

# The agency of the printed page: re-contextualizing the translated text

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*This paper investigates whether there is a relationship between translations and paratexts. A pilot study of the paratextual elements in French translations of Lewis's *The Monk* compares the translations and editions in order to bring to light the relationships between them. The findings are that there is a strong relationship between these elements, and that the role of "reader", "source text" and "target text" should never be taken for granted. In addition, it is found that paratexts change according to the market over the years.*

*Key words: translation, paratexts, book, translator, publishers.*

## Introduction

Texts travel through time and space, from one language to another. In the process, they become material objects, each incarnation being a way of making the text present to the world. Translations can be seen as central to this re-incarnation process. But far from being the end of the story, the translated text is raw material, so to speak, for the work's reception history. To fully enter the host culture and reach the reader, the work has to be carried by something, and this something is still very often a book. Readers read texts wrapped in a complex system of signs: the book and its paratextual elements such as prefaces, notes, title pages, cover picture, publisher's name and brand. How do these margins affect the reading of the text? Does the translator have a room of their own in these margins? If so, what can it tell us about the status and the role of the translator in the production of the text? What can it tell us about the status and the role of translated literature in the host culture?

In this paper I will present some preliminary findings from my research into the translation and publishing history of M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* in France. Focusing on different incarnations of Léon de Wailly's translation, first published in 1840 by H. L. Delloye and regularly reissued since then, I will investigate and question the relationships between the translated text, its paratexts, and the materiality of the book, arguing that textual studies, as defined by Greetham (1994: 1-10), should be part of any thinking about translation.

## Beginnings

This research project was born from a textual *curiosity* – the explanation of which calls for a short account of the translation and publication of M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* in France.

*The Monk* was first translated and published in Paris by Maradan in 1797, a year or so after its original publication in London. Attributed to P. V. Benoist, J. M. Deschamps, J. B. D. Desprès and P. B. Lamare, this first translation was later to be described by Léon de Wailly as "disdainfully inaccurate". It was nevertheless republished no less than eleven times before the

end of the nineteenth century. It should be noticed that no translator's name appears on any of these editions. Its last appearance seems to have been in 1878, when it was published by Claverie together with Diderot's *La religieuse*.

A second translation, by Léon de Wailly (1804-1863), was published in 1840 by H. L. Delloye. This new translation, although advertised as "verbatim from the first original edition", did not enjoy the same popularity as the first one. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that it was republished, this time by José Corti. Since then, it has somehow become the authoritative French translation of *The Monk*, regularly reissued by Corti and other publishers.

A competing version of *The Monk* was, however, presented to French readers in 1931. At a time when the Surrealists were favouring the re-discovery of English Gothic literature, the poet and dramatist Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) produced his own version of *The Monk*. In his foreword he praises Léon de Wailly's translation as being the only "accurate" one (Artaud 1966: 9).

Finally, it should be added that two French editions of the English text of *The Monk* were published in Paris in early nineteenth century, the first one by Theophilus Barrois in 1807 and a second one in 1832 by Baudry in its series "Collection of old and modern British novels and romances" (n°35).

The scenes having been set, let us now turn to the textual curiosity mentioned above. In the course of studying John Phillips' translation of epigraphs from Artaud's *Le Moine*, I found that Léon de Wailly's text did not match what scholars recognize today as being Lewis's original text.<sup>1</sup> What had begun as a linguistic study turned into something like a bibliographical thriller.

The early publishing history of *The Monk* in England is an intricate one that, for obvious reasons, cannot be explained here (see Todd 1950). Suffice to say that Lewis wrote two concluding passages to his romance, which were both published by John Bell in 1796, at an interval of a few months. In the first—now considered the original—the concluding passage consists of a lengthy description of Ambrosio's sufferings and death. In the second, this description is shortened and followed by another passage beginning "Haughty Lady". Contrary to the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century English editions of the text that I have reviewed to date, which carry either one or the other of these concluding passages, Léon de Wailly's translation bears both. I thus found myself faced with another mystery... and more ant work: did the translator choose to combine the two endings, or is the explanation to be found in the English edition he used for his translation? So far, my investigations into the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France suggest that Léon de Wailly based his translation on a Paris edition of the English text of *The Monk*, published by Baudry in 1832.

Brief as it is, this bibliographical account shows that the authoritative French text of *The Monk* is the product of at least three actors: the translator, the publisher of the "source" text and, the publisher of the translated text.

