

Yayın Değerlendirme

**THINKING ABOUT A PROSPECTIVE METHOD OF
TRANSLATION CRITICISM UPON AN ANALYSIS OF
BERMAN'S TOWARD A TRANSLATION CRITICISM:
JOHN DONNE¹**

Fundagül APAK²



Antoine BERMAN

What kind of method do we need in translation studies to make the proper criticism of any kind of translation or literary translations? As researchers, we have been searching for a satisfying answers to this question throughout the centuries.

Carol Maier (1998, p. 205) who mentions how the concept of “criticism” is approached within historical periods, referring to the work of other researchers, explains the difference between the “reviewer” and the “critic” as such: “The reviewer alerts a reader to new books, describing them and passing judgement as to whether they are worth reading and buying; the critic addresses books that may or may not be new, considering them in detail and usually assuming a reader’s familiarity with them”.

¹ Bu çalışma; dergide her ne kadar “review” başlığı altında verilmiş olsa da adı geçen kitaba gönderme yapılarak, Antoine Berman’ın temellerini attığı bir çeviri eleştirisi yöntemi irdelendiği için aynı zamanda, bir “çeviri eleştirisi yönteminin analizi” olarak dikkate alınmalıdır. Derginin ilerleyen sayılarında, Berman’a ait bu yöntemin de içinde bulunduğu “uygulama”ya yönelik bir çalışmanın yayımlanması düşünülmektedir.

² Yrd. Doç. Dr. heatherrose13@gmail.com

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Translation studies today have reached a point where the critic, especially the translation critic is responsible for a much heavier duty: establishing a valid model which enables an ideal translation criticism.

Antoine Berman who was born in 1942 and died of a brain tumor in 1991 at the age of 49, in his book *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne*, which he wrote in his deathbed, was searching exactly for the answer of this question. The book published in France in 1995 under the title *Pour Une Critique des Traductions: John Donne* was translated into English in 2009.

Berman before his above mentioned last study, made translations from Latin American, German and American literature and independent from the French educational system, worked as (founding) manager and lecturer both in an educational institution founded by François Chatelet and Jacques Derrida (The Independent Collège International de Philosophie) and in a translation centre (The Centre Jean Amyot) associated with the University of Paris. During this period, while working together with Henri Meschonnic as the co-editor of *Les Tours de Babel* as well, Berman wrote several articles for various journals (*Poésie, Poétique*). The university education he had received on Philosophy had provided him with solid intellectual background. His dissertation being about the German Romantics and his wife Isabelle being an Argentinian, residing together with him in Latin America both made it possible for Berman to continue with his work on translation studies in an extensive scope.

The period that started in the 70s when thinkers of translational studies began to get rid of “source text oriented and prescriptive” approaches and tended towards “target oriented and descriptive” works, set in to take its real form through “post-structuralist and post-colonial” movements that had an influence over cultural and literary fields starting from the 80s. Therefore, during the 90s the thinkers focusing on analysis and research according to “interpretive and critical” perspectives, were brought to the agenda due to their search for an “integrative method” (q.v. Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2005, pp. 13-29) with an emphasis on the importance of “objectivity” and an intent to achieve it. Especially the concept of “shifts of expression” introduced in 1970 by Anton Popovič, succeeded in overcoming the rigid manner of the source oriented and prescriptive approaches. In this context Popovič (1970, p. 85) stating that “the shift of expression is as a rule the basic principle governing the changes that occur in a translation. An analysis of the shifts of expression, applied to all levels of the text, will bring to light the general system of the translation, with its dominant and subordinate element.” notes the following while explaining how “shifts of expression” can be recognized among translations: “All that appears as new with respect to the original, or fails to appear where it might have been expected, may be interpreted as a shift.” (Popovič, 1970, p. 79)

This historical period stretching from the 1970s to the 2000's in translation studies, again and again causes the questioning of the source and target texts, the identity of both the writer, the translator and the reader, all different cultures

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and power relations, the concepts of description, interpretation, evaluation, translation and criticism, all both separately and as a whole. *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne*, has been written with an effort to achieve an “integrative method” in translation criticism, while searches for all these discourses, theories and methods in translation studies have been in progress.

