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Research Article

John Anster's Memorable Translation of a Couplet from Goethe's *Faust*

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to describe and provide context for the translator John Anster's rendering of a couplet from the Prelude in Goethe's *Faust*. Anster's translation of a portion of Goethe's drama was published in 1820, making him the first English translator of a number of large extracts from the text. The couplet is of interest because it has become notable in English and is often used to inspire and motivate readers. Yet when we compare Anster's version to the original German, we see a very free rendering, one that brings up intriguing questions about the nature of translating poetry. We also see that Anster has been frequently criticized for straying too far from Goethe's lines. A close comparison of Anster's translation to Goethe's passage containing the couplet serves to illuminate how Anster's rendering diverges from the original. Lawrence Venuti's theoretical approach that describes a type of translation he calls "the poet's version" (2011) provides a useful framework for understanding some of the issues raised by this particular translation. By delving into Anster's rendering of this memorable quotation, we gain insight into the early history of translating *Faust* into English, the phenomenon of rendering poetry into another language, and the life of this particular couplet long after Anster's time.

Keywords: Translation, poetry, Goethe, *Faust*, John Anster, Lawrence Venuti

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Introduction

What you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!
Goethe's *Faust*, as translated by John Anster

The two lines above, attributed to the German poet, novelist and playwright Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, have been quoted in a variety of modern contexts, such as in writings about exploration, on greeting cards, coffee cups, calendars, and in self-help books. A search for the quote on Google turns up numerous instances–mainly as images–of contexts in which the quote has been used, and most of these attribute the lines to Goethe. In 1998, in response to inquiries about the exact origin of the quote, The Goethe Society of North America found that it came from the "Prelude at the Theatre" section of Goethe's dramatic poem *Faust*, and that the lines were taken from an English translation by John Anster (published in 1835), an early translator of the work. In addition, The Goethe Society explained that the quote was later popularized by the explorer, mountaineer, and writer W. H. Murray in his book *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition*, published in 1951. Murray had embedded the lines in a longer passage he wrote about finding the necessary resolve and commitment to begin an endeavor. Although Murray clearly gives Goethe credit for the couplet above, many people mistakenly attribute most of the passage about commitment to Goethe.[1]

The Goethe Society also commented specifically on the translation of the couplet, writing that it cannot truly be attributed to Goethe as it was a "very free translation" and an "inventive paraphrase" of the original source material, and it belonged to the longer passage by Murray (Lee, 1998, pp. 4-5). Hyde Flippo (2020), on the website *ThoughtCo*, weighs in as well on the question of whether or not the English version of the two-line quote can be attributed to Goethe. He first summarizes the findings of The Goethe Society, and concludes that the couplet is not at all attributable to Goethe:

> In fact, the lines quoted by Murray are just too far from anything Goethe wrote to be called a translation, although they do express a similar idea. Even if some online quotation references correctly cite W. H. Murray as the author of the full quotation, they usually fail to call into question the two verses at the end. But they are not by Goethe. Bottom line? Can any of the "commitment" quote be attributed to Goethe? No. (paras. 12-14)

Garson O'Toole (2016), author of the website *Quote Investigator*, presents eight lines of Anster's translation of this passage along with the source text and several other English versions of the lines, so that readers may compare Anster's version to these. O'Toole offers a more nuanced opinion of Anster's work, stating that the oft quoted couplet is "free and poetical" and that the lines should be attributed to Anster, with inspiration from Goethe (paras. 1-2).

The assessments outlined here echo those voiced by some early critics of Anster's translation. Hauhart (1909) summarizes these negative reactions: "Anster's version is not Goethe, but a paraphrase of Goethe," and he took "license" with the material. Critics wrote that Anster added so much material that the length of his rendering was double that of the original. Some called it a 'brilliant paraphrase' and an 'almost incredible dilution of the original' (pp. 121-124).[2]

This criticism of Anster's work underscores a point of view that tends to oversimplify the topic of translation by lifting the activity out of its context, and dismissing and marginalizing the efforts of the translator. It smacks of Venuti's "instrumentalism" (2019) in that these critics assume the original has a fixed meaning that must be extracted and reproduced in English. Granted, such ways of thinking are disappearing as the art of translation is becoming more visible, understood, and appreciated, due to advocacy by literary and translating organizations and translators themselves. Nevertheless, this bit of controversy surrounding Anster's translation of the couplet, which has only become famous in English (Germans themselves do not quote these two lines, although many other sayings from *Faust* have made their way into German), underscores a lack of understanding that persists in some circles about the nature of creative translation.

