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BOUND BY CULTURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE OLD FRENCH AND OLD NORSE VERSIONS OF *LA CHANSON DE ROLAND*

Sif Rikhardsdottir

Texts are not created in a vacuum but are fundamentally influenced by the historical and social conditions out of which they originate. Embedded within them, they contain an array of cultural signifiers that are more or less rooted in that social context. Some texts are more firmly grounded than others in the conditions out of which they arose, giving evidence to a particular political agenda, public preference, fashion, or ideological questionings of an era, while others appear to us to transcend their temporal and contextual borders through their ability to respond to the concerns of later generations. Because of this perceived universality they remain vital beyond the boundaries of the civilization that created them. Regardless of their capacity to reach beyond their time and place, however, texts are representative of a cultural context and require the familiarity with that context for the comprehension of the culturally determined, integrative functions. This is of particular relevance to translations as they represent fundamentally the move from one linguistic realm to another, and consequently the transfer from one cultural sphere to another.[1]

While the implications of cultural adaptation in the translation process are generally recognized in modern translation theories, they are often overlooked in studies of medieval translation.[2] In these, the focus is frequently on the comparative literary quality of the translation with respect to the source and the interrelations of those translations to the source text in linguistic and narrative proximity. Yet the way in which culturally contingent signifying systems are transported between ideologically different societies is of profound value in the uncovering of behavioral patterns, particularly from civilizations of the past where our only witness to the

elements that make up the ideological and conceptual system are often precisely such artifacts as literary works.

The medieval period is inherently unstable, dynamic, evolving, and, not least, intrinsically absent. David Lawton points out that any effort to reconstruct the medieval is contingent upon the fact that "the 'medieval' is itself culturally constructed – and so, for that matter is the framing category of 'culture' itself."[3] To look at culture as a semiotic system is to look at the ways in which the world is made comprehensible by a configuration of social, ideological, and behavioral codes; upon these value systems are based and one can begin to decipher from them certain patterns that present themselves in the literary works and other objects born out of that culture. Just as language represents the signifying system which supports and engenders the successful act of communication, so it is intimately interconnected with the social context out of which that specific discourse arose. In the process of translation, translators must negotiate not only the linguistic differences between the two languages, but also the contextualized symbolic system, both verbal and non-verbal, contained within the original. They must transfer the embedded cultural signifiers to make the text comprehensible to its new audience.

M. A. K. Halliday states that "as speakers and listeners, we project the linguistic system on to the social system … interpreting verbal meanings as the expression of the meanings that are inherent in the culture."[4] The interpretation of language can thus be described as a cultural act, and the translation process therefore depends on the successful reconstruction of those cultural meanings out of which the linguistic choices of the original text have been made. In translation theory this process is recognized as the translatability of a text – where, according to Mary Snell-Hornby, "the extent to which a text is translatable varies with the *degree* to which it is embedded in its own specific culture"; the greater the distance that separates the cultural background of the source text and target text, both in terms of time and place, the greater the difficulty becomes of transporting the source text successfully to the target audience.[5] The transfer of an ideologically bound text to a community differing in its conceptual constructions thus calls for reconfigurations of those elements. This is so historically. Such a process becomes apparent in the translations of Old French literary material in thirteenth century Norway, where the social and psychological outlook of the francophone authors and audiences often differs quite fundamentally from that of the receiving reading community.[6] The revisions of the French literary material expose the complex and sometimes contradictory medieval conceptualizations of text, literary creation, and the function of translation.[7] They also bear witness – in the conscious and unconscious modifications of the substance, form, and representation of the texts – to the cultural configurations of the reading communities for whom the new texts were being translated.

This paper seeks to explore the complexities of the transmission of behavioral patterns in translation through the textual analysis of the Old Norse version of *La Chanson de Roland*. More specifically it asks how the uniquely culturally determined elements of emotional or social values and psychological conceptualizations, evident in the structure, characterization, and linguistic representation of the material, are transported across linguistic and cultural borders. The *chanson de geste* tradition was profoundly interconnected with the sense of identity and past of the French people and drew its evocative force from the glorification of the French ancestors and, more importantly, the contemporary relevance of the battle between Christendom's defenders and infidels. In the voyage across the Channel and then further into Northern terrains, the text had to be uprooted from its originating historic and epic context in order to be made relevant to Nordic readers. A closer look at the text will reveal the complexity of the question of the adaptation of culturally bound codes of conduct and behavior.

The French medieval epic *Chanson de Roland* has survived in several manuscripts in both assonanced and rhymed versions. The manuscript containing the oldest and best text, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Digby 23, is an assonanced redaction in Anglo-Norman and was copied in the twelfth century. While there are considerable discrepancies in the dating of the poem, critics now generally agree on the approximate date of 1100 for the existing version.[8] The Old Norse version of the *Chanson de Roland*, *Rúnzivals þáttr*, forms a part of a compilation in prose of the history of Charlemagne entitled *Karlamagnús saga*, which draws on several different sources, most of which are Old French *chansons de geste*. The text is preserved in four Icelandic manuscripts, none of which are complete, and fragments of five more. The text is relatively similar in all the manuscripts and fragments with only a few exceptions.[9]

While *Karlamagnús saga* has only been preserved in fourteenth and fifteenth century (or younger) manuscripts in Iceland, it is likely that the major part of the compilation was translated during the reign of King Hákon (1217–1263) and transmitted from there to other Scandinavian countries.[10] While it is thus unclear how many of the changes occurring in the translation process can be attributed to the original translators and how much is owing to later scribal revisions in Iceland, one can nevertheless assume a general commonality in the material's transformation and reception due to the close connections and common background of the inhabitants. The *Rúnzivals þáttr* is based on a lost version of the Old French *Chanson de Roland*, but shows extensive similarities with the Anglo-Norman copy in the Digby manuscript, which is used in this discussion for comparison.[11]

