



Translations during the Occupation (France, Belgium 1940-1944)

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Translation is one of the most certain ways of instating a dialogue between literatures and cultures. However, this dialogue can be biased when the activity of translators is carried out in a politically confined background oriented by ideological intention. How, for whom and which purpose does one translate? The period of German Occupation of France (1940-44) highlights these queries in the most exemplary fashion. In addition to the obvious political and economic repercussions, the four years during which France was subject to the law of the Occupier had a great impact on the cultural life of the country: following the 1940 armistice, NS Germany aimed at bringing defeated France to heel and at imposing a new order, based on national-socialist ideas, with, in the foreground, and through the medium of translation into French, the massive introduction of German authors into the "official" editorial marketplace (itself wholly or partly controlled by German capital). Actually, during the Occupation years, a very deep interest in the practice of literary translation thrived in France. On the one hand, we can cite for evidence the impulse given by the "Matthias" list: this directory of some 500 German works (history, philosophy, art, law and literature) to be translated into French, established under the aegis of the German Institute of Paris and its Director Karl Epting, a friend of Céline, contributed to re-orientate the literary offer towards German authors in a significant way. It is important to remember here that as early as December 1940, a Franco-German translation commission, linked to the German Institute, was established to select priority titles to translate. If no French publishing house was theoretically obliged to participate in this translation "program", any publisher choosing one or more titles from the Matthias list was assured to receive the paper needed to print - carefully rationed at this period - and to obtain the imprimatur from the censors. The cost of translations from the Matthias list remained nevertheless at the expense of French publishers, subsidized in this way by the Vichy government. On the other hand, given the official program that aimed at promoting German literature (in its broadest sense) in France, the intense media coverage of translated works (seen as symbols of successful intellectual collaboration) in the Occupied press shows that translation was also viewed as a major issue in imposing the ideological line of the Occupation in France. For the period considered, Parisian newspapers such as *Panorama - hebdomadaire européen* (published in 1943-44) or *Comoedia - Hebdomadaire des spectacles, des lettres et des arts*, display a sustained interest in translation and foreign literature. This is evidenced by the many reviews of translations that appeared in bookstores, articles on German writers (including poets - a phenomenon which it will be necessary to make a special place for in these investigations, insofar as poetry is explicitly considered by the occupier as the best way to know the spirit of a people - understand here: the German people - and is therefore highly favored in this respect), the publication in their columns of significant excerpts of translated texts or controversy about how to translate this or that, headings such as « *Connaître l'Europe* », « *Bibliothèque européenne* », etc... There are even occasionally debates on the redefinition of the status of the literary translator capable of guaranteeing the quality of the texts produced (and to ensure, among other things, compliance in respect to the right ideological "line"). In addition to the press, cultural and literary journals are to be taken into consideration, whether that be official publications, supported by the government (or published directly by the occupier, as was the case for the *Cahiers de l'Institut allemand*, or *Deutschland-Frankreich* which appeared in a bilingual version under the auspices of the German Institute of Paris), or loose-leaves from the underground in free or occupied zones as far as North Africa (cf. the case of *Fontaine*, published in Algiers or *Aguedal*, appearing in Rabat). To stick to one example, a title like *Pyrénées - Cahiers de la pensée française*, published in Toulouse between 1941 and 1944, offers an interesting panorama of translated texts (where once again poetry is mainly represented for the reasons mentioned above), betraying the quandary of an editorial board torn between its support to the Vichy National Revolution and the desire to publish writers missing from the aforementioned Matthias list, e.g. Rainer Maria Rilke. To identify the works translated into French throughout this period, to read extensively publications of various obedience which were echoed in Paris, but also in the provinces and overseas, to track mediators (editors, journalists, translators, teachers, poets, etc.), and analyze the discourse on translation between 1940 and 1944 is likely to bring elements of interest (mostly unhandled to this date) for a more detailed understanding of literary exchanges in France at a highly critical moment in its history.