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[1] The entire passage from Murray's book is as follows with the "commitment quote" in bold:
... but when I said that nothing had been done I erred in one important matter. We had definitely committed ourselves and were halfway out of our ruts. We had put down our passage money—booked a sailing to Bombay. This may sound too simple, but is great in consequence. **Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:**
Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it! (pp. 6-7)

[2] Baumann (1907) points our specific errors in Anster's translation, p. 46.

When I began researching Anster's translation, I found it to be underexamined: the only sources available that analyzed passages from his version may be considered superannuated by some scholars. Furthermore, no one had examined the passage containing the popular couplet. Therefore, to shed light on the evolution of Anster's rendering of the couplet and the reception of his translation of the complete text in his lifetime, I briefly outline the history of translating *Faust*, or portions thereof, into English. In addition, I discuss Anster's version of the passage in which the couplet appears. His thoughts on the task of translating this work, that is, his theory of translation, will further illuminate his approach. My aim is to situate Anster's text in his time period and to understand his translating process. I contend that Anster's rendering should be evaluated as creative interpretation, part of which still resonates today. The enduring popularity of the couplet in English, moreover, has intriguing cultural implications that make it worth examining.

Historical Context of Anster's Translation

Although Goethe published *Part I* of his Faust drama in 1808, it took some time before an English translation was attempted. The play is based on the legend of Faust, said to have made a pact with the devil in exchange for power and knowledge. The first part of Goethe's work contains the "Dedication," "The Prelude at the Theatre," "The Prologue in Heaven," and the story of the seduction and destruction of Gretchen by Faust. Early reception of *Faust, Part I* in Britain was mixed; not many people knew how to speak or read German, and German literature was not held in high esteem. It did not help matters that a national German literature was only beginning to emerge in the late eighteenth century (Ashton, 1977, pp. 156-157; Hauhart, 1909, pp. 1-4). However, several German dramas from the Sturm und Drang period had received attention and praise: plays by Schiller, Goethe and Kotzebue had been translated into English by such literary figures as Walter Scott, Alexander Francis Tytler and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[3] Ultimately, these dramas came to be viewed as dangerous, due to their themes of rebellion and anarchy, and interest waned (Ashton, 1980, pp. 5-9; pp. 30-31).

Goethe was known because of the international popularity of his epistolary novel, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, published in an English translation (via French) in 1779. Goethe's *Faust. Ein Fragment* (1790) had also been translated into English and was being read. His material differed substantially from the legend the British were familiar with and Christopher Marlowe's treatment of it; hence, many readers did not understand Goethe's version and intentions and found the story to be immoral (Ashton, 1977, p. 156; Ashton, 1980, p. 1; Byatt, 2005, p. xvi; Hauhart, 1909, pp. 1-4). Hauhart explains that part of the reason for their incomprehension was the work's incomplete nature: "It lacked coherence and had no catastrophe"; furthermore, readers were bothered by the fact that it had no ending, and that Goethe's Faust was not punished for his sins (1909, pp. 21-22).

Gradually, the negative view of German literature changed in Britain.[4] One positive influence was Germaine de Staël's book *Germany (De l'Allemagne)*, which had appeared in 1810 and was translated from French into English in 1813.[5] When her book was translated into English, passages from Goethe's *Faust* that she had translated into French became known in English. The influence of *De l'Allemagne* was extraordinary and helped ignite general interest in German literature (Ashton, 1980, p. 13; Burwick, 2008, p. 70; Hauhart, 1909, pp. 27-28; Haynes, 2006, p. 3).

Another treatment of Faust in 1816 by Retzsch, published in German as *Umrisse zu Goethes Faust in 26 Blättern*, increased interest in Goethe's work. It consisted of plate illustrations of Goethe's material accompanied by descriptions; a translation of Retzsch's work, done by George Soane, appeared in English in 1820 as *Outlines to Goethe's Faust*. Soane added some translated passages from Goethe's *Faust* in 1821. Also appearing in 1820 was an analysis of *Faust Part I*, published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* along with some translated passages of the work in verse.[6] These translations were done by John Anster and are actually considered to be the first published English translation of large portions of the work (Casey, 1981, pp. 654-655; Hauhart, 1909, p. 33).

