La main de Thôt
ISSN : 2272-2653
Éditeur : Carole Filière

9 | 2021
La traduction littéraire et SHS à la rencontre des nouvelles technologies de la traduction : enjeux, perspectives et défis

Retranslating Zola with/against Vizetelly: uses of alignment

Andrew Rothwell

http://interfas.univ-tlse2.fr/lamaindethot/1039

Référence électronique
Andrew Rothwell, « Retranslating Zola with/against Vizetelly: uses of alignment », *La main de Thôt* [En ligne], 9 | 2021, mis en ligne le 15 avril 2022, consulté le 28 août 2024. URL : http://interfas.univ-tlse2.fr/lamaindethot/1039

Retranslating Zola with/against Vizetelly: uses of alignment

Andrew Rothwell

PLAN

Introduction
Zola's Victorian translator
Aligning Vizetelly with Zola
Vizetelly's (self-)censorship
  Louise's pregnancy and delivery
  Pauline's growth to womanhood
  Respectable values
Conclusion

TEXTE

Introduction

1 Lawrence Venuti's Hermeneutic Model of literary translation offers a telling insight into why re-translators should take an interest in the work of their predecessors. Rejecting the assumption that translation seeks to transfer across some invariant meaning immanent in the source text, Venuti emphasises instead the act of variation by which any translator must 'inscribe' in the original an interpretation that signifies in its new environment:

> Translation is [...] an interpretive act that varies the form, meaning and effect of the source text according to the intelligibilities and interests of the translating culture. The variation is inevitable, driven in the first place by the structural differences between languages and by the differences in values, beliefs, and representations between cultures. (VENUTI, 2017, 8)

2 Studying in detail the choices and decisions visible in an earlier translator's inscription can therefore open a window on the 'intelligibilities and interests', and especially the 'values, beliefs, and representations', of the society in which he or she was working, revealing es-

pecially those aspects of the original context that required 'variation' (in the active sense of the word):

> Translation works by detaching the source text from the set of contexts—linguistic and cultural, institutional and social—that constitute it as a signifying process and by building another set of contexts that constitute the translated text so as to permit it to signify in another language and culture. (ibid.)

3 When a historical translation is closely contemporary with the original, comparing the sets of socio-cultural contexts mobilised respectively by the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) can offer insight into differences between the originating and receiving cultures of the day, and the expectations of their respective target audiences, as the original is made to 'answer […] to the receiving situation' (ibid.). The inscribed interpretation of the early translator can thus cast an additional historical light on the original, an oblique illumination that gives salience to features which from a purely modern perspective might not stand out at all, thereby opening up potential new choices and decisions for the re-translator. I have referred elsewhere to the experience of working in the presence (or shadow) of such a historical TT as translating 'in stereo' (YOUDALE & ROTHWELL, 2022): the ST becomes stereophonically 'haunted' by the constantly-present voice of the prior translator, which also adds an extra 'spatial' dimension to the ST, in the manner of a Victorian stereoscope.

4 This paper reports on the creation of an experimental working environment to test the feasibility of such stereo translating. The project to re-translate into English Émile Zola's 1884 novel *La Joie de vivre* (ROTHWELL, 2018a) was carried out in the computer-assisted translation (CAT) tool memoQ, using a translation memory (TM) created by aligning Zola's ST with the 1901 translation *The Joy of Life* by Ernest Alfred Vizetelly, still in wide circulation. TM is generally assumed to be inappropriate for literary translation because its main design benefits (leveraging of repetitions, consistent terminology and phraseology) are largely nullified by the rich use of general language and stylistic variety characteristic of literary texts. However, a TM containing an older translation (potentially more than one) can present quite different benefits for the literary re-translator. Rather than providing standard text for speedy re-use, as in commercial translation,

it makes readily available to scrutiny, sentence by sentence, the solutions chosen by the earlier translator(s), revealing their decision-making processes and interpretation of the ST in close detail. In the case of *La Joie de vivre* this stereo effect was especially marked, not just because of our chronological distance from Zola and his contemporary translator, but for the gulf in social and moral values that the TM revealed between Third Republic Paris and Victorian London, which led Vizetelly to drastically self-censor his work. Different relationships between a literary ST and its prior translation(s) will of course yield different insights for the re-translator, but it will be argued from the present case study that, where an electronic copy of an old TT is available alongside the ST, it may generally be worthwhile for re-translators to experiment with this non-standard use of TM. In what follows, the focus will be on the lessons learnt from the initial alignment process, before the work of re-translation itself began.