Serendipity being what it is, I decided to test in a more systematic way what had until then been more of an intuition: that there is a lot to be learned from the medium carrying the text, and that the very notions of "reader", "source text" and "target text" should thus not be taken for granted.

## Hypothesis

My research is based on two complementary hypotheses. Following McKenzie and book historians, the first one is that form affects meaning (McKenzie 1986: 10). In other words, the book, including the paratextual elements it bears, can be seen as a mediator of the text. Mediators, contrary to intermediaries, "transform, translate, distort and, modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (Latour 2007: 39). Following Genette (1987: 7), paratext is to be understood as everything that makes the text present in the world, including its materiality. The book, then, can be seen as a crossroads of visible signs and trails left by

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<sup>1</sup> This project was undertaken as part of my essays for the MA in Literary Translation, UEA, Norwich, UK, 2007.

different agents—from whence their strategies can be deciphered with respect, for example, to the status of translation and the translated text. These two basic assumptions call for a specific research method.

## Methodology

Our research methodology is grounded on Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory and the notions of "recording" and "describing" as opposed to those of "filtering" and "disciplining" (Latour 2007: 55). From the trails left by different agents we attempt to infer their strategies and perhaps an intended reading of the text. Not the other way round. This inductive approach is quite different from recent studies focusing on publishing and translation, or even on paratexts and translations. Very few of them, if any, take into account both the materiality of the book and the agent behind it: the publisher. On the one hand, publishers are seen in the light of broad strategic moves, no attention being paid to how these strategies are embodied. On the other, the focus is, for example, on the lay-out of the printed page, no attention being paid to the broader context of the publisher's identity. Once identified, those trails should be compared with the translation itself in order to bring to light whatever kind of relationships, if any, operate between them. This does not mean taking for granted what paratexts say. Indeed, a crucial question would be whether these agents actually master their messages. What happens to their voices when put side by side on, let's say, the back cover of the book?

## The corpus

Our corpus consists of five editions of Léon de Wailly's translation of *The Monk*. One text, five incarnations, and two publishers:

- *Le Moine*, par M. G. Lewis. Traduction nouvelle par Léon de Wailly, Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1840
- *Le Moine*, par M. G. Lewis. Traduction entièrement conforme au texte de la 1<sup>re</sup> édition originale, par Léon de Wailly. Paris : José Corti, 1958
- *Le Moine*, par M. G. Lewis. Traduction entièrement conforme au texte de la 1<sup>re</sup> édition originale, par Léon de Wailly. Paris : J. Corti, 1983
- *Le Moine*, par M. G. Lewis. Traduction entièrement conforme au texte de la 1<sup>re</sup> édition originale, par Léon de Wailly. Paris: J. Corti, 1993
- *Le Moine*, M. G. Lewis. Paris: J. Corti, 2005.

## Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted on the corpus, focusing on:

- Identifying, describing and classifying the paratextual elements. At this stage, two broad categories of paratexts were distinguished according to their provenance (or senders): the editorial paratext and the translational paratext;
- Diachronic analysis: Do the paratext elements evolve over time?
- Deciphering a potential intended reading of the text;

- As for the translated text, the main focus was to check its concluding passage for any alteration of Léon de Wailly's original text.

*The paratext of the first edition of Léon de Wailly's translation, 1840*

Léon de Wailly's translation of *The Monk* was first published in 1840 by H. L. Delloye, who also carried Balzac. Delloye was actually one of the most important publishers of keepsakes in France, which enjoyed great popularity in the mid nineteenth century. At the time when he published *Le Moine*, however, he was experiencing great financial difficulties. He went bankrupt, and in 1841 he had no choice but to sell his catalogue to the Garnier Brothers.

An ordinary edition in two volumes, the book is home to a rich paratext from front-cover to back-cover. The front cover, essentially typographical, reads as follows:

*Le Moine* / par M.G. Lewis / Traduction nouvelle / et entièrement conforme au texte de la première édition originale, / par Léon de Wailly (*The Monk*, by M.G. Lewis. New translation taken verbatim from the original first edition, by Léon de Wailly)

This text is framed at the top of the page by the title of the series *Bibliothèque choisie* and at the bottom by the place of publication, the publisher's name and address, and the year of publication.

The back cover is used as an advertising medium, carrying the retail price and a list of forthcoming titles, along with a brief description – form and content – of each book. From this description, it appears that the publisher is keen to advertise the quality of the editing process and the fact that the books come with metal engravings, giving the series a scholarly aspect.