John Anster (1793-1867) was an Irish poet, translator, barrister, and law professor who had learned German at Trinity College when he studied there as a young man. He was a friend and protégé of Coleridge (Ashton, 1980, p. 63; O'Flanagan, 1867, p. 558).[7] He published many of his own poems, literary essays, and numerous translations of German poems (Casey, 1981, pp. 657-658; O'Flanagan, 1867, p. 557). As mentioned, there was early on a great deal of criticism of Anster's complete translation of *Faust*. In addition to the free rendering of the original, critics charged that Anster used blank verse where Goethe had used rhyme, thus avoiding the difficulties of translating poetry. Nevertheless,

[3] Coleridge had plans to translate *Faust*, which were unrealized apart from some lines. See Ashton's (1980) chapter on Coleridge for an enlightening report on this topic.

[4] See Ashton (1980) and Constantine (2005) for a detailed reports on renewed interest in German literature. In addition to de Staël, Thomas Carlyle's writings on the merits of Goethe's work were extremely influential.

[5] See Burwick (2008) for information on the English translators of *De l'Allemagne*, p. 73, note 16.

[6] See Constantine (2005, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii) and Luke (1987, p. xlix) for information on additional early translations of *Faust*.

[7] For evidence of the close relationship between Anster and Coleridge, see M. J. Ryan (1927, Jan-March).

Anster's poetic abilities were evident, which even his harshest critics admitted (Casey, 1981, pp. 656-657; Hauhart, 1909, pp. 121-124). One reviewer highlighted the translation's popularity and summarized: 'It is as an English poem that Anster's Faust must be regarded; and it is really astonishing with what felicity thoughts, the highest and deepest in German theology, and the subtlest in their metaphysics, find adequate expression in our language' (qtd. in Casey, 1981, p. 657). Casey writes that in his lifetime, Anster enjoyed "almost celebrity status for his translations" and that he was considered the foremost translator of *Faust* on the European continent (pp. 661-662).

A Close Look at Anster's Translation

The couplet appears in the "Prelude" ("Vorspiel auf dem Theater") section of Goethe's *Faust* (lines 33-242[8]). This part consists of a discussion between a theater director, a writer or poet, and a comic actor. The director desires the writer to produce a play that will draw in and entertain the masses—he does not care what it is, as long as it appeals to a lot of people. The poet is concerned with art and literary quality and feels that he must be in the right mood to produce a good play. The comic actor serves as an intermediary between the director and the poet and encourages the poet to mix art and entertainment, to mix in a grain of truth with the entertainment in order to educate the public while giving them something exciting to watch. Thus the Prelude is a discussion of what makes good theater and good entertainment, and it introduces an element of lightheartedness into the drama.

The Prelude also introduces motifs and themes that are central to the whole work. One important motif is the idea that art is the human way of creating order out of the chaos of being. Both the poet and the character Faust are striving to find the "order that holds together the contradictory and wavering elements of experience" (Bub, 1969, p. 792). The Prelude can be seen as offering an inspirational message on how creativity brings meaning to human life. Throughout the discussion about the nature of drama, the director becomes increasingly impatient and wants the poet to stop dreaming and to simply start making his magic (lines 57-58). The director's impatient words are the last ones of the Prelude: he is tired of all the words and debate and wants action, that is, the writing of a play, and he advises the poet not to sit around and wait for his Muse but simply to begin (lines 225-230).

Here I describe Anster's translation choices in the director's final speech (lines 214-230) in the Prelude, which contains the famous couplet. To attempt a measure of objectivity, I borrow criteria from a Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) model developed by Wook-Dong Kim in his 2018 article about Deborah Smith's award-winning translation of *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang. Kim chose his assessment criteria, a reformulation of two separate models proposed by Juliane House and J. C. Sager, to critique Smith's work and give examples of what he considers mistakes in Smith's translation. While *The Vegetarian* is a prose work, Kim points out that it exhibits strong poetic qualities, thus making his TQA a potential tool to examine Anster's poetic work in a systematic fashion. Kim's assessment categories are: 1) vocabulary errors, 2) homonymy errors, 3) undertranslation and overtranslation, 4) errors made on the syntactic level, and 5) words or phrases charged with culturally specific features (pp. 66-68). In contrast to Kim's goals,[9] my analysis does not aim to enumerate errors in Anster's work, but rather to examine his translation choices in order to understand his translating process and to point out divergences from the original text.