The Norse translator transforms the verse of his original into prose, resulting in significant changes in the formal presentation and tone. The transfer from the metrical form of the French *Chanson de Roland* to the basic prose delivery of *Rúnzivals þáttr* indicates the necessary adaptations made by the Norwegian translator as the existing native meters, eddic and skaldic verse, were singularly unsuited for the assonanced poem.[12] There was, moreover, an established tradition of vernacular prose in Scandinavia.[13] Yet the close adherence of the translated text to the original (sometimes almost line by line) indicates that it was nonetheless viewed as a translation rather than a creative adaptation. A comparison of the first lines of the French verse with those of the Old Norse text discloses an observance of the original to the point of verbal echoes despite the substitution of prose for meter:

> *Carles li reis*, nostre emperere magnes,
> *Set anz* tuz pleins ad estet *en Espaigne*.
> Tresqu'en la mer *cunquist la tere* altaigne,
> *N'i ad castel ki devant lui remaigne*.
> Mur *ne citet* n'i est remés a fraindre,
> *Fors Sarraguce, ki est en une muntaigne*.
> *Li reis Marsilie la tient, ki Deu nen aimet,*
> *Mahumet sert e Apollin recleimet*:
> Nes poet guarder gue mals ne l'i ateignet. (1–9)
>
> [King Charles, our great Emperor,
> Has been in Spain for seven long years.

> He has conquered that haughty land right to the sea.
> Not a fortress remains,
> No wall, no city, that he has not smashed,
> Except Saragossa, which is on a mountain.
> King Marsile holds it, he who does not love God.
> He serves Mohammed and prays to Apollo:
> He cannot prevent misfortune from befalling him there.][14]

This episode is related as follows in the Old Norse version:

> *Karlamagnús konungr* var *7 vetr* alla samfasta *á Spanialandi*, ok *lagði undir sik alt* með sjá svá at *hvorki borg né kastali* var sá, *at eigi hefði hann undir sik lagt*, né heruð eða tún, *nema Saraguze*, er *stendr á fjalli einu*. *Þar réð fyrir Marsilius konungr* hinn heiðni, sá er *eigi elskaði guð*, heldr *trúði hann á Maumet ok Apollín*, en þeir munu svíkja hann.[15]
>
> [King Charlemagne was in Spain for seven winters, and conquered everything along the sea so that there was neither a city nor castle that he had not conquered, neither estate nor farmstead, except Saragossa, which stands on a mountain. There reigned the heathen king Marsilius, he who did not love God, but rather trusted in Mohammed and Apollo, but they will betray him.][16]

The main semantic components of each verse – such as "King Charlemagne" in the first verse and "seven years" and "Spain" in the second – are repeated in the Norse text with the syntactical structure adjusted to accommodate Norse grammar and the flow of the prose. The translator remains close to his original, recasting the content in its new linguistic form. There are only minor differences observable in the first lines, and these do not affect the transmission of the matter contained in the verses, but indicate the translator's propensity for reshaping his material to his new audience. The qualifier, "nostre emperere magnes" [our great Emperor] is omitted as the narrative voice shifts from an internal persona speaking to an implied French audience to an impersonal voice recounting legends from the past. The addition of "heruð eða tún" [estate nor farmstead] likewise subtly adjusts the landscape to give the audience tangible visual images of familiar setting to supple-

ment the representation of place. The cadence and rhythm of the original is obviously lost in the transition from the French assonanced verse to the Old Norse prose, and the emphasis seems to be on retelling the story rather than either recreating the sound and flow of the original, or embellishing the text with rhetorical flourish. The language is comparable to the narrative style of the *konungasögur* [lives of the Kings] which differs significantly from the relatively formal linguistic presentation of the *chansons de geste*.[17]

The logical and consequential structuring of episodes indicates the changes made by the translator to adapt his material to the literary expectations of the receiving audience. The translator's disregard of such literary devices as epithets, *laisses similaires*, foreshadowing, and soliloquies, employed by the French poem, shifts the focus from dramatic building towards an emotional climax to the action itself. Native Scandinavian literature customarily consisted of a series of episodes with rapid action and little attention given to the psychology or emotional life of its characters. Long monologues were non-existent and dialogues were short and to the point and meant to convey information with narratorial intervention and judgment kept to a minimum or avoided altogether. The apparently deliberate modifications made by the translator reveal an effort to conform the foreign material to the existing native literary tradition, while at the same time maintaining the essential quality of the original and its structure.[18]

In the translation the dialogues are shortened and made more concise to move the story forward. The descriptive, repetitive, and imaginary use of meter and vocabulary in the battle scenes in the French version is reduced, and the emphasis is on single battles with rapid action and brief interspersed dialogues. The narrative focus is shifted from the relations between the characters, their self-representation, and emotional state to the *acts* of the characters and the way in which those actions propel the narration towards the inevitable impending death of Roland. In fact, the epic is brought to closure rather rapidly, omitting the episode with Bramimonde and the court proceedings – thus emphasizing that the focal point of the translation is indeed the epic closure rather than its continuance, which in the French context, by contrast, is crucial for the interlinking of the heroic past and the contemporary present.