Zola's Victorian translator

5 A plot summary of *La Joie de vivre*, the twelfth in Zola's epic Rougon-Macquart novel cycle, may make it sound like a moralistic story in which goodness and optimism triumph over pessimism and disaster. 10-year-old Parisian orphan Pauline Quenu is adopted by her aunt and uncle and taken to live on the wild Normandy coast, after inheriting a substantial fortune from her shopkeeper parents. Falling in love with her feckless older cousin Lazare, she sees her money squandered by her guardians on his various failed projects. Despite this, Pauline sacrifices herself for his happiness, pushing him to marry the coquettish Louise, whose sickly baby she then helps bring into the world, and later cares for. However, the novel's contemporary translator into English, Ernest Alfred Vizetelly (1853-1922), knew Zola well and was in little doubt that he intended its title to be taken ironically. The material and emotional disasters that befall the heroine, the chronic agonies of her gout-ridden uncle, the devastation wreaked by the sea on the fishing village and its indigent, depraved population, the pervading atmosphere of Schopenhauerian pessimism that shrouds Lazare's existence, and the final *coup de théâtre* of the maid's suicide, all support such a reading, reflected in his sardonic initial choice title, *How Jolly Life Is!*.[1] This first translation was issued in 1886 by his father Henry's publishing house Vizetelly & Company, which

also published the first English translation of *Madame Bovary*, done by Eleanor Marx, in the same year. It was revised for republication with the same press in 1889, and again for Chatto and Windus in 1901, with the final title *The Joy of Life* by which it is still widely known today.

6 Publishing translations of Zola at all in the prudish moral climate of Victorian England was a risky business: he had the reputation of a literary pornographer and care was needed to avoid prosecution. In Chapter 9 ('The British Pharisees') of his critical study *Émile Zola, Novelist and Reformer* (VIZETELLY, 1904), the translator looks back, more in sorrow than in anger, at the hostile reception received in reactionary circles by the English versions his father published, and their joint efforts to forestall a ruinous ban. Things came to a head with *La Terre* (1887), already a *cause célèbre* in France, which had earned Zola the Légion d'Honneur and was published in English as *The Soil* the following year. A long-standing resident of Paris, Ernest recalls his initial optimism, on hearing of his father's plan for the publication, that it might indicate some 'prospect of English people dropping the hypocrisy which had clung to them so long' (VIZETELLY, 1904, 253). However, on reading the proofs he had 'found in them a good deal of matter, which in his opinion needed "toning" for the English reader'. Accordingly, he and his father set to work and 'struck out or modified a very large number of passages', though he notes that the arrival of the proofs in sections made it 'difficult to determine what incidents and facts might be really essential, and how far expurgation might be carried without rendering the book unintelligible' (VIZETELLY, 1904, 255-6) — a clear indication of the lengths to which he felt obliged to go.

7 To no avail, however, for Zola and Henry Vizetelly were targeted in 1888 by a House of Commons debate on 'pernicious literature' (VIZETELLY, 1904, 262-67; KING, 1978, 238-240) and in October that year, in a prosecution sponsored by a self-styled National Vigilance Association (GORHAM, 1978, 361), Henry was tried at the Old Bailey under the Obscene Publications Act for *The Soil* and several other novels by Zola, including *How Jolly Life is!*. He was found guilty, fined £100 and saw the books banned (KING, 1978, 240-42). This doubtless explains why, in the Preface to the second edition of *How Jolly Life Is!*, which he had carefully 're-expurgated' following the guilty verdict (Vizetelly,

1904, 543), Ernest was at such pains to stress the book's inoffensiveness, while still rushing combatively to the defence of its author:

> Criticism has fallen fiercely upon most of the works of fiction which have proceeded from M. Émile Zola's busy pen — at times the criticism of envy, at others the criticism of prejudice, and again the criticism of the blind. Indeed, in the long series of volumes dealing with the Rougon-Macquart family there is but one which has commanded the approval of friends and foes alike; and that is the present story 'La Joie de vivre'.
> When this book first appeared in Paris its merits fairly took away the breath of the envious, and its superiority over every-day fiction was so manifest that the blindest began to see. As for the prejudiced, all that the most captious among them could lay hold of for rebuke was a few passages contained in the tenth chapter. (VIZETELLY, 1889, v)

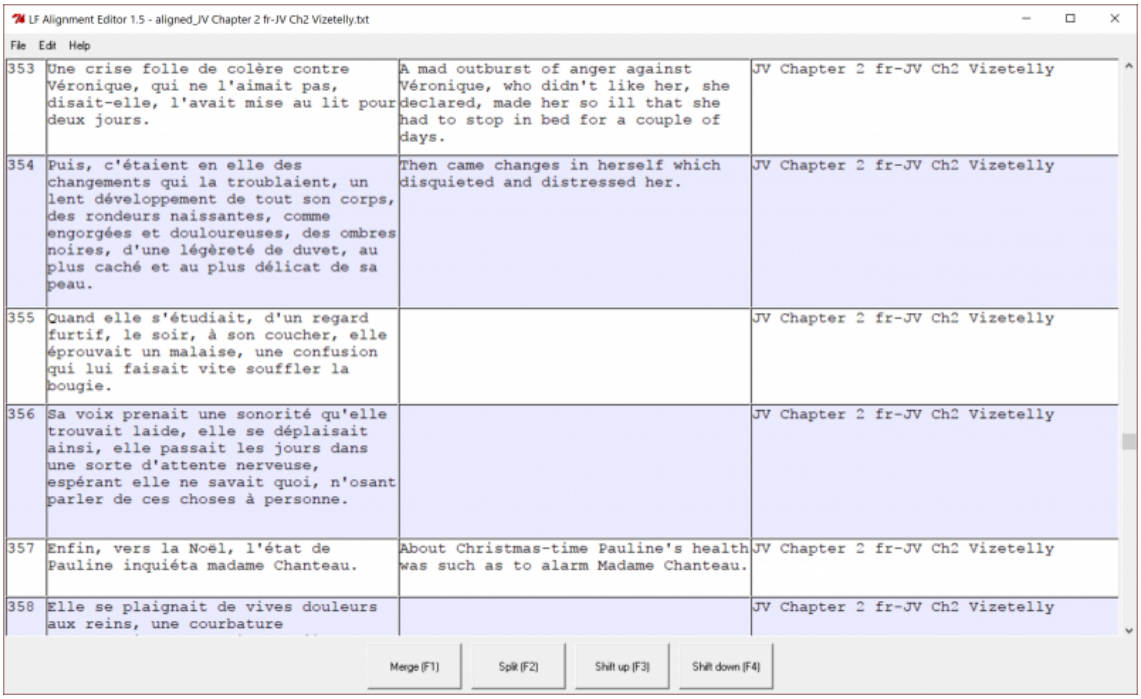
8 The implication that he had needed to expurgate just 'a few passages' of Chapter 10, which is substantially given over to details of Louise's excruciating and dangerous delivery, was disingenuous, but the threat of renewed prosecution that he was attempting to ward off remained very real. His father was in fact indicted again in 1889 for twelve translations, including the re-expurgated *How Jolly Life Is!* (VIZETELLY, 1904, 285-6; KING, 1978, 245-6). On conviction, he was sentenced to a £200 fine and spent three months in Holloway Prison, having already liquidated his publishing house, and he died a broken man on New Year's Day in 1904. Little wonder, then, that the 1901 version by which Zola's novel remains widely known in English should still bear the scars of Ernest's self-censorship, a process revealed in close detail when the translation is aligned with the original.