Vocabulary Errors

Vocabulary errors occur when the translator does not have sufficient command of the source language and therefore makes mistakes in choosing equivalent renderings in the target language (Kim, 2018, p. 68). Anster's knowledge of German was incomplete, and he admits that he was not always sure of the meaning of certain passages, according to Hauhart (1909, p. 35). However, I see no vocabulary errors in this portion of Anster's translation.

Homonymy Errors

Homonymy errors occur when a translator encounters words with more than one meaning in the source language (Kim, 2018, p. 69). In line 5 (Anster's translation, shown in Figure 1), Anster interpreted 'Stimmung,' (Goethe, line 218) most likely meaning 'mood' in this context, as the noun 'tuning,' in the sense of the tuning a musical instrument.

[8] Here I use the Erich Trunz edition of *Faust* (Hamburger Ausgabe, 1986). Note that Constantine (2005) translated *Faust* using this edition (p. xli).

[9] See Yoon for an insightful critique of Kim's evaluation of Smith's translation. She summarizes Smith's efforts:

While Smith, a first-time translator from Korean to English, has thus certainly made errors, they have little bearing on the overall success of the translation as a literary product. For Smith, the pursuit of literary and poetic goals is much more important than a pedantic adherence to fidelity. These aesthetic effects are achieved by employing lyrical and poetic language. (2023, p. 251)

Figure 1. Goethe's Lines (214-230), Author's Literal Translation, and John Anster's Translation

Goethe (lines 214-230)	**Literal Translation**
Direktor: 214. Der Worte sind genug gewechselt, 215. Laßt mich endlich Taten sehen! 216. Indes ihr Komplimente drechselt, 217. Kann etwas Nützliches geschehn. 218. Was hilft es viel von Stimmung reden? 219. Dem Zaudernden erscheint sie nie. 220. Gebt ihr euch einmal für Poeten, 221. So kommandiert die Poesie. 222. Euch ist bekannt, was wir bedürfen: 223. Wir wollen stark Getränke schlürfen; 224. Nun braut mir unverzüglich dran! 225. Was heute nicht geschieht, ist morgen nicht getan, 226. Und keinen Tag soll man verpassen. 227. Das Mögliche soll der Entschluß 228. Beherzt sogleich beim Schopfe fassen, 229. Er will es dann nicht fahren lassen 230. Und wirket weiter, weil er muß.	Director: 214. Words enough have been exchanged, 215. Let me finally see deeds! 216. While you turn compliments, 217. Something useful can be happening. 218. What does it help to talk a lot about the right mood? 219. It never appears to one who hesitates. 220. If you call yourselves poets, 221. Then bring forth (command) poetry. 222. To you is known what we require: 223. We want to slurp strong drinks; 224. Now brew it up for me without delay! 225. What does not happen today, will not be done tomorrow, 226. And no day should one pass up. 227. Resolve should what's possible 228. Courageously at once by the hair grasp, 229. It (resolve) will not then let it (the possible) go 230. And it will continue to operate because it must.
Goethe (lines 214-230) Direktor: 214. Der Worte sind genug gewechselt, 215. Laßt mich endlich Taten sehen! 216. Indes ihr Komplimente drechselt, 217. Kann etwas Nützliches geschehn. 218. Was hilft es viel von Stimmung reden? 219. Dem Zaudernden erscheint sie nie. 220. Gebt ihr euch einmal für Poeten, 221. So kommandiert die Poesie. 222. Euch ist bekannt, was wir bedürfen: 223. Wir wollen stark Getränke schlürfen; 224. Nun braut mir unverzüglich dran! 225. Was heute nicht geschieht, ist morgen nicht getan, 226. Und keinen Tag soll man verpassen. 227. Das Mögliche soll der Entschluß 228. Beherzt sogleich beim Schopfe fassen, 229. Er will es dann nicht fahren lassen 230. Und wirket weiter, weil er muß.	**John Anster's Translation** (note: numbering does not match original due to Anster's non-literal rendering) Director: 1. Come, come, no more of this absurd inventory 2. Of flattering phrases—courteous—complimentary. 3. You both lose time in words unnecessary, 4. Playing with language thus at fetch and carry; 5. Think not of tuning now or preparation, 6. Strike up, my boy—no fear—no hesitation, 7. Till you commence no chance of inspiration. 8. But once assume the poet—then the fire 9. From heaven will come to kindle and inspire. 10. Strong drink is what we want to gull the people, 11. A hearty, brisk, and animating tipple; 12. Come, come, no more delay, no more excuses, 13. The stuff we ask you for, at once produce us. 14. Lose this day loitering—'twill be the same story 15. To-morrow—and the next more dilatory; 16. Then indecision brings its own delays, 17. And days are lost lamenting o'er lost days. 18. Are you in earnest? seize this very minute— **19. What you can do, or dream you can, begin it,** **20. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.** 21. Only engage, and then the mind grows heated— 22. Begin it, and the work will be completed!