The effort of cultural acclimatization is apparent not only in changes in the formal presentation, but also on the level of rhetorical and textual presentation. Eugene Vance relates the discourse of Roland to changes in social conditions in twelfth century France, signaling the interrelations between vernacular writing and cultural impulses.[19] Drawing on Vance's argument, I would argue that the signifying power of the *Chanson de Roland* lies as much in its representational capacity as it does in its narrative content. If one approaches the genre of the *chansons* as discourse rather than form, the translator must find a discursive mode to represent the French epic in a manner conducive to its new audience's reception and comprehension. He does so by omitting much of the rhetorical devices characteristic of the *chansons de geste*, such as repetition, amplification, anticipation, and epithets as well as many of the descriptive passages. There is similarly a noticeable effort to adapt the French discourse to familiar native discursive patterns, as is evident in minor alterations in both thematic and linguistic representation.[20] During a dialogue between Roland and Oliver, close to the end of their final battle, Oliver remarks: "Ja aves vos ambsdous les braz sanglanz" [See how bloody both your arms are!] and Roland responds: "Colps i ai fait mult genz!" [I have struck many noble blows!] (1711–12). In the Norse version the reply becomes "því valda stór högg og þó mörg högg" [literally: that is caused by big blows and still many blows] (828–29). The response not only shifts the focus from the subjective "I" to the objective "caused by," more characteristic of native writing, but is in addition so authentically Nordic sounding that it could stem from any of the Norse heroic sagas. While it contains the essential message of the French text, that is, the blows struck by a heroic warrior, the subtle shift from "colps i ai fait" to "stór högg og þó mörg högg" is one of cultural amplification. The translator (or scribe) has rephrased the original to call upon the collective memory of his audience of similar episodes in the native literary tradition. The aim is to infuse the text with both authenticity and, more importantly, a familiarity of values, characterization, and idiom.[21]

The difficulty in conveying the French text to a Nordic audience lies, however, not in the textual representation, which reveals simply the effort of adapting the foreign text to the familiar discourse of the native literature, but rather in the transmission of the ideological structures that differ from those of the receptive

culture. Mary Snell Hornby draws attention to what she calls "perspective" where "the reader of the source-language text is appealed to as a member of a particular cultural or social group, and where knowledge of or even a relationship to this culture is presupposed."[22] The concept of differing perspectives denotes the difficulty of transmitting such implicit social or cultural messages to a reader either unfamiliar with the cultural standards of the source text, or from a different social and cultural context altogether.

Clifford Geertz states that "not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artifacts," foregrounding the interrelations between the depiction of emotions in literature and the ideological constructions that shape how, when, and the way in which emotions are expressed.[23] It is, in fact, through behavior that culturally determined concepts find their articulation, and the question of literary representation of behavioral patterns is thus profoundly relevant to the issue of translation.[24] In *Chanson de Roland*, this culturally determined representation becomes apparent in the portrayal of the characters and their relationships to each other. The weeping, lamenting, and fainting of Roland at the sight of his dead comrades establishes within the French cultural context the close bond existing between the men. The verbal expression of that emotion confirms Roland's nobility, as the faculty for aristocratic male bonding is conveyed in the capacity for exalted emotions. Within a Nordic context, however, this would be relayed through the actions taken by the remaining individual to avenge and preserve the reputation of the fallen companion, rather than through the depiction of the internal sorrow felt at that loss.

In the process of transporting the story of Roland from the expressive French culture to the traditionally reticent and taciturn Nordic mentality with its objective and impassive mode of literary expression, the translator must either put those unconventional discursive traditions in a context comprehensible to the audience, or adjust them to the existing standards of behavior. There are, within any given culture, established conventions as to how and when emotions are verbalized and displayed; the Norse translator therefore had to negotiate the cross-cultural differences between those conventions in a manner that would both allow the foreign text to maintain its exotic qualities, and take into account the disparate emotional codes of the receiving audience.[25]

In the Norse translation of *Chanson de Roland*, many of the episodes containing emotional outbursts, complaints, fainting, or weeping are either abbreviated or left out altogether. In some instances the translator makes an effort to modify such behavior by making it seem less emotional and rather born out of physical necessity, hence explaining what must have seemed as "unmanly," or in any case strange behavior to the Nordic audience unaccustomed to tears and laments by their literary heroes.[26] A key example is the poignant and evocative verse relating Roland's reaction to Oliver's death in the French version:

> Li quens Rollant, quant il veit mort ses pers
> E Oliver, qu'il tant poeit amer,
> Tendrur en out, cumencet a plurer.
> En sun visage fut mult desculurer.
> Si grant doel out que mais ne pout ester,
> Voeillet o nun, a tere chet pasmet.
> Dist l'arcevesque: "Tant mare fustes, ber!" (2215–2221)
>
> [When Count Roland sees his peers dead
> And Oliver, whom he loved so well,
> He feels compassion, he begins to weep.
> His face lost all its color.
> He suffered such pain that he could no longer stand,
> Involuntarily he falls to the ground.
> The Archbishop said: "You have much grief, baron!"]

The narrative perspective at the beginning of the passage is through the eyes of Roland and the focal point thus on the dead bodies of his companions, adding to the emotive thrust of the scene. The perspective shifts from his companions to Oliver, where it lingers; and the effect is underscored by the verbalization of the love felt by Roland for his now dead friend. The climactic narrative moves from internal feelings of pity or tenderness to the external dramatization of his sorrow through the tears shed and the pain felt by Roland, culminating in his collapse. At that point the narrative perspective shifts from Roland to the Archbishop, through whom the audience is made to visualize the entire scene of the dead bodies, as well as the unconscious body of Roland himself. The focus is thus on the staging of the scene for maximum emotional impact and the dramatization of the internal feelings experienced by the tragic figure of Roland.