These outer fringes of the text present several interesting characteristics: 1) a rich and somewhat intriguing translational paratext, making the translation paramount to the interest of this edition of the text, both in scholarly and marketing terms; and 2) the author's name is given in full. Turning to the inside paratext, we find the following elements:

- A metal engraving;
- Inside title-page, which is exactly the same as the front cover except for a quotation from Horace in Latin together with a French translation;
- The translator's note, which is three pages long and includes a bibliography of M. G. Lewis;
- Authorial paratext (two pages): "Avertissement de l'auteur" and "Préface de l'auteur", signed "M.G.L." and dated 28 October 1794.

So far, the "promises" of the front cover are kept, and room is given to the translator to express himself. The authorial paratext dated 1794 refers the reader to "the first original edition". As for the Translator's note, it serves different functions, namely introducing the author and the text to the reader, giving clues on how to read the text, emphasizing the literary value of the book, and explaining why a new translation was necessary and what the translator's choices were. Wailly insists that he "compelled himself to produce a strictly faithful translation". What is glaringly missing, however, is any reference to the "first original edition", even though Wailly insists on the censorship problems met by the text when it was first published. What is also interesting is that Wailly explicitly links his note to the authorial paratext, making them part of one and the same system.

At this stage, it is possible to suggest an "intended reading" of the text as deciphered through the paratext, with the translation and the translator playing central roles. The reader is thus invited to:

- (Re)discover a great and important foreign literary text that raised controversy and generated many imitations;
- (Re)discover it through a new translation that will restore it to its original state;
- Reach it through a publisher who prides himself on paying careful attention to the editing process.

And yet, the source text of Léon de Wailly translation was not the text of the “original first edition”, contrary to what the Delloye edition proudly boasts. So what would happen to the translated text and to this misleading claim in later editions?

### *Corti editions of Léon de Wailly’s translation: a translator vanishes...*

A century after its original publication, in 1958, Léon de Wailly’s translation was brought to twentieth-century readers by the publisher José Corti. Since then, *Le Moine* has been part of Corti’s catalogue, the text being reissued in 1983, 1993 and 2005, this time in a new series and with several substantial changes.

#### *The 1958, 1983 and 1993 editions*

The 1958 edition has a pale blue cover (reminiscent of the popular *Bibliothèque bleue*). The front cover reads as follows: “*Le Moine*, par Lewis, Paris, Librairie José Corti, 1958”. This minimal paratext frames a black and white picture, taken from a nineteenth-century popular edition of *Le Moine*.

The back cover is blank. Also noticeable is the fact that the translator’s name, contrary to Delloye’s edition, does not appear on the front cover. Only on the inside title page do we find Léon de Wailly’s name, together with the formula “traduction conforme au texte de la première édition originale” and the quotation from Horace. On the following pages, the publisher reproduces the translational paratext (translator’s note and Lewis’s bibliography) as it appeared in the 1840 Delloye edition – mistakes included – followed by the authorial paratext: Avertissement de l’auteur et préface de l’auteur.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of “rediscovery”, already paramount in Delloye 1840 edition, is also omnipresent in all of Corti editions of *Le Moine*. Only this time, it is mostly carried by the new editorial paratext that frames the nineteenth-century translation. Inscribing this new edition in the earlier publishing history of *Le Moine*, Corti explains that he wished to “present the 1958 reader with the original translation of Léon de Wailly and the original form through which the text was discovered by the reader of the romantic period.” This romantic, old-fashioned turn is further emphasized by the mention, at the bottom of the same page, that “the cover reproduces the title of the Harvard edition of 1850 and the illustration by J.A. Beaucé that adorned it.”

However, another figure and reference ultimately makes the text present to the world: that of Antonin Artaud, used to legitimate this new edition and the use of this specific translation—which translation, the publisher warns the reader on this very same page, is presented without the slightest modification, even though some “corrections” might have been necessary. This is a well-worn expression designed to exonerate the publisher of any responsibility for the quality of the translation.

Although left with the all-important task of introducing the text and the author to the French audience, the translator is invisible on the outside of the book – a practice rather unusual for a publisher like Corti. This might have something to do with the ambivalent literary status of *Le Moine*. As for the strong visibility of the translator *inside* the book, it is somehow offset by

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<sup>2</sup> In the Translator’s note, the name “Quérard” is wrongly spelled “Quénand”. This misprint is reproduced in the four Corti editions.

the fact that the translation, together with the translator, is presented as an “historical object”, part of the larger “nineteenth-century package”.