'Stimmung' can mean 'tuning' (cf. 'stimmen' = to tune), but here Goethe's director is urging the writers to get in the mood to write and produce the play. The director scoffs at how creative people procrastinate and make excuses about not being in the right mood to begin working. Although this may have been a misunderstanding on Anster's part, one could also argue that he intended 'Stimmung' to mean 'tuning' to create a music metaphor. The next line contains a command that is not in the original (an instance of "overtranslation," discussed in the next section): the director tells the poet to 'Strike up, my boy,' as in to strike a chord (line 6), thereby continuing with the music theme. It is impossible to say with certainty that Anster's rendering is a mistake, and it is similarly impossible to say with certainty what Goethe intended with the word.

Undertranslation and Overtranslation

Undertranslation refers to "a loss of meaning that occurs when the translator translates freely and creatively, leading to a type of overgeneralization" (Kim, 2018, pp. 70-71). I find no instances of undertranslation in Anster's version. Overtranslation refers to an "increase in detail" (Kim, 2018, p. 70); as we have seen, Anster was frequently criticized for doing this. Specific examples are as follows:

a. Line 1. 'Come, come' and 'absurd inventory' have been added in Anster's version. While the words are added, the sense of impatience in them is not an addition. Goethe writes in line 214 'Der Worte sind genug gewechselt'

(literally, 'Words enough have been exchanged'); 'genug' expresses the director's impatience. Furthermore, the director's impatience is again emphasized in line 215 where he orders the poet to take action: 'Laßt mich endlich Taten sehen!'

b. Lines 10-11. 'to gull the people' is not in Goethe's original, although one could assume it is what he meant with 'Wir wollen stark Getränke schlürfen' (Goethe, line 223). The metaphor indicates, on the one hand, that one must get in the mood to create poetry, and on the other, that the created material is like a drink because the director urges the poet to brew it up without delay in the next line, that is, get the poetry written. But Anster extends the metaphor here and describes the drink in detail in line 11 ('A hearty, brisk, and animating tipple') thereby making explicit what was only implicit in Goethe, expressed simply with 'stark Getränke'. Anster's lines 12 and 13 then align more directly with Goethe's.

c. Lines 16-22. These deviate the most from Goethe. Anster elaborates on the delay, leading to the famous couplet in lines 19 and 20. Then in lines 21 and 22, he rephrases the sentiment. Goethe's 'resolve' ('der Entschluß' (line 227)) becomes 'boldness' in Anster. Anster further expands this section by having the director address the poet directly in line 18: 'Are *you* in earnest?' In addition, nowhere does Goethe say there is 'genius, power, and magic' in resolve or boldness, although he does attribute the ability to achieve one's goal to resolve. Again, Anster elaborates and makes explicit (or perhaps invents) what Goethe does not.

Syntactic Errors

These errors have to do with misunderstanding grammatical features (rather than vocabulary items) in the source language (Kim, 2018, p. 73). Anster's translation is free and creative and does not attempt to replicate the German syntax; thus it is difficult to determine whether he committed such errors.