In the Old Norse version the passage is reduced to a single sentence with Roland's "ógleði" [sadness] assuming more of a physical feature due to his weakened state and consequently culminating in the "ómegin" [faint] that falls on him: "Nú sá erkibyskup at Rollant hafði svá mikla úgleði, at hann lá í úmætti" (522) [The archbishop now saw that Rollant suffered such grief he had collapsed].[27] The emotional weight of the passage is shifted with the effect coming rather from the *inside* as opposed to the actual description of the outburst of emotions of the French version.[28] The Norse translator moves the focal point to the Archbishop and depicts the entire scene through his eyes, reducing the narratorial intrusion and giving the scene a sense of objectivity. Similarly, the climactic narrative movement from internal feeling to external representation of those feelings in the French text is omitted. In fact, the only word with sentimental value, "ógleði," is presented as the Archbishop's interpretation rather than a narratorial statement of Roland's state of mind.

The depiction of the reaction of Charlemagne and his men to the news of the ambush and Roland's death is similarly curtailed through a reduction of the sentimentality and the shortening of the passage to make it more concise, less affected, and more in tune with traditional Nordic views of honor and the obligation of revenge:

> Tiret sa barbe cum hom ki est iret,
> Plurent des oilz si baron chevaler.
> Encuntre tere se pasment .XX. millers,
> Naimes li dux en ad mult grant pitet.
> Il n'en i ad chevaler ne barun
> Que de pitet mult durement ne plurt.
> Plurent lur filz, lur freres, lur nevolz
> E lur amis e lur lige seignurs;
> Encuntre tere se pasment li plusur.
> Naimes li dux d'iço ad fait que proz,
> Tuz premereins l'ad dit l'empereür:
> . . .
> "Car chevalchez! Vengez ceste dulor!" (2414–2428)
>
> [He tugs his beard like a man who is angry,
> His brave knights' eyes are brimming with tears.
> Twenty thousand fall to the ground in a swoon,
> Duke Naimes feels very great sorrow.
> There is not a knight nor a baron
> Who does not shed bitter tears of sorrow.
> They weep for their sons, their brothers, their nephews,
> Their friends and their liege lords;
> Most fall to the ground in a swoon.
> Duke Naimes did the wise thing,
> He was first to speak to the Emperor:
> . . .
> "Ride knights! Avenge this hurt!"]

The Old Norse text condenses the description of the sorrow of the army by confining it to a single sentence applied to Charlemagne. The swooning of twenty thousand soldiers is reduced to Charlemagne falling off his horse for the sake of his "ógleði" [sadness], again subtly transforming the *exposé* of the emotional tumult in the French version (falling to the ground in a swoon) to a natural and to some extent a physically explicable consequence of the sorrow felt by the emperor:

> Karlamagnús konungr sleit klæði sín ok skók skegg sitt ok féll af hesti sínum fyrir úgleði sakir. Nú var þar engi maðr er eigi feldi tár fyrir sakir sinna vina. Nemes hertugi hafði af því máli vel sem öllum öðrum, ok hann gékk nær konungi ok mælti: "... Nú væri þat drengiligra at hefna frænda sinna en at syrgja eftir dauða." (525–6)
>
> [King Charlemagne tore his clothes and shook his beard and fell from his horse in his sorrow. There was no man there who did not shed tears for the loss of his friends ... Duke Nemes did the right thing as in all other matters and he went to the king and said: "... Now it would be more honorable to avenge one's kinsmen than to mourn for the dead."]

The seemingly insignificant and minor adjustment at the end of the quoted passage epitomizes the acclimatization of the passage to the Nordic mentality of the receiving audience. Rather than simply urging the knights to retaliate for the harm, as the French text does, the translator adds the declaration that it would be "more manly" (that is, more honorable or brave) to avenge their

brothers and friends than to sit and mourn those already dead. Both the verbal expressions "drengilegt" [noble] and "frændur" [kinsmen], which are inserted by the translator, are representative of the cultural context of medieval Scandinavia (and appear frequently later in the sagas); and the sentence as a whole both reflects and follows the typical Norse pattern of provocation preceding the traditional retribution for the killing of a family member.[29] The Norse translation thus shifts the expression of righteous anger in the French text to a formulaic ritual stemming from the pre-Christian Germanic mentality of honor and duty.

Within both Scandinavian and Romance studies, the prevailing general conception of the Old Norse translations of the French *chansons* and courtly material is one of inferiority. They have suffered as an unequal and lesser literary tradition in comparison with the native genre of the sagas, and they have also suffered as the inferior and often inadequate counterpart of their French originals. Rather than analyzing them based on the standards of a native genre, which are in fact misleading in the evaluation of the translated material, or comparing them to its foreign original irrespective of the impact the cultural context of the translators has had upon their structure, they should instead be studied based on their internal coherence and as evidence of the cultural capacity for assimilation and adaptation of foreign material.

While it is true that much of the unique aural quality of the French *Chanson de Roland* is lost in the translation, owing to the transference from the metrical system to prose and the elimination of much of the characteristic rhetorical qualities which give the poem its unique character, I disagree with E. F. Halvorsen's argument that many of the differences between the Old Norse and the French version are due to "mistakes" in translation. Halvorsen refers to episodes describing battle scenes on horseback and argues that due to the translator's unfamiliarity with fighting with a lance on a horseback (since in thirteenth century Scandinavia horses served as transport while men fought on foot with swords, spears, and axes) he alters passages in his translation, resulting in misreadings and errors.[30] On the contrary I would argue, along with Gabriele Röder, that such alterations mark a conscious modification by the translator for the sake of an *audience* unfamiliar with fighting on horseback.[31] The amendment becomes thus a deliberate component of the translation project and indicates again the effort of

conforming the text to its new cultural context through the transformation of cultural signifiers that otherwise would have been incomprehensible or misleading to the target audience:

> Sun cheval brochet, laiset curre a esforz,
> Vait le ferir li quens quanque il pout.
> L'escut li freint e l'osberc li desclot,
> Trenchet le piz, si li briset les os,
> Tute l'eschine li desevret del dos,
> Od sun espiet l'anme li getet fors,
> Enpeint le ben, fait li brandir le cors,
> Pleine sa hanste del cheval l'abat mort. (1197–1204)
>
> [He spurs his horse, he lets him run full speed,
> The Count goes to strike him with all his might.
> He smashes his shield and tears open his hauberk,
> Cuts into his breast and shatters his bones,
> He severs his spine from his back,
> He thrusts out his soul with his spear,
> He sticks it deeply into him, he impales his whole body,
> Running him through, he throws him dead from his horse.]