Aligning Vizetelly with Zola

9 Creating a translation memory from a source text (ST) and its existing translation requires electronic files of each to be available. In the present case the Zola text was obtained from the Gallica database of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and checked against the definitive Pléiade edition (ZOLA, 1964), page numbers from which were also added manually to the electronic file, while a 1915 reprint of VIZETELLY 1901 was downloaded from Project Gutenberg. Next, both texts were divided by chapter into eleven smaller files, and the ST and TT

of each were aligned at segment level using the freeware tool LF Aligner 4.1. This uses clues such as relative position in the text, sentence length, and punctuation to work out probable correspondences between ST and TT sentences, which can then be corrected manually by splitting or joining segments, and moving them up or down, until they align horizontally. Each corrected alignment was finally exported in TMX (Translation Memory eXchange) format, for subsequent import into a translation memory in memoQ (YOUDALE & ROTHWELL, 2022). For the purposes of the present paper, the corrected alignments were also exported to Excel for convenient analysis.

10 Correcting the alignment was a revealing process for the retranslator, since it demanded a close cross-reading, sentence by sentence, between Vizetelly's TT and Zola's ST, allowing patterns of thematic shifts and omissions to emerge. For most of the chapters the automatic alignment was fairly successful, though careful attention was needed to pick up the relatively numerous cases where the translator had decided to split or join Zola's sentences (it was found that he never chose to arrange them in a different sequence). A second issue was the frequent omission of one or more complete sentences, and the not infrequent omission of substantial passages, which required the text of the TT to be moved down the corresponding number of slots until the alignment could be resumed (see e.g. in Figure 1, rows 355 and 356):



.

Figure : LF Aligner interface (from Chapter 2, onset of Pauline's puberty)

11 A third, subtler category of shifts in the TT was the omission or reductive paraphrase of part(s) of a sentence (see e.g. Figure 1, row 354), which did not affect the alignment but was revealing of Vizetelly's strategies for avoiding potentially controversial material — and indeed of his judgements about what might be regarded as controversial in the first place.

12 The outcome, for the re-translator, was a nuanced sense of the constraining boundaries of decency and respectability within which his Victorian predecessor was striving, in the event unsuccessfully, to confine his version. This cast into sharp relief the daring experimentalism of Zola's writing, attacked also in conservative circles in France but never censored there, giving the retranslation task an edgy historical perspective that it would otherwise have lacked. The 'stereo' view of the ST thus obtained helped in turn to calibrate decisions in the new translation about whether and how far to aim for a similar shock effect on the modern reader to that experienced by Zola's contemporaries. Without the constantly present reference point of the Vizetelly alignment, such decisions could only have been framed in an amorphous present-day language-world in which the subject-

matter itself of *La Joie de vivre* is unlikely to offend many 21st-century readers. The alignment can thus be argued to have deepened the retranslator's reading of the ST in important ways and probably contributed to producing a better-informed TT.

Vizetelly's (self-)censorship

13 In support of these claims, the analysis that follows will focus on the main no-go areas that Vizetelly judged most certain to excite the zeal of the moral 'vigilants'. While the themes of desire, sex and reproduction are predictably selected for deletion and paraphrase, perhaps the most damaging expurgations for the novel's power to move the reader concern the consistent repression of Pauline's bodily and emotional experience as a woman, the source of much of the work's complexity and at times startling modernity. Almost as significant is the care with which Vizetelly adjusted Zola's social observations to remove conflicts with the Victorian system of 'respectable' family values. With these three elements either substantially bowdlerised or excised, it is little wonder that the book represented in English for over a century by Vizetelly's 1901 translation should have been received as lifeless and dull — even if his assiduous, though reluctant, expurgations ironically proved insufficient to keep his father out of jail. To illustrate his approach, extracts from the ST and TT will be presented below in parallel, somewhat as they appear in the aligner, with significant deletions of ST information underlined and reductive paraphrasing in the TT italicised.

