



Translators' Choices in *Tartuffe* Les choix des traducteurs du *Tartuffe*

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Article abstract

Selected passages from twelve English translations of Molière's *Tartuffe* are studied. The passages are chosen because of questions they raise about the language of everyday life and of religion in seventeenth-century France. The translators choose the extent to which they will keep the structures and references of the original text, or adapt them for easier access by a contemporary audience. They also choose between the French tradition of a dark, menacing interpretation, and the North American one of seeking the maximum of laughs.

Translators' Choices in *Tartuffe*

Nancy Senior

Translators make choices at every point, some explicit and some implicit, some made at the beginning and others arising in the course of translation. The sum of these decisions can make for very different versions of the same work.¹ In this paper treating twelve twentieth-century English versions of Molière's *Tartuffe*, I will first make some remarks on the kinds of choices made by the translators. Then I will look in detail at how they deal with a few short passages, chosen to illustrate aspects of seventeenth-century French language, religion and everyday life. The eight prose translations included here are by Stanley Appelbaum, Haskell M. Block, David Edney, Miles Malleson, Renée Waldinger, A. R. Waller, and John Wood, as well as one, published in the Modern Library series, where the name of the translator is not given. The four verse translations are by Morris Bishop, Donald Frame, Christopher Hampton and Richard Wilbur. I have not included versions that are very free adaptations.

The kinds of choices

Any translator of Molière, and indeed any literary translator, must choose where he or she stands on the continuum between, on the one hand, bringing the work to the public, and on the other hand bringing

¹ Ideally, different translations of a work should be considered in their entirety, particularly when the object is to evaluate their relative merits. Since this procedure is cumbersome when more than two or three versions are considered, and since this study aims to illustrate some general points about choices rather than to judge the translations as a whole, only short passages will be compared.

the public to the work.² Should the reader or theatre audience be expected to make an effort to understand the play and its time, or should the play be adapted to appeal to the taste of the public? Each translation will bring a different answer, as will each production of a play.

A theatrical text has of course two possible destinations. It can be performed, with each production supplying a different interpretation. It can also be read with no intention of putting it on stage, in which case the reader's imagination supplies an individual interpretation, including a vision of the characters, their relations, and the overall meaning of the play. In effect, the play might be compared to a novel consisting of dialogue, stage directions, and in some cases more or less copious notes. In this way theatrical texts reach a public which does not have access to stage performances for geographical, financial or other reasons. Although different aims of translating a play are not mutually exclusive, a translator will probably have one uppermost in mind: is the play to be performed, will it most often be read, will the translation accompany the original text as an aid to the reader? Hampton and Malleon refer to specific productions of their texts; Wilbur mentions audiences' reactions to his (frequently-performed) verse translations; Edney gives alternate versions of the officer's speech in the final scene, depending on whether the director chooses a seventeenth-century setting or a modern one. On the other hand, the manner of presenting Appelbaum's and Waller's English texts makes visible their relation to the original French on facing pages, and allows the reader to pass easily from one to the other.³

Many factors other than purely literary ones may affect translations, particularly when a play is to be performed (as is so often

² In an essay first published in 1813, Friedrich Schleiermacher characterizes the two approaches in extreme terms. He sees only two roads open to the translator: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him: or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and leads the author to him." (Schleiermacher, 1977, p. 75)

³ In the introduction, Appelbaum acknowledges a tension between two goals: to provide a translation that is "literal, in English prose, line for line", and "to offer an acting version" without copyright entanglements. (p. xiii)

the case for Molière, who always wrote for the stage). Susan Bassnett criticizes “the link between theatre translation and crude economic concerns” which sometimes leads to questionable practices.⁴ As one might expect, the “crude economic concerns” she mentions are not cited to justify such practices; rather, a more respectable explanation is given. “It is principally among English language translators, directors and impresarios that we find the use of the notion of ‘performability’ as a criterion essential to the translation process.” (Bassnett, 1991, p. 102) Bassnett argues that assumptions about the relation of the text and performance on which this notion is based are “often oversimplistic and based on a concept of theatre that is extremely restricted”. (p. 103) Traditions of performance vary from one time and place to another, and there are “enormous differences in rehearsal convention, in performance convention and in audience expectation”. There is no such thing as a universal “performability”, and the concept should not be used to prove that changes must be made in order to make a play accessible to audiences. Bassnett’s argument can be used by those who think the public should come some distance to meet the work, rather than having the work come to meet the expectations of the public.

Neal A. Peacock shows more sympathy than does Bassnett with steps taken to obtain what he calls “theatrically successful solutions to the problem of translating Molière for the English stage” (Peacock, 1994, p. 83). He groups translators (or adapters) into three categories: conservationists, who wish to preserve all the features of the seventeenth-century structure, though in a renewed form; modernisers, who “have upgraded certain aspects for the modern age”; and post-modernisers, who “have knocked down and rebuilt the main structure but have reused some of the original materials” (p. 84). According to Peacock, Malleson subjected Molière’s texts to “the theatrical emendations appropriate to the English stage”, keeping the French setting and plot but having the characters speak in “a modern

⁴ Bassnett describes the contemporary British policy, as practiced by the National Theatre, in which “translators are commissioned to produce what are termed ‘literal’ translations and the text is then handed over to a well-known (and most often monolingual) playwright with an established reputation so that larger audiences will be attracted into the theatre. The translation is then credited to that playwright, who also receives the bulk of the income.” (Bassnett, 1991, p. 101)

idiom” (p. 85). Peacock considers Malleson to be halfway between conservationist and moderniser. Peacock’s language is revealing: the word “upgrade” seems to imply that modern versions are superior to the original work, and the expression “emendations appropriate to the English stage” suggests that a translator who departs from the rhythms of the original is doing the author a favour. According to Peacock, Malleson’s *Tartuffe*, dating from 1950, is even now a source for adapters who do not read the original French play. One may guess that their use of this version, already quite different from Molière in phrasing, will give an adaptation far from the original in many respects.