The passage depicting Roland in battle striking with his lance is modified in the Old Norse version as follows: "En Rollant . . . reið í móti honum ákafliga ok hjó til hans með sverði sínu ok klauf í sundr skjöld hans ok brynju ok festi blóðrefil sinn í brjósti honum ok steypti honum dauðum af hesti sínum" (509) [Roland . . . rode against him vehemently and struck him with his sword, and cut apart his shield and coat of mail: he plunged the point of his sword into his breast and cast him dead from his horse]. Rather than sounding as Halvorsen would contend "quite absurd," the passage would have provided the medieval Norse audience with a fairly vivid image of the battle, combining the established cultural conception of how a fighting proceeds (that is, with a sword) with the foreign elements of the combat depicted in the French text.[32] The adjustment in fact displays a rather successful merging of the two cultural and literary realms.

Halvorsen's argument that the translation is faulty or not accurate due to the translator's incompetence in the source language is based partially on misconceptions about medieval translation

methods and objectives – where the goal was not to reproduce an "accurate" version of the original, but rather to transmit the matter with varying degrees of faithfulness and no unconditional obligations of accuracy or truthfulness.[33] The text seems indeed to show a growing tendency toward such familiarization of the source material as the translation progresses with more omissions, transformations, and insertions or replacement of Nordic sounding expressions in dialogues. This could imply that the translator was growing more comfortable with his own creative share in the translation project. The material might have captured his imagination and the internal focus shifted from transcribing the French text to rendering the content in a manner inspired by his own literary and cultural background.

A comparison with another collection of French poems, *Strengleikar*, the Old Norse version of Marie de France's *Lais*, translated during the same period in Norway and preserved in a single Norwegian manuscript from the late thirteenth century, is of interest with respect to textual transformation, the aim of translation, and the impact of the expected audience.[34] In the approach to translation, the collection shows marked similarities to *Karlamagnús saga*. It is noteworthy that both are compilations of individual French *chanson de geste*, on the one hand, and the collected *lais* of Marie de France on the other, alluding perhaps to the seeming Nordic propensity of gathering assorted but related material into compilations such as the *konungasögur* [lives of the Kings]. The fact that hardly any of the poems contained within the collections have survived independently in a different form supports the notion that the translations were conceived of as compilations.[35]

The *Strengleikar* collection transforms the airy verse form of Marie de France's *Lais* into prose and the pattern of condensation and omission resembles the translation mode observable in *Rúnzivals þáttr*.[36] Yet the linguistic presentations of the two Norse translations differ. While *Rúnzivals þáttr* shows distinct efforts to reduce the sentimentality of the original, *Strengleikar* retains many of the passages containing unfamiliar descriptions of courtly love behavior, the anguish, swooning, and sighing, thereby introducing "foreign" terminology, such as "ástarangur" [love-sickness], "hugsjúkur" [melancholic], and "kurteiz" [courteous], into the Norse literary language.[37] The disparity between the two can be at least partially explained by the different material being translated. While the

Chanson de Roland is a masculine poem celebrating the heroic death of the protagonist with ample violence and little or no female inspiration or influence, Marie de France's *Lais* celebrate and focus almost exclusively on the idea of courtly love with minimal battle scenes and are renowned for their unique feminine perspective. It stands to reason that the material of the *chansons* would seem more pertinent to the Nordic mentality and literary heritage and hence would assume some of the characteristics of similar native literature, whereas the matter of the *Lais* would have been utterly foreign, and was possibly translated accordingly to reveal to the audience the manners and customs of the courtly world hidden within the poems.

The disparity between the two French works ought to illustrate a greater or lesser adaptability to the target language and culture, as well as the diverse objectives behind the translation projects. The powerful and epic language of the *chanson de geste* portraying the exclusive masculine world of battles and heroic deeds contrasts noticeably with the courtly and playful tone of the *Lais*, accentuating the inherent difference in thematic presentation. The repetition of words or ideas within the poem along with the replication of sound patterns through the assonance within each *laisse* give the *Chanson de Roland* a certain onerous rhythmical quality that propels the song forward and substantiates the matter being recounted. The shorter couplets of Marie de France, on the other hand, give her poems a lighter touch and a sense of a circular motion within each poem enclosing the visual scenes which make up the symbolic substance. Whereas the rudimentary structures of the *Chanson de Roland* and the masculine world portrayed within the poem would have adapted well to the native Scandinavian literature, the lyrical quality as well as the courtly matter of the *Lais* would have contrasted profoundly with the traditional heroic ideals of the Nordic cultural mentality. The dissimilarity between the two Old Norse translations indicates the varying degrees of adaptability of foreign material to existing literary standards. Whereas the Norse version of the *Lais* aspires to capture the poetic essence of the original, the linguistic emphasis in *Rúnzivals þáttr* is on dramatic momentum rather than symbolic imagery. The differences observable in the translated texts thus echo divergences in the content and the manner of representation of the French poems.[38]