The edition presented to the French readers in 1958 thus frames the text with an explicit “gothic-romanticism-rediscovered-by-the-Surrealists” reading—a spin reinforced by the closing paratext which consists of a list of four titles published by Corti, all of them belonging to the gothic genre, including: *Bertram ou le château de Saint-Aldobrand* by R. M. Maturin in the translation by Taylor and Charles Nodier (originally published in 1821) with a preface by Marcel A. Ruff (1955), and *Le château d’Otrante*, by Walpole, translated by Dominique Corticchio, with a preface by Paul Éluard (first published by Corti in 1943).

Following the 1958 edition, Corti released two editions of the text, the first in 1983 and the second in 1993. I will not expand on them here, since the editorial and translational paratext presents only minor changes (most notably a blurb on the back cover with a quotation from André Breton) and conveys the very same intended reading as the 1958 edition.

### *The 2005 edition, series Les Massicotés, n°13*

Thus lived *Le Moine* in France, until a new edition was launched by Corti in 2005. This time it was in Corti’s semi-paperback series Les Massicotés, launched in 2004. Does this new edition bring anything new in terms of paratext and text?

On the front and back covers, as far as the translator is concerned, invisibility still prevails.<sup>3</sup> The back-cover copy is the same as the one that first appeared in the 1993 edition. The front cover reads: “Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Le Moine*, Corti Les Massicotés”.

Contrary to the three earlier editions, Lewis’s name and surname appear in full and come before the title. This comes together with a new framing of the text, that of the series Les Massicotés, through the typographic and colour patterns. The front-cover picture has also been changed, being this time taken from a nineteenth English edition of *The Monk*.

If we look inside the book, we find that the paratextual elements have undergone significant changes, both in order and content:

- The translator’s name does not appear on the inside title page, which is immediately followed by the authorial paratext: “avertissement de l’auteur”, then “préface de l’auteur”.
- The translator’s note now appears at the end of the book, albeit as it appeared in the previous editions – once again, mistakes included. This time the translator’s name appears in rather small print at the beginning of the bibliography: “Books written by M.G. Lewis, list established by the translator, M. de Wailly.”
- A new and interesting feature is that the text is now divided into three volumes.
- A new paratextual element is introduced: the “Publisher’s note”. Here again, Wailly’s translation is backed and legitimated by what Artaud wrote about it in his own version of *The Monk*: a “faithful translation”. What is more interesting is that the publisher gives the reader new information about the circumstances of the original publication by Corti, in 1958: “Is it Artaud or José Corti’s son Dominique who induced the publisher to take on *The Monk*? We’ll never know.” Then we learn that José Corti went to the Bibliothèque nationale de France where he copied de Wailly’s translation by hand. The publisher’s note ends stating that, like José Corti, the publisher has left Wailly’s translation untouched, although some “corrections” would have been necessary.

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<sup>3</sup> This is despite the fact that the French good practices guide (1993) for literary translation states that the translator’s name should appear distinctly on the front-cover or on the back-cover.

The publisher thus gives the text and the translation a new legitimacy, notably thanks to the decision made by the founder, 50 years previously, to publish *Le Moine*, while indirectly pointing toward a potential source of mistakes.

A central question is obviously why, after having published the text in the same form for almost half a century, Corti should have introduced these changes, back-grounding the translator and fore-grounding the context of the original publication.

A clue is to be found in the text itself. Although the publisher states he has left Léon de Wailly's translation untouched, the "Haughty Lady" passage is gone. The text thus mirrors the original English edition for the first time.

What happened? What did the publisher discover? José Corti's manuscript? Well, this is part of what I have to find out.

Another question is whether the disappearance of the translator and the erasing of the "Haughty Lady" passage are related. Did the publisher discover that for fifty years they had been publishing a text that did not match what the paratext claimed? Did they decide to re-establish the "right" text, covering themselves with the reference to José Corti's manuscript... and putting the careless translator in the background?

## Conclusion

Since 1840, the publishing history of *Le Moine* in France has been grounded in a recurring theme, something like a quest of the origins. Each century has forged its own reference point and constructed an intended reading. Pivotal to these readings has been a translational paratext dating back to the nineteenth century—itsself based on a misleading edition of the text. In sharp contrast with the wordy paratext, the actual mobility of the text goes on covertly.

The reception history of *The Monk* in France now calls for another rediscovery: that of the first translation of *The Monk* (1797) which, in all likelihood, was indeed based on "the first original English edition".

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