A translation of Molière may be intended to last for years, or, as Bassnett and Peacock point out, it may be aimed specifically at a particular production. The text of *Tartuffe* gives various indications about the title character, not all of which are compatible and coherent. Is Tartuffe a buffoon, a vulgar sensualist, a convincing con man, a menacing force of evil, a man trying but failing to lead a godly life? Does he fall in love with Elmire, or is he a habitual seducer? Is Elmire flirtatious, or just calm and clever? Does she enjoy Tartuffe’s attempt to seduce her, is it painful for her, is she tempted or disgusted? Molière’s text moves from comedy at the beginning to disturbing final acts. Should comedy be emphasized, at the expense of the serious material underneath? What kind of comedy should it be? How subtle or crude? A translator can emphasize one aspect of the action and characters, or keep many possibilities open.

French theatre has a long history of different interpretations for this play, as Roger Planchon observes: “When I decided to stage *Tartuffe* I studied all the previous productions. That’s when I realized that there is no such thing as tradition” (Quoted by Carmody, 1993, p. 56).⁵ In the twentieth century serious interpretations, including notably

⁵ Salomon’s *Tartuffe devant l’opinion française* confirms Planchon’s remark. At times in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, interpretations tended toward the indecent, no doubt to the delight of a certain part of the public but to the dismay of others. Napoleon congratulated Mademoiselle Mars because, unlike some of her predecessors, she played Elmire as “une honnête femme”, for “les gens de goût”. (Salomon, 1962, p. 138) In 1825, Stendhal notes that “l’on rit fort peu au *Tartuffe*”, though “on a plusieurs fois souri et applaudi de plaisir”. (Quoted by Salomon, 1962, p. 140)

those of Planchon, have been predominant.⁶ A modern sensibility often finds dark elements where seventeenth-century directors and audiences may have seen the opposite. In the final scene, the officer arresting Tartuffe announces that the King knows everything and reads all hearts. This flattery of Louis XIV was presumably meant to be reassuring at the time, and to win royal support in the controversy raised by the play. (See Salomon, 1962, Ch. 1 and 2.) Today it can sound considerably less benign. Planchon's staging, building on the invasion of private life, showed the terrifying power of a police state by means of a massive show of force in the arrest. In contrast, the North American tradition of playing *Tartuffe* tends toward broad, often farcical comedy, to the point that spectators may wonder how anyone could be taken in by such an obvious impostor.⁷ When the play is performed for the broadest laughs, much of the content is lost; character study disappears and menace is removed. Copley's remark about adaptations could apply as well to some stagings: "Molière has largely disappeared in the process; he has been transformed from a dramatic poet into an expert purveyor of near-farce." (Copley 1960, p. 116)

What language to use

The question of setting must be considered not only by the director of a performance, but also by the translator. To what extent is the audience supposed to see the play as set in a particular time and place? Should it be fully of its time, should it be timeless, or of the translator's own time? If the setting is specifically Molière's time, how much information should be given to help the present-day public understand things that people of Molière's time knew immediately? The language of translation will be chosen as a result of that choice. It can either keep

⁶ At the Planchon production, my first experience of the play on stage, I was surprised that there were no laughs at all. The Comédie Française version in 1997 was also serious. Both productions explored the nature of Orgon's attachment to Tartuffe. In Planchon, the implicitly homosexual element was brought out, though without any overt homoerotic acts. In the 1997 Comédie Française version, a broken-hearted Orgon embraces Tartuffe before the latter is led off by the arresting officers.

⁷ Edney relates how a festival adjudicator, baffled by a restrained production of *Tartuffe*, remarked sarcastically to the cast: "I have always wondered what it would be like to see *The Mikado* done seriously." (Edney, 1998, p. 61)

some strangeness, some feeling of the foreign origin of the text; or else it can aim for fluency, for a “naturalness” that gives the impression the work was written in the target language.⁸ The translator could in theory use language of the time the play was written. This option in its pure form is practically never chosen, for writing authentic-sounding seventeenth-century English is a daunting task, and the result would probably not be appreciated by the public. A commonly adopted middle way is to use modern English while avoiding anachronisms as much as possible, so that obviously recent words and references do not break the illusion. At the other extreme, especially for purposes of comedy, a translator may use deliberate anachronisms. (See Simon, 1976)

In the case of a verse play, the choice between verse and prose in the target language is probably the first definite decision to be made. Other considerations such as those discussed above no doubt underlie the decision; but only the question of verse or prose must receive an explicit answer before one can put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. Frame writes in an introduction to his translations that since “rhyme affects what Molière says as well as the way he says it”, it is worth while to use it in English as well. (Frame, 1967, p. xiv) In English as well as in the French original, rhythm and rhyme can create surprising and memorable lines. As Wilbur points out, Molière’s lines are arranged in intricate patterns of balancing half-lines, lines, couplet, quatrains and sestet. “There is no question that words, when dancing within such patterns, are not their prosaic selves, but have a wholly different meaning.” (Wilbur 1958, pp. x-xi. See also Waldinger, 1999.) Some other translators consider that prose is more suitable for the twentieth century stage. At about the same time Wilbur finds verse