It is of some significance in this context that *Strengleikar* seems to have been less popular and influential in Scandinavia, based on manuscript preservation and manifest influence within the literary tradition, than *Karlamagnús saga*, testifying perhaps to the consequences of audience expectations and cultural predilection for the durability of a translated text. Whereas the semiotic system out of which the *Lais* originated was so profoundly different from the existing narrative and cultural discourse of Scandinavian literary tradition, the heroic epic had its counterpart in Nordic pagan history and could thus be subsumed and given a familiar shape and form to facilitate the transfer of unfamiliar cultural elements. The negotiation of the separate semiotic systems of the French text and its Norse translation, evident in the diverse behavioral patterns that manifest the innate ideological principles, underscores elements that define the cultural conceptualizing of self and social environment. By identifying such elements one can approach the text as a product of its culture and approach the "medieval" through the location of those ideological signifiers that ultimately constitute a "culture."[39] The adaptations evident in the otherwise close translation of *Chanson de Roland* indicate the intimate interconnectedness between a language and its cultural constitution. The interpretation of discourse is therefore contingent not only upon the knowledge of the linguistic components of that language, but also upon the entire culturally determined semiotic system that underlies and enables its signifying potential. The successful transposition of a text depends not only upon the linguistic transfer of the material, but more importantly upon the satisfactory negotiation between the signifying structures of one culture and that of the other.

NOTES

1. I differentiate between geographical and cultural sphere here. In multilingual territories texts can exist in multiple versions without having to cross any territorial boundaries. The cultural context is, however, intimately linked to the language in which the text is written and hence is by necessity shifted once the text is rewritten within its new linguistic context despite their possible coexistence within the same location.

2. Gregory Rabassa approaches the problem of cultural context in translation on a linguistic level by analyzing semantic differences between the corresponding signifiers in any given language in his article "Words Cannot Express . . . The Translation of Cultures." Lawrence Venuti similarly considers racial, ethnic, and social implications of textual transfer between separate cultures in his article "Translation as a Social Practice: or, The Violence of Translation" in the same volume, *Translation Horizons, Beyond the Boundaries of Translation Spectrum*, ed. Marilyn Gaddis Rose (Binghamton, 1996), 183–194 and 195–214. André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett concentrate on the issues of context, history, and convention in translation in the collection of essays, *Translation, History, and Culture* edited by them (London, 1990), and in their later book *Constructing Cultures* (Clevedon, 1998). In his excellent article "Translating Medieval European Poetry," Burton Raffel discusses the difficulty of conveying medieval literature to a modern reader unfamiliar with the context out of which the original grew (*The Craft of Translation*, ed. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, 1989, 28–53). The focus is, however, on modern reception of medieval literature, not cultural differences within the medieval period itself. Recent studies on medieval translation practices and theory are shifting the focus to contextual comparative readings, see for instance *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, ed. Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo, 1989), and *The Medieval Translator*, ed. Roger Ellis and Ruth Evans (Binghamton, 1994).

3. "Analytical Survey I: Literary History and Cultural Study," *New Medieval Literature*, ed. Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland, and David Lawton, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1997), 237–270, at 238.

4. "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," *The Semiotics of Culture and Language*, ed. Robin P. Fawcett, M. A. K. Halliday, Sydney M. Lamb, and Adam Makkai, vol. 1 (London, 1984), 3–36, at 9.

5. *Translation Studies* (Amsterdam, [rev. ed.] 1995), 41.

6. For information on the import of foreign material in Norway during the rule of King Hákon Hákonarson (1217–1263) see for example E. F. Halvorsen, "Introduction" in *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland* (Copenhagen, 1959); Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Cambridge, 1921); Marianne E. Kalinke, *King Arthur North-by-Northwest* (Copenhagen, 1981); and *Les Relations littéraires franco-scandinaves au Moyen âge* (Paris, 1975).

7. In this paper Old French will be used to designate the *Langue d'Oïl* of Northern France and will not make distinctions between its regional dialects, such as Picard, Anglo-Norman, and Francien, except where directly relevant. The terms "France" and "French" refer to the common cultural heritage of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of France.

8. See *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Gerard J. Brault (University Park, 1984), xviii.

9. The standard edition of *Karlamagnús saga* used in this paper draws on the four manuscripts: Vellum MS no 180c, fol. written in the second half of the fourteenth century; Vellum MS no 180a, fol. written in the fifteenth century; Paper MS no 180d, fol. written not long before 1700 which is practically complete; and Paper MS 531, 4to written by síra Ketill Jörundsson who died in 1670, which contains the whole saga with only a few gaps. All four manuscripts are located in the Arnamagnæan collection in Copenhagen. Several manuscripts of *Karlamagnús saga* are mentioned in medieval inventories in various Icelandic monasteries (*Karlamagnus saga ok kappa hans*, ed. C. R. Unger, Christiania: H. J. Jensen, 1860, see also E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, 32–37).

10. There has been a general consensus among critics that the compilation came about in Norway around 1250 and drew on a number of French and Latin texts, while some argue that it was translated in several stages with some parts thus being older than others. For the argument of different stages of translation see Paul Aebischer, *Les différents états de la Karlamagnús saga* (Berlin, 1956). For the discussion of the collection within a specific Norwegian context see Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Cambridge, 1921), 237–255.

11. Due to the close commercial connections and general amity between the Norwegian and English court, as well as the Church, during the thirteenth century it is likely that most of the material was transmitted via England. It can thus be surmised that the manuscript used by the Norwegian translator was an Anglo-Norman version, perhaps not much different from the one preserved in the Digby manuscript. For a discussion of the preservation history of the *Chanson de Roland* see E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, 77–98.

12. While there is evidence of native heroic tales (such as those preserved in the Icelandic *Eddas*) being popular in Norway in the twelfth century, as well as skaldic poetry being composed near the end of the century, they were either never written down, or the manuscripts containing such literature have been lost (E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, 2–16).