On page viii, the translator of the book, says the following about the purpose of Berman in writing this book: “Berman’s purpose is to develop a method that is specific to translation and that can bring to light translation’s capacity for self-reflection.” Berman (2009, p. 49) himself on the other hand, reveals his purpose in his own words: “My purpose is not to present a model but a possible analytical path.” Thus, Berman is well aware of the difficulty in putting forward an integrative model for the field of translation criticism and also acknowledges that the time he has to develop this model will not be enough. Furthermore, he senses that the next generations aside from “limitless network of meaning” falling within the area of survey of Hermeneutics, together with new orientations and perspectives in translation studies, may very well choose to search for different methods. That’s why in this book, rather than imposing a “model” for translation criticism; he tries to establish one of the “possible analytical pathways” leading to that certain model.

We see that the book is divided into three main chapters: While the first chapter consists of thoughts on theory and method, the second chapter, presents a comparative analysis –in the light of the method attempted to be specified in the first part– between the translations (by Auguste Morel, Jean Fuzier & Yves Denis, Philippe de Rothschild, Octavio Paz) of “Going to Bed” which is one of the elegies of John Donne (1572-1631) and the source text. The third chapter, concentrates on how the translation of Dennis and Fuzier is perceived in the French literary system. The most comprehensive chapter with its 120 pages, is the second one where the translations are compared with their source texts. Berman has fictionalized his book according to the order of the method he has set off to develop for translation criticism:

Berman first of all tells us about the method which is going to light the way for a translation criticism model and as a result of which kind of thinking processes he has established this model and in this context mentions points such as the “definition of (translation) criticism, negative and positive translation criticism, paratexts, (re)reading(s) of the target and the original texts, translation-criticism/translator-critics, criticism on micro and macro levels”. While strolling along these matters, what is noteworthy for us is the “dilemma” Berman experiences. On the one hand, Berman mentions that in the case of the history of translation criticism, those made from the past until today have been highly insufficient and destructive and includes these kind of criticisms, under the group of “negative translation criticism”. On the other hand, bringing up the results of his translation evaluations concluded during a period before the writing of this book, with a discourse belonging to “negative translation criticism” Berman (2009, pp. 23-25) says:

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In my research and my seminars, I have been led to analyze or criticize a number of translations. It goes without saying that no traductological research can be done without such analysis or criticism [...] Even if I sharply question some translations of Donne, Plato, Benjamin, and so forth, even if the work of analysis uncovers serious errors, I have always wanted to avoid systematic attacks and rather, when possible, look for the reason or reasons for these errors. In the total count, nine of my analyses are positive 'evaluations' (Hölderlin, Chateaubriand, Klossowski, Deguy, Paz, Jouve, Roud, Amyot, Oresme); three are mixed (Robert, Guerne, Thiériot), that is, according to the analysis, these translations possess some weakness; and four are negative (Mora, Gandillac, Fuzier/Denis, Rothschild). In this last case, the analysis suggests that they are not 'bad' translations, but seriously defective (Gandillac), poetically insufficient (Mora's Sappho), or based on a misguided project (Rothschild, Fuzier/Denis).

On page 29 of his book, Berman tells again: "Without dogmatic a priori, one can safely say that most translations are insufficient, mediocre, average, even bad, and this without *at all* questioning the talent or the professional ethics of their authors." In this case, even if the translator of the book talking about the translation criticism attitude of Berman on page viii, quotes "He avoids the naive and mostly fruitless discussions of 'fidelity' and 'faithfulness.'" Berman's discourses on the subject contradict with this statement.

So within the context of this work, what is "translation criticism" and how should an "ideal translation criticism" be?

According to Berman (2009, p. 3), if the definition of translation criticism basically means "bringing out the truth of a translation", then "a rigorous analysis of a translation, of its fundamental traits, of the project that gave birth to it, of the horizon from which it sprang, of the position of the translator" (ibid.) will become a current issue. At this point, the "criticism" definition of Berman, is in tune with the definition of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940); criticism seeks for the truth in the translation or criticism is "the releasing of its truth" (Sieburth, 2000, p. 321).