⁸ Berman, referring to Schleiermacher's two poles, says that a translator who chooses the foreign work as exclusive master “runs the risk of appearing to be a foreigner, a traitor in the eyes of his kin”; if on the other hand he settles for a conventional adaptation, “he will have satisfied the least demanding part of the public, sure enough, but he will have irrevocably betrayed the foreign work as well as, of course, the very essence of translation.” (Berman, 1992, pp. 3-4) According to Venuti, a translated text is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when it gives the appearance “that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original.’” The translator's invisibility is “a weird self-annihilation, a way of conceiving and practicing translation that undoubtedly reinforces its marginal status in Anglo-American culture.” (Venuti, 1995, p. 1 and p. 8)

essential, Block argues that “the language of present-day prose is much closer to [Molière’s] idiom than that of verse” (Block 1958, p. xii), and Hampton says that the ingenuity demanded for rhymed translations “cannot avoid drawing attention to itself, somewhat at the expense of the line of the play as a whole”. (Hampton 1984, p. 8)

Translators of French classical theatre usually maintain a high level of decorum, corresponding to the *bienséances* required at the time. The restrictions on what could be said certainly did not make for dull comedies. Molière is often earthy but not obscene. In many plays he suggests improper things, and allows the audience to complete the thought. In *L’École des femmes*, a great deal is made of the fact that Horace has taken something from the innocent Agnès. The audience, along with her jealous suitor Arnolphe, can imagine things other than the ribbon that Horace has in fact stolen. Certain English versions of Molière take a different approach, using openly obscene language, with corresponding staging.⁹ Molière’s wit is replaced by crudeness, perhaps because the translator or director thinks that otherwise a modern audience will not understand the jokes.

One challenge to translators is to deal with word play, which may not survive the passage into another language. In Act I, sc. 2 of *Tartuffe*, when Cléante refers to Madame Pernelle as “cette bonne femme”, the servant Dorine remarks:

Ah! certes, c’est dommage
Qu’elle ne vous ouît tenir un tel langage :
Elle vous dirait qu’elle vous trouve bon,
Et qu’elle n’est point d’âge à lui donner ce nom.

The adjective *bon* is taken in several senses here, including uncomplimentary ones as well as the obvious favourable meaning. The 1694 *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* mentions that “un bon

⁹ Ranjit Bolt’s translation of *L’École des femmes* in Peter Hall’s production (London, 1997) was apparently quite successful; it pleased many members of the public and was praised by some critics. However, having seen the production, I sympathize with one reviewer’s view that it was a great disappointment, with a translation “heavy-handed and awash with contemporary vulgarities”, and acting done in an “over-the-top farcical style”. (Urban Desires)

homme” can mean “Un vieillard, homme avancé en âge”, as well as “Simple, idiot”. Cléante’s reference to Madame Pernelle may be polite; on the other hand, it may refer to her age or to her limited intellectual capacities. Dorine then uses it in yet another sense; according to the *Dictionnaire*, “On dit aussi d’Un homme, Il a esté bon, pour dire, qu’il a fait ou dit quelque conte, soit avec esprit, soit par sottise.” According to Dorine then, if Madame Pernelle heard Cléante call her a *bonne femme*, she would object to the slighting reference to her age, and would say that he was being silly. None of the translators quite manage to replace all the word play by an equivalent one, though most transmit the general idea of the exchange and some do have Dorine make humorous remarks. Waldinger simply uses “old”, both for Cléante’s expression “this old lady”, and for Dorine’s reply: “she would soon tell you that you have some nerve and that she is not old enough to be called that”. Edney introduces another adjective: “What a strange, old lady!” Dorine takes up both: “‘Strange’ she might not like, but ‘old’ would really have her up in arms.” Bishop has Cléante say “that good woman”, to which Dorine replies that Madame Pernelle would say she is “not old enough yet to be good” — a clever remark, but perhaps not one that the prudish Madame Pernelle would make. Hampton’s Cléante exclaims: “Silly old...”, and his Dorine remarks: “I know / she’d tell you you’re the one who’s being silly / and that no one would ever call her old.” With Wilbur, Cléante begins a remark about “How that old lady...”, but is interrupted by Dorine’s observation: “She’d thank you for the *lady*, but I’m sure / She’d find the *old* a little premature.”

Everyday life then and now

More or less information may be included in a translation, particularly in the case of references to social or cultural matters. One may simply convey as directly as possible what is in the original text, or add additional information, or shorten or omit passages that risk losing audiences of one’s own time. References to things not familiar to the target audience can be translated without concession; alternatively, a more general term can be used, or the reference can be replaced by something that will give a similar effect. Sometimes a familiar term can be misleading. One might think that the deceptively familiar *mouchoir*, mentioned in Act I sc. 2, would present no difficulties. Dorine complains to Cléante about Tartuffe’s servant Laurent, who in her opinion is as unbearable as his master:

Le traître, l'autre jour, nous rompit de ses mains
Un mouchoir qu'il trouva dans une *Fleur des Saints*,
Disant que nous mêlions, par un crime effroyable,
Avec la sainteté les parures du diable.

