text comparison and the abundance of instruction to be found in Van Leuven-Zwart’s method. The semantic categories used in my concept of ‘text world’ are very basic (‘subject’, ‘object’, ‘states’, ‘processes’, ‘events’, etc.), but any further specification would result in a methodological *mer à boire*. Perhaps this is another form of desperation, of ‘methodological desperation’. So be it, I am willing to live with it.

I am well aware that this attitude puts the weight of the success of working with the *armamentarium* to a large extent on the shoulders of the individual describer. Success will depend on the competence of the individual describer. Working with the *armamentarium* presupposes a fair amount of knowledge in the areas of linguistics, stylistics, literary theory and literary history, and not in the least of translation studies – more knowledge than this book can provide. On the other hand, the *armamentarium* does not appeal to any kind of knowledge that is not part and parcel of any graduate program in any faculty of Letters (or should be). Perhaps working with the *armamentarium* would benefit from an ‘induction course’\(^{162}\) on graduate level, but on postgraduate level anyone should be able to work with it.

The historical dimension

In Chapter 2 I distinguished between the (intra)textual and extratextual dimension of the translator, and stated that the two could never be totally severed. On the other hand I stated that, methodologically speaking, the relationship between translation description directed towards the (intra)textual translator (target text-source text comparison) and translation description directed towards the extratextual translator (historical contextualization) is problematical. Once again we may have hit upon a form of methodological and theoretical des-

\(^{162}\) Hermans (1999) uses the term in a depreciatory way when he discusses the complexity of Van Leuven-Zwart’s method. I fail to see why it should be an objection that one might need a course in order to be able to apply a method.
The problematical status of the relationship between the two may be illustrated by the way it is treated within several frameworks. The emphasis in the Göttingen approach is mainly on the historical aspect of translation description, it does provide for a method (of sorts), but it totally lacks reflection on the methodology of text comparison, in terms of the problems involving the establishment of *tertia*, or of a unit of comparison. The method of Van Leuven-Zwart is theoretically fixated on the development of an intricate method for comparing specific text pairs, and she does not address the historical dimension at all. She does make use of historical material, nevertheless, in trying to explain some of the results of the comparison she uses as an illustration of her method (only to be found in Van Leuven-Zwart 1984: 209-210). Of more recent date is Anthony Pym’s *Method in Translation History*. A book that, judging by its title, one would pick immediately if one set out to study translation from a product- or function-oriented point of view. It is, I think, a very useful book, one of the few on the subject in which an elaborate and consistent research programme is presented rhetorically sound and with great pedagogical skill, but what the author has to say about the actual comparison of original and translation is precious little. The inspiration for the method of ‘reading and comparing texts’, he says, with a methodological naivety he will not allow himself on other subjects, may be found in ‘the general procedures of descriptive analysis’ (Pym 1998: 107). Appealing as the idea of a general procedure for descriptive analysis may be, I don’t think any such thing exists. At least, to limit myself to Descriptive Translation Studies, I hope this book has shown this much. Toury might be the only one who has attempted to devise an integrated method both for the detailed analysis of the relationship between target and source texts and their historical-systemic contextualization. He, however, has abandoned that particular integrated approach to text comparison (cf. Chapter 4).

Perhaps we have to attribute the problematic relationship between the textual and extratextual aspects of translation description to the fact that, as far as theory is concerned, the gravitational pull of both aspects is directed to different centres: the linguistic and the literary. It is striking to see that discussions concerning the interdisciplinary
status of translation studies and the ensuing demarcation criteria seem to be going always in one direction: either towards contrastive or comparative linguistics (cf. Toury 1980: 19-34; Chesterman 1998; Malmkjær 1999) or to comparative literature (Bassnett 1993). The kind of detailed analysis necessary to compare texts in a meaningful way is probably more akin to (pragmato-)linguistics\textsuperscript{163}, whereas the historical dimension obviously links up with Comparative Literature (where it originated in the first place). The problem of this particular approach within Descriptive Translation Studies as an interdisciplinary\textsuperscript{164} may then be illustrated by the fact that one will be hard put to find any demarcation discussion between comparative linguistics and comparative literature.

This form of desperation is, of course, only a problem, if one wishes to integrate both aspects theoretically. Knowing that I have chosen an ad hoc approach to this problem, one will not be surprised that I don’t think that is a necessary condition for practising translation description.

**Coda: A final statement**

Theoretical and methodological desperation, then, may be overcome by sheer pragmatism – by knowing one’s limits and taking one’s losses. To my mind this is as far as it goes.

\textsuperscript{163} Theoretical considerations about shifts and correspondences would fit in nicely with, for instance, the work on parallel corpora going on in translational corpus linguistics (cf. Baker 1995 and Thunes 1998 ). Particularly the elaborate classification of shifts devised by Van Leuven-Zwart may prove to be useful at this point.

\textsuperscript{164} Which it shares, by the way, with an (inter)discipline like literary stylistics.