Culturally Specific Features

Translating nuances relating to cultural aspects can be daunting (Kim, 2018, p. 75). In Anster's version, there appears to be only one culturally specific reference that has not been carried over. Goethe has the director tell the poet to seize the opportunity by its hair ('beim Schopfe' line 228). Native speakers of German would most likely recognize that 'Schopf' (shortened from 'Haarschopf' = a shock of hair) has a metaphorical meaning in this phrase. While Anster does indicate that the poet should seize the opportunity (lines 14-16), he does not bring over the image of someone or something being grabbed up by its hair. To provide modern examples in which this image has been carried over, we see that Luke translates the lines as 'Seize Chance's forelock and waylay/The possible before it slips away' (1987, p. 9, lines 228-229). Constantine renders it as 'Let Resolution seize the Possible/Bravely by the forelock right away' (2005, p. 10, lines 227-228). On the other hand, Williams does not employ the image; his translation reads 'You've got to grab your chance, or else it's gone/It doesn't come round twice, so don't be slow' (1999, p. 9, lines 227-228). As with all the examples in this analysis, we simply cannot say with certainty that Anster did not understand the reference; all we can assert is that he did not literally translate it.

Views on Translating Poetry

The foregoing analysis reveals that Anster did indeed depart from the original text freely and often. Reading this passage in its entirety, one definitely gets a sense of his enthusiasm and poetic talent. Anster's defense of his translation in the preface to the 1835 edition of his complete version of *Faust* focuses precisely on poetic considerations. There, he explains that paraphrasing (which led to the overtranslation, as noted) was necessary to convey the meaning of the original lines in English poetic form. He does not believe that he overly paraphrased—he feels rather that he labored to "render intelligible the full thought of the German words." He also defends his use of blank verse in places where Goethe used rhymed verse, another aspect of his translation that was criticized. Goethe did use blank verse in other parts of the poem; Anster elaborates that he was able to "preserve the character of Goethe's versification" with the trochaic endings of blank verse. He asserts that he stayed as close to the original as possible, given the constraints of composing poetry: "I allowed myself no liberties except those implied in the fact that I was translating a Poem, and was writing in the hope that the translation itself—at however humble a distance from Goethe's great Work—might be recognized as a Poem." Anster believes that the effect of Goethe's verse would have been lost had he tried to force the rhymes in English, and instead he preferred to use forms familiar to English-speaking audiences (1890, pp. viii-xii).

The challenges Anster faced in rendering poetry into another language are familiar to modern translators. Luke and Constantine feel strongly that the rhyming parts (not all of it is rhymed) of the play in German must be rhymed in English. In the introduction to his 1987 translation, Luke contends that the drama is first of all a poem, and that much

of the quality is lost if it is not a poem in English as well. The way Goethe said what he did matters as much as what he said: "Half the point of what Goethe says is lost if it lacks the musical closure and neatness of the way he said it." Yet Goethe did not use the same rhyme scheme throughout, and he also produced unrhymed lines, prompting Luke to render the rhyme pattern in English in a variety of ways (1987, pp. l-li). Constantine reframes this idea by maintaining that poetry translators must make frequent use of the technique of 'compensation' in order to achieve an "equivalence of effect" (2005, pp. xxxix-xl).

Anster's statements on how he translated align with approaches to translation during his time period. According to Burwick, the goal "was not simply to adapt the original to the target language, but also to meet the cultural expectation of stylistic form and aesthetic appeal." Burwick explains that Alexander Fraser Tytler (*Essays on the Principles of Translation* (1790)) put forward the idea that the words of the translation should be felt by its readers in the same way that readers of the original work perceive them. By the time Anster translated *Faust*, the notion was firmly established that a translation should be oriented towards its expected purpose. Thus, for example, academic works should be translated in a way that conveys the content accurately. In contrast, translating a work of theater for the public "means conforming to the modes of comedy or tragedy already familiar to the local audience." Poetry was considered yet another matter with a type of "tug-of-war" of forces: it was pulled "between the principle of fidelity to the original and the principle of cultural adaptation." While some poetic translations might choose to highlight the foreign quality of the work, making the English "strange, occult, exotic," others exuded a type of "authorial immediacy, the illusion of the creative 'presence' in the work." At times this assimilation went quite far, leading the translation to "appropriate the entire text, transforming it into an entirely new work" (2008, pp. 68-69).[10]