A *mouchoir* could be a “Linge dont on se sert pour se moucher” (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*), that is, a handkerchief — not a frivolous thing, unless it is especially fine. Indeed, in his first appearance at the beginning of Act III, Tartuffe proffers his own *mouchoir* to Dorine, saying, “Couvrez ce sein que je ne saurais voir”. The *mouchoir* found in the *Fleur des saints* is more likely to be a “Mouchoir de col, Le linge dont les femmes se couvrent le col & la gorge” (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*), in which case it might be considered a “parure du diable” — though one would think that to wear a low-cut dress without one would be even more shocking, as Tartuffe’s reaction to Dorine’s appearance shows. (See Salomon, 1962, Ch. 1, on the controversy about *les nudités*) For *mouchoir*, Waller says “a handkerchief”; Waldinger “a fine handkerchief”; Edney and Wilbur “a kerchief”; Appelbaum, Block and Bishop “a neckerchief”; Hampton explains the function: “my lace bib”.

Another question arises in the same line. Is it necessary for the reader or spectator to know that the book in which the *mouchoir* was pressed was about the lives of the saints, or is it sufficient to know that it was a religious book of some sort? Frame keeps the French “*Fleur des Saints*”, The Modern Library version and Waller use the expression “*Flower of the Saints*”, Hampton gives “*The Lives of the Saints*”, Appelbaum explains that it was “a huge volume of saints’ lives”, Block generalizes to “a book about saints”, Edney and Waldinger change it to “a prayer book”. All those who use “*Fleur des Saints*” or “*Flower of the Saints*” keep the strangeness and remind us that the action is happening in 17th century France. “*Lives of the saints*” is less strange, “*prayer book*” perhaps even less so. The latter is based on what Eugene Nida calls the principle of “dynamic equivalence”, where the translator abandons parallel linguistic structures in order to give what he or she considers to be an equivalent effect in the target language. (Nida 1964, pp. 159-160) We may note that the eighteenth-century translators Baker and Miller go even further in this way, substituting a religious book familiar to an English audience, though certainly of dubious relevance to Catholicism: “*The Pilgrim’s Progress*”.

One of the funniest scenes in the play, the first one in which Orgon appears (Act I, sc. 4), presents a number of questions to the translator. The scene has been prepared by the various characters' comments about Orgon's infatuation with Tartuffe, and it confirms all that has been said. It gives information about Tartuffe himself, who has not yet been seen; the man's sensuality is revealed, in contrast with what has previously been said about his severity towards others.¹⁰ When Orgon, just returned from a trip, inquires what has happened in his absence, Dorine informs him that his wife Elmire has been ill. After each description of Elmire's suffering, Orgon asks: "Et Tartuffe?" Each time, Dorine tells him that Tartuffe has been well: he has eaten heartily, drunk copiously, and slept well. Orgon replies each time: "Le pauvre homme!" In the last of the exchanges, Dorine says that Elmire finally agreed to be bled, and felt better afterwards. Orgon asks the same question:

Orgon :	Et Tartuffe?
Dorine :	Il reprit courage comme il faut Et contre tous les maux fortifiant son âme, Pour réparer le sang qu'avait perdu Madame, But, à son déjeuner, quatre grands coups de vin.
Orgon :	Le pauvre homme!

Translation of this passage raises a number of questions concerning everyday life, including how to deal with words having several meanings, and words whose meanings have changed since the seventeenth century. Tartuffe drank to fortify "son âme", a term that may refer simply to oneself, or the soul (appropriate in the context of this play). It is translated as "his soul" (Appelbaum, Block, Waldinger, Frame), "his spirit" (Bishop), "himself" (Edney, Hampton, Modern Library, Waller, Wood), "his cheerfulness" (Bishop). The line is omitted by Malleson. Against what was he fortifying his *âme*? It could be "all ills" (Appelbaum, Waller), "all evils" (Block), "disease" (Edney), "all harm" (Modern Library), "the worst that might happen" (Wood), "trouble" (Bishop), "the blows of fate" (Hampton). The expression is replaced by a different formulation, "at any cost", by Wilbur and Frame. The latter two verse translators, working

¹⁰ It may well be that Molière has Dorine exaggerate for comic effect. When Tartuffe appears in Act III, he does not appear as clumsily obvious as Dorine's remarks suggest.

independently, came to the same solution because of the need for a rhyme with “lost”.

Wilbur: To keep his cheerfulness at any cost
And make up for the blood *Madame* had lost
He drank, at lunch, four beakers full of port.

Frame: And, girding up his soul at any cost
To make up for the blood *Madame* had lost
He downed at breakfast four great drafts of wine.

Few of the translators managed to capture Dorine’s ironic use of religious terminology to describe Tartuffe’s self-indulgent behaviour.

It was at *déjeuner* that Tartuffe drank the wine. As the origin of its name indicates, *le déjeuner* was the first meal, at which one ceased to *jeûner* (like the English “break fast”); people normally ate it several hours after rising.¹¹ Translators must decide whether to say “breakfast” or to translate it as “lunch”, as the word *déjeuner* is used in France today. The choice of “breakfast” is perhaps more comic; to a modern public the idea of drinking wine early in the morning is particularly odd. Appelbaum, Block, Edney, Malleson, Waller, Wood, Frame and Hampton say “breakfast”, while Bishop, Bolt, and Wilbur choose “lunch”, and Waldinger does not specify the meal. Wilbur and Frame keep in mind the whole line and its rhythm: “He drank, at lunch, four beakers full of port” (Wilbur); “He downed at breakfast four great drafts of wine” (Frame).