For Berman an effort of releasing the truth of the translation should prepare a space for retranslations and in this respect should be "productive". Berman (2009, pp. 78-79) mentions the following on this subject:

Applied to translated literature, this productive criticism will thus articulate, or attempt to articulate, the principles of a retranslation of the work in question, and thus of new projects of translation. It is not a question of proposing a new project (this is the work of the translators themselves) nor of playing the role of advice giver, but of preparing a space for retranslation in the most rigorous way possible.

Berman after examining the (French) translations of Donne's 19th century elegy ("Going to Bed"), makes his additional remark below. According to this, translation criticism should be made "silently" and in this criticism, instead of telling "concretely" how retranslations of Donne should be made, an "urge for retranslation" should be established by determining specificities of "global" and

“historical” spaces and the “principles” to be followed during the process should be presented as well.

Criticism must be silent. It is not its role to say how concretely Donne should be retranslated. Let us hope that criticism has fulfilled its task, sketched the global and historical space of such a retranslation, and presented the principles that this retranslation should follow. It will have exceeded its goal if, through its long digressions, it has awakened the desire for a retranslation (Berman, 2009, p. 199).

However, taking into consideration his previous discourses about the “destructiveness” of these translations, these thoughts of Berman regarding the “quality” of translation criticism, seem to lose their sincerity.

As per Berman, “translation” and “criticism”, therefore “translator” and “critic” are tightly related to each other; the translator acts like a critic at all stages of the translation. Berman (2009, p. 28) explains the situation as such: “[...] criticism and translation are structurally related. Whether he feeds on critical works or not in order to translate such-and-such a foreign book, the translator acts like a critic at all levels.” Therefore Berman, in his method which suggests an ideal translation criticism model, concentrates on the “translator” and the “translation”. The main points of this method according to the explanation made by Massardier-Kenny on page ix of the book are as follows:

- 1- The translation critic must read and reread the translation as an autonomous text. Then, (s)he must read the source text.
- 2- The translation critic must analyze the source text in terms of its stylistic “regularities”, which may involve an analysis of its rhythm and semantic and metaphoric networks.
- 3- The translation critic becomes familiar with secondary material (prefaces, afterwords, glossaries, interviews) written by the author and the translator in order to prepare for the comparison between original and translation. Then, based on his/her interpretation of the literary work, the critic selects specific passages in the text where the singularity of the work is concentrated, what Berman calls “signifying zones”.
- 4- The translation critic must focus on the translator to determine his or her “translating position”, “translating project” and “translating horizon”.

In this “target oriented” approach, the target text positioned at the focus of translation criticism, has to be dealt with as an “autonomous” text in the literary system of the target culture and has to be studied through readings which are continuously repeated. According to Berman (2009, p. 26) who mentions that on the road to an ideal translation criticism, aside from the translation, also the source text definitely has to be read and analyzed, dealing with both the translation and the source text, is essential in translation criticism because “criticism is ontologically bound to the work”

Nevertheless, in the translation criticism method he proposes, giving priority to reading the translated text, Berman brings to mind also the following question: If the person to criticize a translation is in command of more than one language

and has firstly read the source text and then the translated text and comes up with an urge to criticize, in this case, does Berman's method lose its validity because priority is given to reading the "target" text? This condition is also valid for, the translation criticism method, theory and/or discourse giving priority to reading or examining the "source" text. A critic upon his wish and/or necessity should be able to render "prior" the source text or translation during its reading phase. For example, when "intersemiotic translation" is the case, during the process of translation criticism, the need to provide the critic with "possibility of choosing", becomes even more evident. Someone who has not read the source and/or target text, but has seen the "movie", for the sake of satisfying his/her curiosity and/or conducting a scientific research on the subject, should "as a priority" have the possibility to read and compare with each other both the source text and written translations of it upon his/her wish. In my opinion, the "independence of choosing" and/or the "possibility of concurrent comparative reading" that will come up during the phase of reading and examining source and target texts, will provide the critic practicing the translation criticism with a large spectrum of perspectives and/or interpretations.