13. While it is unclear to what extent such literature was being composed or even known in Norway, Halvorsen argues that oral (at least) versions of such literature as *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas of pre-Icelandic Germanic heroes) must have existed outside Iceland due to allusions to them in texts such as *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus (ibid., 106–107). It is likely that some form of native literature (whether oral or written) was being practiced in Norway which must have had similarities with those extent in Iceland, or that they at least were familiar with those being produced in Iceland due to the close cultural connections between the two countries.

14. Quotes from the French text are taken from *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. and trans. Gerard J. Brault, and will hereafter be given with line numbers in parentheses in the text. The English translations are based on Brault's facing translation in the edition with some variations to illuminate points of comparisons. The verbal echoes are underlined in both citations for clarification.

15. "Af Rúnzivals bardaga," *Karlamagnús saga ok kappa hans*, ed. C. R. Unger, 484. The Old Norse version will hereafter be referred to as *Rúnzivals þáttr* and will be cited in the text with page numbers in parentheses.

16. The English translations of the Norse quotes are my own and are meant to convey the sense of the Norse version, not the poetical quality. Constance Hieatt's English translation was consulted for concordances in each case (*Karlamagnús saga. The Saga of Charlemagne and his Heroes*, vol. III, Toronto, 1980).

17. Gabriele Röder uses Halvorsen's terminology of "translator's prose" to designate the style of *Karlamagnús saga*, which is more colloquial and uses rhetorical devices less frequently than the "court style" which is more ornate. She argues that the style apparent in the preserved texts bears close resemblance to that of the *konungasögur* (lives of Kings) and *Íslendinga sögur* (Sagas of Icelanders) and differs fundamentally from the formal language which has become the hallmark of the *chansons de geste* tradition (see "Die *Chansons de geste* in der altnordischen *Karlamagnús saga*" in *The Medieval Translator. Traduire au Moyen Age*, ed. Roger Ellis, René Tixier and Bernd Weitemeier, vol. VI, Turnhaut, 1998, 138; and E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, 10–12).

18. For a detailed textual comparison of the French and the Old Norse version see E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*. Gabriele Röder's article also contains an excellent overview of the various types of changes made by the Norse translator (ibid.).

19. *Mervelous Signals* (Lincoln, 1986) 120–123, see also chapter 3 on Roland.

20. Given the temporal distance between the original translation and the writing of the extant manuscripts containing the text, many of those changes might be due to later efforts of Icelandic scribes to emulate saga writing. Recent comparative evidence of later Icelandic versions and older Norwegian fragments of Norse translations has, however, not necessarily substantiated closer adherence to the original by the extant Norwegian texts than the Icelandic versions. In her article "Gvímars saga," Marianne E. Kalinke demonstrates that the eighteenth century Icelandic paper manuscript containing *Gvímars saga* often contains more accurate or original readings than the thirteenth century manuscript which preserves the unique version of the Norwegian translation of the French *lai*, *Guigemar* (*Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana XXXIV, Opuscula VII*, Copenhagen, 1979, 106–139). In view of the close

connections between the two cultural realms such later amendments would not deter in any case from the general conception of cultural transformation.

21. For a general discussion of the parallels between *Karlamagnús saga* and native Scandinavian literature see Lars Lönnroth, "Charlemagne, Hrólf kraki, Ólaf Tryggvason, Parallels in the Heroic Tradition" in *Les Relations littéraires franco-scandinaves au Moyen âge*, 29–52. Lönnroth argues that the form we have today of *Karlamagnús saga* is the result of scribal expansions in Iceland during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and that they therefore show extensive signs of influence from native writing.

22. *Translation Studies* 53.

23. *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 2000), 81.

24. For a discussion of emotion as a cultural construct see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*; Rom Harré, ed., *The Social Construction of Emotion* (Oxford, 1986); and Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past* (Ithaca, 1998).

25. My argument here is not that *Chanson de Roland* differs necessarily from the native Scandinavian literature in its emotional force or dramatic undertone, but rather in the manner that feelings and sentiments are expressed. Where the French epic exhibits emotion frequently, both in action and speech, it is rarely displayed in the Nordic literature and must rather be inferred from the context, characters' actions, or involuntary physical reactions.

26. Within the saga realm, the accusation of crying (with respect to men) was justifiably avenged by death and was considered a tremendous insult to the masculine identity as it was interpreted as an effeminization. The weeping Continental hero must thus have been a rather startling discovery to the Nordic audience and one which necessitated some cultural shifting, both in the matter being translated and in fact in the conceptual realm of the audience itself.

27. It is of note here that the word chosen to describe Roland's sorrow, "ógleði," which is quite literally "un-happiness," has assumed the meaning of "queasiness" or "nausea" in modern usage. It is unclear when this shift occurred or whether the word had any such connotations in medieval usage. Þorbjörg Helgadóttir, editor of the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (Dictionary of Old Norse Prose) published by the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen, kindly looked up their yet unpublished examples and could confirm the use of the word as "sadness," while there were no indications of how or when the meaning changed. The association between the sorrow and a literal feeling of sickness would substantiate the shift from emotional impression to internal physical reaction.

28. It is of significance in this context that the sagas contain passages demonstrating similar internal emotional agitations indicating the established conventions of representing emotion: "Þórhalli Ásgrímssyni brá svá við, er honum var sagt, at Njáll, fóstri hans, var dauðr ok hann hafði inni brunnit, at hann þrútnaði allr ok blóðbogi stóð ór hvárritveggju hlustinni, ok varð eigi stoðvat, ok fell hann í óvit, ok þá stoðvaðisk" (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1954, 344–45). [Thorhall Asgrimsson was so shocked when he was told his foster-father Njal was dead and had been burned in his house, that his whole body swelled up and blood gushed from both ears, and it could not be stopped and he fell in a faint, and then it stopped.]