Tartuffe drank “quatre grands coups de vin”. How much was that? *Un coup* is not an exact measurement. Several translators choose “draughts” (or the variant spelling, “drafts”): “big draughts” (Appelbaum), “great drafts” (Frame), “large draughts” (Modern Library). For others, he drank four “glasses”: “large glasses” (Block), “big glasses” (Edney), “glasses full of wine” (Bishop). Waller has him

¹¹ Although the word now refers to the noon meal in France, it has kept the sense of “first meal of the day” in Canada. Its use recalls the practice of religious fasting (*le jeûne*). Since Tartuffe’s first words in the play, addressed to his servant but deliberately within earshot of Dorine, refer to his *haire* and his *discipline* (Act III, sc. 2), he no doubt also claims to practice other austerities. He tells Elmire that he tried to resist his attraction to her, but the sweetness of her looks “surmonta tout, jeûnes, prières, larmes” (Act III, sc. 3).

drink “four large bumpers”, Bolt writes “several stoups”, Wood has “good swigs” (a colourful word, but “three or four good swigs of wine” is not necessarily a large quantity), Hampton gives “tumblersful” (which suggests a large amount), and Wilbur writes “four beakers full of port”.¹²

Orgon’s repeated exclamation “le pauvre homme”, following Dorine’s reports on Tartuffe’s hearty appetite, is the chief source of laughs in the scene. Even today the adjective *pauvre* has a double meaning in French, expressing either pity or affection. Orgon could have used it in either sense in speaking of Elmire, in view of her illness. However, ignoring the news of his wife, he expresses his attachment to Tartuffe by this word. At the same time the audience thinks of the other meaning, clearly not applicable to Tartuffe. The English translator cannot have it both ways; he or she must choose “dear” or “poor”. Either Orgon says something in English that makes sense but is not very comic aside from the repetition, or else his exclamation is wildly inappropriate and thus funny. None of the translators find a way to have Orgon mean the remark one way while the audience takes it in another way. All of them, with one exception, use “poor”. Edney has considered the two possibilities; while in his article he mentions the expression “Poor man!”, in his own translation he writes “Dear man!”

Language sacred and salacious

The scene in which Tartuffe tries to seduce Elmire (Act III, sc. 3) presents another kind of challenge to translators, for Tartuffe uses religious terminology to speak of sensual desire. The scene must have been deliciously shocking to some members of the audience and truly horrifying to others. Its power depends on the widespread and ancient practice of using erotic language in speaking of religion. The love poems in the *Song of Solomon* were interpreted in Jewish tradition as an expression of God’s love for Israel. Christian commentators applied the same approach to the work, assuming the love to be that of Christ

¹² When I asked a number of people “What is a beaker?”, everyone said it was a piece of laboratory glassware, except for a British-born chemist who mentioned a container similar to a tankard. This odd result is no doubt skewed because the chemist knew the context in which the word was used.

for the Church. (See Reese, 1993) Over the centuries, writers such as John of the Cross have continued to use the language of human love to express love of God.¹³ The image of a nun as the bride of Christ is still used today in the Catholic Church.¹⁴ In the other direction, the language of religion was used in the literature of courtly love, where the lover's devotion to the lady was of a quasi-religious nature.

Many seventeenth-century religious writers presented the austere practices of religious devotion in terms of pleasure. One of the most eminent of these was François de Sales, whose extremely influential *Introduction à la vie dévote* was published in 1608. According to him, “la dévotion est le vrai sucre spirituel, qui ôte de l’amertume aux mortifications et la nuisance aux consolations.” (Sales, 1804, Première Partie, Ch. II) A prayer states: “Et vous, ô mon Dieu, mon Sauveur, vous serez dorénavant le seul objet de mes pensées; [...] vous serez les délices de mon cœur et la suavité de mes affections.” (Première Partie, Ch. X) Devout people are like happy birds in the air of divinity, “qui les environne de toutes parts de plaisirs incroyables”. (Première Partie, Ch. XVI)

Tartuffe's attempt to seduce Elmire must be seen in the light of this back-and-forth movement between sensual and mystic impulses and the expression of one in terms of the other. In his declaration, he assures her:

Que si vous contemplez d’une âme un peu bénigne
Les tribulations de votre esclave indigne

¹³ The sixteenth-century Spanish mystic John of the Cross carries on this tradition in his well-known poem “The Dark Night”, in which the soul steals out of the house for a secret meeting with her beloved. The last stanza reads: “Quedéme y olvidéme, / el rostro recliné sobre el Amado; / cesó todo, y dejéme, / dejando mi cuidado / entre las azucenas olvidado.” (“I stayed, myself forgotten, / My countenance against my love reclined; / All ceased, and self forsaken / I left my care behind / Among the lilies, unremembered.” (Brenan, 1973, pp. 146-147)

¹⁴ The metaphor occasionally comes to popular culture; the Belgian nun “Soeur Sourire” sang: “Mets ton joli jupon mon âme / J’ai rendez-vous, Seigneur, avec vous.” Sister Luc-Gabrielle’s record became popular not only in Europe but in North America as well. She won a Grammy award in 1963 for the song “Dominique”, and appeared on the Ed Sullivan show in 1964. (See Infoplease.)

S'il faut que vos bontés veuillent me consoler,
 Et jusqu'à mon néant daignent se ravalier,
 J'aurai toujours pour vous, ô suave merveille,
 Une dévotion à nulle autre pareille.