With respect to Berman, in a comparison between source and target texts, the critic referring to "secondary material", plays an essential role in determining the "signifying zones" necessary for a vigorous criticism. The "signifying zones" expected to represent all significances of both the source and target texts during the criticism, can be both in "micro" (phoneme, syllable, punctuation...) and "macro" (sentence, paragraph, style, genre, ideology...) levels. Herein Berman notes two "translation analyzes" he considers to be important until that day. Although he finds one of these analyzes, "Engagé Analysis" which belongs to Henri Meschonnic and involves a "micro" scaled approach, offensive and militarist, he still considers it to be scientific and also useful because it takes advantage of modern sciences (linguistics, semiotics, poetics...). On the other hand, he makes a criticism about the "source oriented" nature of Engagé analysis and refers to the "Descriptive Socio-Critical Analysis" which presents researchers with an approach which is both "target oriented" and "macro" scaled. Even though this analysis is important in terms of departing from "source text oriented and prescriptive" approaches, it fails to avoid the criticism of Berman.

Translation is considered as a part of literary translation in "Descriptive Socio-Critical Analysis". That said, Berman criticizes the "Polysystem Theory" of Itamar Even-Zohar (1939-), –one of the thinkers of Tel-Aviv School– who has included this analysis in his studies and the "norms" concept of Gideon Toury's (1942 -) again one of the members of this school. Berman (2009, p. 40) in his criticism on the subject of polysystem theory, mentions that "translated literature" is situated neither at the "centre" nor on the "periphery" and continues: "The whole schema periphery/center needs to be revised. The fact that translation has always had a problematic status within the center does not mean that it is at the periphery. Translated literature is neither at the periphery

nor at the center.” Again finding Toury’s “norms” too “functionalist”, Berman (2009, p. 45) emphasizes that in this approach, there is no place for the “translating subject”: “The dominance of functionalism, even in an enriched version, prevents, in my opinion, any reflection about the translating subject”.

For Berman (2009, p. 39) who criticizes the Tel-Aviv School with his words “Like all functional theories this translation school, despite its sociologizing historicism, is blind to the uniqueness of history” in relation to the above mentioned points, each translation is personal and because it is so, it is also equally subjective and hence along the historical process, it is very difficult to make a “definition of translation” (Berman, 2009, p. 46).

According to Richard Sieburth (2000, p. 322) “rejecting both the extremes of the *sourciers* and *ciblistes* (that is, of source- or target-oriented methodologies), Berman attempts to establish a flexible middle ground derived at once from the tradition of modern hermeneutics (Heidegger, Ricoeur, Jauss) and from Schlegel’s (and subsequently Benjamin’s) concept of *Kritik*”.

As one can see, Berman in this method where he tries to form boundaries on the track of reaching an ideal translation criticism, is under the influence of “Hermeneutics”. “Traditional Hermeneutics” coming forward as an essential branch of theological studies during the Middle Ages and Renaissance; becomes “philosophical” together with the birth of German Romanticism. While the question “How is it read?” is replaced with the question “How do we communicate?”, this transformation initiated by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and other thinkers, accompanied by the “ontological” approach developed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), begins to comprise not only the symbolic communication but also human life and its existence. At this juncture, in Hermeneutics both an interpretation of the text is performed and the rules of text interpretation are considered, on top of all this, the theory is tackled.

As per Gadamer, who emphasizes the historicity of understanding, any kind of interpretational act is included within the rotary movement between the existing sensibility of the reader-interpreter regarding the entirety and the examination of the pieces. According to Gadamer, emphasis is on the “interpreter” (receiver, reader, translator, critic...):

Gadamer highlights the dialectic of participation and distancing that marks the effort to understand, and stresses the historicity of the interpreter who is confronted with the ‘otherness’ of the data to be interpreted, even though the latter are part of a historical continuum that comprises the interpreter as well. Being exposed to history is the precondition for understanding but makes self-understanding problematic. While it prevents a globalizing view from above, it permits a ‘fusion of horizons’, the always provisional and hard-won meeting at the intersection between the familiar and the alien (Hermans, 2009, p. 132).