Venuti places the debate about fidelity to the original in a different light: he outlines a practice of translating poetry, mostly carried out by poets, that goes by various names, including 'translation,' 'adaption,' 'imitation,' or 'version.' The newly created text—the poet's version—relates to the original as follows: "The resulting text derives from a specialized source, but it may depart so widely from that source as to constitute a wholesale revision that answers primarily to the poet-translator's literary interests" (2011, p. 230). Venuti finds that this type of translation is rooted in the twentieth century, with Ezra Pound being the first practitioner of the form. Pound's knowledge of Chinese was limited, a circumstance that did not deter him from translating classical Chinese poems (pp. 231-232).

Venuti contends, moreover, that the translated text is "recontextualized" in that it is created in such a way that the receiving culture will understand it and find it meaningful. This point matters because it puts the focus on the translator's choices and processes. For example, the type of meter that works well in the source poem may not work well in the poetry of the target language. In addition, when a poem is brought over into another culture, new meanings and associations are generated from the newly created work (pp. 236-237). De Staël articulated a similar idea when she expressed her belief that translation enriches the target language with 'imported beauty' and 'new turns of phrase and original expressions' (as quoted in Burwick, 2008, p. 70).

Venuti's hermeneutic model has as its basis his conviction that the poet's version is a translator's interpretation of an original source, and that it is simply not true that the source has a fixed meaning. As Baer (2021) explains, "the source text meaning does not exist 'a priori', somehow before the text is subjected to interpretation" (p. 369). Attempts to pin down a fixed meaning are instrumentalist, argues Venuti, and critics must stop evaluating translations solely in terms of fidelity to the originals (2019, pp. 16-17; 39).[11]

Anster offers an excellent example of the poet translator described by Venuti. Although he had knowledge of German, it was not complete. He had no previous translations to consult, as he was the first translator to attempt to bring Goethe's play over into English. He worked as an established poet who was so moved by the original that he was inspired to translate it; in the process of creating a poem in English, he emphasized aspects of Goethe's passage and made some lines more explicit. His version of the couplet can be seen as an original enrichment to the English language.

How should we assess a translation if not by comparing it to the original to determine how close a rendering it is? Venuti suggests that a "translation might be evaluated according to its impact, potential or real, on cultural and social institutions in the receiving situation," among other considerations (2011, p. 240). From the overall positive reception of Anster's translation, interest in the play grew, in part because the English version was perceived as a poem, which conveyed certain values of Anster's culture–that 'boldness' has 'genius, power, and magic' for instance. There is no doubt that Anster's verses had great impact in his day, and the memorable couplet has survived to the present time.

[10] Also see Constantine (2006, pp. 225-226) for remarks concerning the debate during this time period on whether to domesticate a foreign text or highlight its foreignness.

[11] See two thoughtful reviews for descriptions of weaknesses in Venuti's model: B. J. Baer (2021), and C. Le Bervet (2021).

Conclusion

In summary, Anster's version of the lines examined here is that of a poet in that he sought to create an English poem by attempting to capture the passion and urgency of the director's feelings. Ultimately, his complete translation of the work was superseded by others that were considered more accurate (and less freely rendered).

Yet it cannot be ignored that the Anster version of the couplet has remained popular over many years, and has taken on a life of its own in the English language. Modern critics who dismiss Anster's efforts may lead readers to miss out on the history of translating *Faust* into English and miss out on the opportunity to investigate the translation themselves and form their own opinion of it. Furthermore, when we ignore Anster's contribution to popularizing Goethe's work, we fail to understand an essential reason the two lines of the commitment quote have endured. Writers who use the quote to preface their books and merchandisers who use it to sell their products understand on some level that the quote aligns with cultural values that place emphasis on self-reliance and bold action. This is the aspect of Goethe's words that Anster reformulated and highlighted in his translation. For many, the Anster version, and its attribution to Goethe, are important and inseparable sides of the same coin. Simply put, the English version is *by* Goethe–Anster's name, perhaps even that fact that there was a translator involved, is long since forgotten.

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