While this may seem like ordinary language to a modern audience, in seventeenth-century France it was highly charged in both a religious and an erotic sense. Tartuffe speaks of the possibility that “vos bontés veuillent me consoler”. While the singular “votre bonté” would probably mean simply “your goodness” or “your kindness”, the plural suggests “vos faveurs”.¹⁵ These *bontés* are meant to console him. While *la consolation* is often used in the ordinary sense of “soulagement que l’on donne à l’affliction, à la douleur, au déplaisir de quelqu’un” (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie*), it is often used in a religious sense. The same dictionary gives as examples for this meaning: “Dieu est toute sa consolation.” “Dieu est le consolateur de nos âmes, le consolateur des malheureux, des affligés. L’Eglise appelle le saint Esprit Le consolateur, l’Esprit consolateur.” Tartuffe asks Elmire, in consoling him, to condescend “jusqu’à mon néant”. In addition to its meaning of “nothing”, as in mathematics, *néant* can refer to the unworthiness of the sinner before God. According to the *Dictionnaire*, “les creatures se sentent tousjours du neant dont elles sont sorties.”

Tartuffe addresses Elmire as “suave merveille”. The adjective *suave* may not be recognized today as a religious one even in French, and the English word borrowed from French is even further from the seventeenth-century meaning.¹⁶ As we have seen above, François de Sales often uses the word to speak of the sweetness of religious devotion. The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* defines *suave* as “Qui est doux & agreable, il n’a guere d’usage qu’en parlant des odeurs.” *Suavité* is “La douceur d’une odeur[...] Il signifie en termes de spiritualité, Certaine douceur qui se fait sentir à l’ame, quand Dieu la

¹⁵ A little earlier in the scene, Elmire has thanked Tartuffe for praying for her health; she says she is grateful for “toutes ces bontés”, using the term in a moral and religious sense. Later, in Act IV sc. 5, Tartuffe demands that Elmire provide “un peu de vos faveurs” to prove to him the “charmantes bontés que vous avez pour moi”. Clearly, he is not asking for her prayers.

¹⁶ The *Petit Larousse* defines the adjective *suave* as: “D’une douceur agréable, exquis”, and gives as examples of usage, “Parfum, musique suave”.

favorise. Durant l'oraison il sent des suavitez merveilleuses." On the other hand, a *merveille* is simply a "Chose rare, & qui cause de l'admiration", such as the seven wonders of the world. In translating the expression "suave merveille", one obviously cannot use the borrowed word *suave*, since its meaning is inappropriate. The entire expression is omitted by Frame, Malleson and Wilbur. It is translated without religious connotations by Appelbaum ("sweet wonder") and Hampton ("delicious prodigy"). A number of translators use the noun *miracle* to restore some of the lost meaning of the adjective: "lovely miracle" (Bishop), "delicate miracle" (Block), "miracle of nature" (Edney), "miracle of sweetness" (Modern Library), "sweet miracle" (Waldinger), "miracle of loveliness" (Wood).

Tartuffe promises Elmire "une dévotion à nulle autre pareille". *Dévotion* is "Pieté, attachement au service de Dieu", according to the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*. Even today it retains the same meaning; the *Petit Robert* defines it as "attachement sincère à la religion et à ses pratiques". The *Robert & Collins Senior* offers the English equivalent "devoutness, religious devotion". The cognate English word refers only secondarily to religious practice; the primary meaning is attachment, as in devotion to duty or to family. For the French *dévotion*, all the translators use the English "devotion". In the combination "Immeasurable worship and devotion", Bishop restores religion by an additional noun. Frame omits the language of spirituality entirely:

A bit of sympathy is all I crave
For the distress of your unworthy slave.
If your kindness, Madame, should ever deign
To condescend to me, and end my pain,
Nothing would be as constant and as true
As the devotion I shall have for you.

Hampton omits most of it as well:

If you could bring yourself to show some favour
to your unworthy servant's tribulations,
if you would deign to stoop down to my level
and out of kindness offer me relief,
delicious prodigy, I guarantee
my eternal, unparalleled devotion.

Wilbur keeps a religious flavour:

And if, in your great goodness, you will deign
 To look upon your slave, and ease his pain, —
 If, in compassion for my soul's distress,
 You'll stoop to comfort my unworthiness,
 I'll raise to you, in thanks for that sweet manna,
 An endless hymn, an infinite hosanna.

The use of “manna” and “hosanna” recall biblical language, though “hosanna”, a public exclamation of praise, is inappropriate in a declaration of illicit love where Tartuffe later promises complete secrecy. The translator's clever rhyme reduces the character's cleverness and the menace that he represents for the family.

When the attempt at seduction is revealed to Orgon, Tartuffe shows himself to be a master of deception. He diverts attention from the act of which he is accused, by accusing himself of all kinds of terrible but unspecified crimes:

Oui, mon frère, je suis un méchant, un coupable,
 Un malheureux pécheur, tout plein d'iniquité,
 Le plus grand scélérat qui jamais ait été;
 Chaque instant de ma vie est chargé de souillures;
 Elle n'est qu'un amas de crimes et d'ordures;
 Et je vois que le Ciel, pour ma punition,
 Me veut mortifier en cette occasion.

While Tartuffe's confession is true, Orgon takes it — as Tartuffe intends — to be an expression of Christian humility and a willingness to be accused of sins which he has not committed. It echoes jansenist language expressing the conviction of sin in every human being. Tartuffe says that every moment of his life is “chargé de souillures”. The word *souillures* is rendered by a number of translators (Block, Modern Library, Waller) as “pollution” or “pollutions”; or Tartuffe's life “has been polluted” (Bishop). For *souillures* Appelbaum uses “impurity”, Wood “foul deed”, Frame “grime” (to rhyme with “crime” in the following line). For Wilbur, Tartuffe's life has been “one heap of crimes”. Waldinger mentions “blemishes”, which is rather weak, evoking character faults rather than evil deeds. One may wonder whether those translators who chose “pollution” would do so today. The word is now so often used to refer to such things as chemicals washing into rivers, that it does not evoke immorality in private life.