While Berman (2009, p. 63) explains the concept of “horizon” mentioned in the phrase “the horizon of translator” which belongs to hermeneutics and is included in the fourth stage of his translation criticism he has been trying to

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develop, as “The horizon is the set of linguistic, literary, cultural, and historical parameters that determine the ways of feeling, acting, and thinking of the translator.”, he also refers to the “horizons of expectations” (q.v. Berman, 2009, p. 64) of the readers of the target culture. According to this, since the horizon of expectation changes from person to person and/or society to society, the points (sentence, meaning, style, ideology...) the analysis is based upon within the scope of translation criticism, will change as well. Again according to Berman, this situation will affect the perception of the translations among the target culture.

Based upon Berman's analysis and the study on John Donne's translations made in/into the French culture, we all of a sudden comprehend why all of them are labeled as “scandals” in the target culture. The reason for this, is that the norms belonging to the English poetry system are not approved by the French poetry system and beyond that are considered incomprehensible. In other words, the horizon of expectation of the French culture doesn't overlap with the English culture. For example, features like “the introduction of prose into poetry as a refreshing power”, “focusing on outside appearances in poetry” or “utilization of gestures and mimics in poetry” which are considered normal for the English literary system, have been refused by the French literary system. This, results with an avoidance to translate John Donne into the French culture for a very long time.(q.v. Berman, 2009, p. 169-199).

As A Result

Berman who has taken a step towards putting forth an ideal translation criticism model and has tried to set the boundaries of a four staged method, in this work adopts a target text and translator oriented approach. Additionally, in order to be able to achieve an ideal translation criticism, besides the target text and the translator, Berman also pays importance to the source text, the writer as the source of the source text and the source culture system, the perception of the source text and the writer within their period and culture, their perception among the target culture system and the secondary sources. In this respect, Berman's approach presents a comprehensive method in terms of translation criticism and makes an obvious effort to combine theory with practice.

Nevertheless, Berman exhibits a “biased” manner in the analysis of John Donne translations. Before clarifying this issue with a few examples, let us remember the model of Raymond van den Broeck. In this model, Broeck (1985, p. 61) makes the following warning about the attitude of the critic: “He must never confuse his own initial norms with those of the translator.” Therefore, the critic has to be objective in his criticism. We see that this warning is not taken into account by Berman. For example, Berman states that in the translation by Fuzier & Denis, there is a constraint in the utilization of “archaic” words. On the other hand, he praises Morel, mentioning that in his translation, words belonging to the 16th century, have been utilized skillfully and that this archaism has brought “youth, refreshment, light” into the French poetry system. Similarly the

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translation made by Yves Bonnefoy is also successful according to Berman, because the translator steers away from an "ornamental language" and "simplifying" and "intensifying" his discourse, manages to place Donne in the "present time" of France. He also considers Octavio Paz "successful" both for revealing his project and making a free translation and furthermore for keeping up with the target system norms; Paz while overcoming the difficulties caused by the differences between the two cultures, has made use of elements of "simplification" and "intensification" in his translation. At this point Denis & Fuzier have proven "unsuccessful" due to their attempt of over-dressing their translation, whereas Paz has proven "successful" by undressing his (q.v. Berman, 2009, pp. 80-199).

By his method, in which he has tried to develop an engaged togetherness of both theory and practice, Berman has made an effort to put forward "how" an ideal translation criticism should be. Taking into consideration the negative conditions under which he has written this book, I believe that would he have survived, he would certainly carry translation criticism to completely different dimensions.

Sherry Simon (1999, p. 117) raising her hat to Berman's work, emphasizes on this subject: "Translation, as theory and as practice, Berman showed, *must* be a mode of engagement. His careful and passionate writing remains a compelling model of that engagement."

At this stage yet another question comes to mind: Who actually should be the person to make an ideal translation criticism?

In this study, even if not "directly" we may as well see an "indirect" answer to this question: People, who are open to interdisciplinary studies and can combine theory with practice, just like Berman.

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