29. "Drengilegt" reflects the Norse notion of honorable and noble comportment, which is associated with both moral and ethical behavioral patterns (for example murder vs. justified killing such as those due to an insult or brought about by the necessity of revenge) as well as the conceptualization of "manly" behavior, for instance the duty of a man to behave in the appropriate manner (to take action rather than show emotion for example). "Frændi" refers to a family member and can be used indiscriminately for a brother or one connected to the family through bonds of marriage. In some cases it is also used for a close friend, often bound to the other by a pledge of honor.

30. *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, 129.

31. "Die *Chansons de geste* in der altnordischen *Karlamagnús saga*," *The Medieval Translator. Traduire au Moyen Age*, 144.

32. *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, 129.

33. The cultural adaptation of foreign linguistic structures and cultural customs are often misconstrued as linguistic ineptitude as can be seen with the French battle cry "munjoie," which is either omitted or changed in the translation, and which Halvorsen attributes to the translator's misunderstanding. Gabriele Röder has, however, demonstrated that the cry of war was indeed known since it is translated and explained in the first part of the *Karlamagnús saga* ("Die *Chansons de geste* in der altnordischen *Karlamagnús saga*" in *The Medieval Translator. Traduire au Moyen Age*, 146–147).

34. The collection, which contains eleven of Marie de France's *lais* along with a number of other *lais*, some of which have no known French originals, is preserved in Codex De la Gardie 4–7 in the Uppsala University Library dated approximately 1270, which is no longer in a complete state. Fragments varying in size are now conserved as manuscript AM 666b, 4to in the Arnemagnæan collection in Copenhagen. The De la Gardie manuscript is the oldest and most important Norwegian source of Old Norse translations of courtly literature as most of the romance translations have been preserved only in

later Icelandic manuscripts (See *Strengleikar. An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-one Old French Lais,* ed. Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, Oslo, 1979).

35. Paul Aebischer argues in his book, *Les différents états de la Karlamagnús saga,* that the first stage in the compilation was an introductory chapter about Charlemagne's early years based on a lost *Vie romancée de Charlemagne,* a chronicle drawing on various *chansons de geste* and dated about 1200. Peter G. Foote also points out connections to the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle,* a legendary history in Latin that originates from the same traditions as the *Chanson de Roland,* which he claims was translated in Iceland in the early thirteenth century (*The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in Iceland,* London: London Mediæval Studies, 1959). It is likely though that the greater part of the collection was translated and assembled in Norway in the mid-thirteenth century, with later additional material possibly being interpolated or added into the existing collection.

36. Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane point out in their edition of the poems that the fidelity varies between poems with many of earlier poems being translated quite accurately while some of the later ones being abridged somewhat more extensively (ibid., xxii–xxvii).

37. The introduction of "unfamiliar" vocabulary into Norse literature is, obviously, not limited to *Strengleikar,* nor do the words necessarily originate with that specific translation. *Tristram saga* (translation of Thomas' *Tristan*) contains, for instance, multiple examples of such usage. Those words are, nevertheless, ingrained into the language through their manifestation in such works as *Strengleikar.*

38. Saxo Grammaticus' (1186–1218) *Gesta Danorum* reveals the contemporary cultural anxiety about the conflict between the ancient warrior ideals and the new influx of continental courtliness. The protagonist of the *Gesta* is torn between the realm of courtly ideals and values (diplomacy, lovemaking, attention to clothing etc.) and the traditional heroic ideals represented in the obligation of revenge (see Stephen C. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness,* Philadelphia, 1985, 176–189).

39. I use the word "approach" here purposely as any effort to describe the medieval is dependent upon modern perception of the past as a contained, vanished, and dissimilar, whereas any culture is, as is evident in this discussion by the adaptability of both the translated text and the reading community receiving it, in constant flux, dynamic, and changing and can thus neither be entirely contained nor depicted.

TOWARDS AN ANGLO-SAXON THEORY OF TRANSLATION[1]

Larry J. Swain

A somewhat unique contribution that the Anglo-Saxons left us is the amount of literature they translated from Latin into Old English. Some of this translated material is prose, some of it poetry, but all of it is important and forms a vital component of the Anglo-Saxons corpus. Most of the major literary figures of the period indulged in some sort of translation activity, whether Bede, Alfred, Aelfric, and other writers. One is left wondering how the Anglo-Saxons themselves approached the task of translation and whether they followed a particular method or "philosophy" of translation. In searching for an answer this paper will examine Bede and Alfred as translators and interpreters of the texts they worked with.

In his book *The True Interpreter* Louis Kelly critiques translation theories. His critique rests on the observation that a complete theory of language must include discussions of specification of function and goal, description and analysis of operations, and critical comment on relationships between goal and operations. In other words, theoretical discussions of translation must include the literary, linguistic, and hermeneutical. Kelly observes that there has been no universal theory of language because none have included all three criteria in a unified approach.

This paper is not about to attempt a theory of translation or Language, or even of Old English language. Rather, this paper is an attempt to discuss Anglo-Saxon translations of Latin works between Bede and the eleventh century in a way which includes Kelly's three areas. In the end rather than *traduttore traditore,* "the translator is a betrayer," the paper will hope to demonstrate that Anglo-Saxon translators were also interpreting their text, and these interpretations will tell us a great deal about Anglo-Saxon scholasticism.

Bede's account of Caedmon's poetic activity gives us a unique glimpse into the process of early Anglo-Saxon translation. Bede