In the second seduction scene (Act IV, sc. 5), where Orgon, hidden under a table, hears for himself the proof of Tartuffe's treachery, Tartuffe uses less religious language. The tension here comes less from a contradiction between his words and his intentions, than from suspense about what is going to happen next. While the scene can be very funny, it has a more serious aspect because of Elmire's distress. As I mentioned earlier, Elmire's character can be played in different ways. In some interpretations she finds her dealings with Tartuffe unpleasant but necessary, while in others she enjoys flirting with him. A translator may tend to one or the other of these views. In addition, the rendering of as little as a half-line may make a difference in the way the audience sees her. When Tartuffe demands that Elmire prove her feelings towards him by "un peu de vos faveurs", Orgon still remains hidden, and Elmire coughs loudly to signal that it is high time to reveal himself. The coughing is so obvious that Tartuffe remarks:

Tartuffe: Vous toussiez fort, Madame.

Elmire: Oui, je suis au supplice.

Tartuffe: Vous plaît-il un morceau de ce jus de réglisse?

Elmire: C'est un rhume obstiné, sans doute; et je vois bien
Que tous les jus du monde ici ne feront rien.

Tartuffe: Cela certes est fâcheux.

Elmire: Oui, plus qu'on ne peut dire.

Elmire's remarks "je suis au supplice" and "plus qu'on ne peut dire" indicate clearly that she is suffering. Not only is her cold "obstiné", as she says two lines later, but her husband is so as well. While Tartuffe takes the first of her remarks, "Oui, je suis au supplice", to refer to the cough, the audience understands that she is calling on Orgon to end the situation. In the wording chosen by some translators, Elmire refers to the source of her distress as "it", which logically would mean the cough: "Yes, it is very bad" (Block), "It tortures me" (Bishop), "Yes, it racks me" (Waller), "Yes, yes. It's bad indeed" (Wilbur). Other translators avoid the pronoun "it", so that the remark can equally indicate other causes of suffering, understood immediately by the audience if not by the slow-acting Orgon: "Yes, I'm in torture" (Appelbaum), "Yes, I am in agony" (Edney), "Yes, I am very much tormented" (Modern Library), "Yes, I am very uncomfortable" (Waldinger), "Yes! I'm in great distress" (Wood). Even if the rhythm is

sometimes heavy, these versions retain the double meaning which is essential to the passage; they thus express her distress, and contribute to the portrayal of her as “une honnête femme” at the mercy of an evil man.

Conclusion

Earlier in this article I mentioned some questions that a translator must answer explicitly or implicitly, the most general one being whether to bring the work to the public or the public to the work. According to some people, the criterion of “performability” — criticized by Bassnett, accepted by Peacock — must be met in translations of dramatic works to be used on stage. In some of the passages from *Tartuffe* quoted above, concessions can be made to changing times without too much damage. Adapting or explaining matters of everyday life, for example, does not touch the heart of the play. The translators studied here describe the amount of wine drunk by Tartuffe in various ways, some more colourful than others. In dealing with *mouchoir* and with *Fleur des Saints*, some go further than others in explaining the references to seventeenth-century life or in replacing them with more familiar references. All the solutions in these two passages are more or less satisfactory, and nothing essential is lost. In other cases, it is impossible to retain everything that is in the French text. None of the translators quite manages to capture *cette bonne femme*, and all of them lose the double meaning, and thus much of the comic effect, of *le pauvre homme*.¹⁷ In the latter case, Orgon's repetition of the expression, whether it be “Poor man!” or “Dear man!”, still conveys his infatuation with Tartuffe.

One of the most difficult challenges is to capture the religious language and references which were so shocking at the time of the play's first appearance, and which are still powerful today to the reader

¹⁷ Copley points out that Malleson's addition of “chips of explanatory dialogue” to Molière's phrases (“Poor man! He was haggard enough when I first saw him.” “Poor man! Maybe you should have let him sleep”) loses the economy of the original and upsets the balance. Still, Copley prefers Malleson's dramatic effectiveness to certain accurate translations of Molière that are almost impossible to speak. (Copley, 1960, pp. 120-121) Since, as Peacock says, Malleson's version is used as a base for adaptors, one wonders how much of Molière is left in the twice-removed product.

or spectator who understands them. In the passage quoted from the first seduction scene, some of the translators retain this crucial element, while others omit it almost entirely.¹⁸ Tartuffe becomes simply ridiculous, without the danger or scandal of the original.

The language of seventeenth-century French religious devotion, as we have seen, includes many common lexical items having a specialized meaning. Tartuffe masters this language perfectly, and uses it to serve his lechery and greed; he increases his crimes by hiding them under cover of the sacred. In a double borrowing, words such as *suave*, *bonté* or *consolation* move from the neutral register to the sacred, and in Tartuffe's speech, to the obscene. Such a complex set of relations is difficult to capture in another language, and yet if a translation loses this aspect, the work loses much of its force.

The challenge may in some ways be compared to translating a sociolect, that is, the language of a particular social group. In this play, there is no question of non-standard grammar or constructions; the language of devotion expresses ideology more than regional origin or social class.¹⁹ What subset of the target language can best render this aspect of the source text? If historical accuracy is the translator's main aim, the language of Catholic devotion in English would probably be

¹⁸ The limitations of comparing very short passages are evident here. A six-line extract is not enough to see how the translators have communicated religious content and connotations; they could have compensated for losses in one place by the way they treat other parts. In this case, Tartuffe's speech or even the entire scene could be considered as a suitable unit of comparison. A look at the entire scene shows that while most of the translators successfully communicate explicit religious references, they do not use a language suffused with religious imagery or connotations to the point of making up for the sort of loss shown in the lines quoted.

¹⁹ A. Chapdelaine and G. Lane-Mercier write of the dichotomy between "la langue officielle, correcte, non marquée et des langages 'illégitimes', incorrects, marqués", where the contrast between the two types represents the social hierarchy. (Chapdelaine and Lane-Mercier 1994, p. 8) In the case of *Tartuffe*, the language, although correct, is marked; and the translator of the play, like the translator of a non-standard sociolect, must attempt "la reconstruction sémiotique et rhétorique" (*Ibid.*, p. 10) of the author's use of the language of a particular group.

used. If one wishes a dynamic equivalent, to use Nida's terminology, the vocabulary of another religious group might be chosen. If a translator aims to show the universality of the theme — after all, religious frauds are as common in our time as they were in Molière's, and they are found in religions both traditional and new — he or she may prefer to use a more general pious language. The application desired for a particular performance can be made by means of staging. Stage sets, costumes and acting can evoke many different contexts in which an opportunist takes advantage of the gullible, or an oppressive regime threatens the integrity of private and family life.²⁰ Anne-Françoise Benhamou warns of the danger of attempting a too-precise parallel with contemporary situations in translating great theatrical texts: “La traduction doit conserver, évidemment, le 'feuilletage' du texte, et ne pas réduire à une seule possibilité de représentation un texte qui en offre plusieurs.” How, otherwise, can one play (with) a text that already supplies all its interpretation? (Benhamou, 1990, p. 13)

In the remarks above, I have assumed that the public recognizes religious language — an assumption that perhaps cannot be justified. Every teacher of literature has had to explain religious references so that they will not be missed by many students. It can no longer be taken for granted that readers will catch the biblical references that are so important in English literature. In *Tartuffe*, the power to shock came from seeing a hypocrite manipulating the language of the sacred for evil ends. Since for many members of the public today, religious language is often no longer even recognized, and if recognized, often not held sacred, it is a real challenge to translate at the same time the comedy, the scandal and the menace of the play.

²⁰ This applies of course to productions in the original language as well. In 1995, Ariane Mnouchkine set the play in North Africa in the context of Islamic fundamentalism. When questioned about this, she replied: “ Je reste persuadée que la pièce a été écrite exactement dans ce contexte. [...] Donc, si j’avais vécu dans le sud des États-Unis, j’en aurais sans doute fait un pasteur protestant intégriste, mais je ne voyais pas l’intérêt de jouer ça en cols de dentelle.” (Mnouchkine, 2000)

According to Antoine Berman, “Il faut retraduire parce que les traductions vieillissent, et parce qu'aucune n'est *la* traduction.”²¹ (Berman, 1990, p. 1) André Topia analyzes the reason for this different fate: the original has a network of organic interactions with its time, language and culture, which the translation cannot have.²² (Topia, 1990, p. 46) *Tartuffe* more than most literary works has both deep roots in its time and potential applications to specific situations in other times. In the words of Ariane Mnouchkine, it is “une fontaine de jouvence”. (Mnouchkine, 2000) For these reasons it will no doubt continue to attract translators, who will make choices based on their understanding of the work, their talents and the purpose for which they undertake the translation.

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²¹ Berman makes an exception for what he calls “les grandes traductions” such as the Vulgate, Luther's Bible, the Authorized Version of the Bible in English, and specific literary translations such as Schlegel's Shakespeare. (Berman, 1990, p. 2)

²² As later generations constantly renew their view of the period, says Topia, their perspective on the work will change as well, and new translations will be needed. “Ainsi, alors que cette œuvre ne cesse de se ré-ajuster à l'intérieur d'une configuration toujours en mouvement, la traduction ne 'bouge' pas.” (Topia, 1990, p. 46)

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ABSTRACT: Translators' Choices in *Tartuffe* — Selected passages from twelve English translations of Molière's *Tartuffe* are studied. The passages are chosen because of questions they raise about the language of everyday life and of religion in seventeenth-century France. The translators choose the extent to which they will keep the structures and references of the original text, or adapt them for easier access by a contemporary audience. They also choose between the French tradition of a dark, menacing interpretation, and the North American one of seeking the maximum of laughs.

RÉSUMÉ : Les choix des traducteurs du *Tartuffe* — Dans cet article, des passages tirés de douze traductions anglaises du *Tartuffe* de Molière sont étudiés. Ces passages sont choisis en fonction des questions qu'ils posent sur le langage de la vie quotidienne et religieuse en France au XVII^e siècle. Les traducteurs choisissent jusqu'à quel point ils gardent les structures et références du texte de Molière ou les adaptent pour rendre le texte plus accessible au public de leur temps. Ils choisissent aussi entre la tradition française, qui donne souvent une interprétation sombre de cette pièce, et la tradition nord-américaine, qui vise surtout les effets comiques.

Key words: Molière, *Tartuffe*, translation, religion.

Mots-clés : Molière, *Tartuffe*, traduction, religion.

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