Louise's pregnancy and delivery

14 Vizetelly's most extensive act of expurgation occurs in Chapter 10, where Zola narrates the difficult pregnancy and life-threatening delivery of Lazare's young wife, Louise. Here LF Aligner reported a drastic misalignment between ST and TT, finding 730 sentences in 264 paragraphs in the former but just 323 sentences and 113 paragraphs in the latter — making the translation less than half the length of the original (so much for Ernest's 'few passages'). Already in Chapter 9 Lazare's first allusion to her condition is euphemised: 'Sa grossesse la fatigue beaucoup' (p. 1049) becomes 'Her *state of health* has made her weak and languid', while the narrator's explanation that 'La grossesse

de sa femme, à ce moment, lui causa une nouvelle secousse' (p. 1058) is rendered 'The knowledge that his wife was *enceinte* gave him a fresh shock.' This 'polite' use of an Anglo-Norman legal archaism[2] would no doubt have bamboozled any minimally-literate English adolescent into whose hands the book had fallen, as would Vizetelly's references to Mme Bouland, who comes to assist Louise, as the '*accoucheuse*' — he seems unable to use the Anglo-Saxon 'midwife'. He also omits the medical fact of the duration of pregnancy: Louise's despairing objection 'À huit mois, que voulez-vous que la sage-femme puisse y faire?' (p. 1077) is untranslated, and when she is finally summoned, the specifics of her 'questions brèves, sur les dates, le lieu et le caractère des douleurs' (p. 1084) are telescoped into: 'began to question her.'

15 Much of the force of Chapter 10 comes from the remorseless build-up of the physical symptoms and pain of Louise's dangerous labour, which Vizetelly expurgates systematically. Zola's preparation of the ground, 'Sa grossesse, très pénible, l'avait en effet accoutumée à de continuelles nausées, à des maux d'entrailles, dont la violence parfois la tenait pliée en deux, pendant des journées entières' (p. 1078), is simply omitted, as is the realism of her early attempts to cope with the pain: 'Assise au bord de son lit, la jeune femme, les pieds nus, enveloppée dans un peignoir, se balançait d'un mouvement d'horloge, sous la fixité intolérable d'une souffrance qui lui arrachait de grands soupirs réguliers' (p. 1080). She experiences terrible contractions, nausea and vomiting, as first the midwife, who has just lost another patient, then Dr Cazenove, an ex-naval surgeon essentially self-taught in obstetrics, strive by candle-light and without anaesthetic to save the lives of the mother and child. Vizetelly's strategy is to maintain only the bare bones of the narrative, using a combination of deletion and neutral reformulation to conceal from his reader the unacceptable details of Louise's 'state of health'. For instance, her ambulatory compulsion, groans and screams of agony, and movingly pathetic attempts to preserve her modesty, are suppressed or toned down by summarisation with superordinate expressions:

À toute minute, ses mains tâtonnantes quittaient un instant la commode, glissaient le long de ses flancs, allaient empoigner et soutenir ses fesses, comme pour alléger le poids qui les écrasait. Et Pauline, debout derrière elle, ne pouvait rien, devait la regarder souffrir, détournant la tête, feignant de s'occuper, lorsqu'elle la voyait ramener son peignoir d'un geste d'embarras, avec la préoccupation persistante de ses beaux cheveux blonds défaits et de son fin visage décomposé. (p. 1083)	Meantime Pauline *remained with* Louise, *unable to assist her* in spite of her desire to do so.
Leurs oreilles se tendaient vers la chambre. Des plaintes vagues en sortaient toujours, il y eut deux cris déchirants. (p. 1084)	They strained their ears to catch *the sounds* that came from Louise's room;

16 When the anxious father-to-be asks the midwife what is wrong, it is precisely the 'particulars' of her answer that Vizetelly omits, at the same time replacing the drama of direct speech with summarizing narration:

Lazare pâlissait. Un souffle froid lui avait glacé la face. Il balbutia: — Qu'y a-t-il ? — L'enfant se présente par l'épaule gauche, autant que j'ai pu m'en assurer, et je crains même que le bras ne se dégage le premier . — Eh bien ? demanda Pauline. — Dans un cas pareil, la présence d'un médecin est absolument nécessaire... Je ne puis prendre la responsabilité de l'accouchement, surtout à huit mois . Il y eut un silence. (pp. 1084-5)	Lazare turned pale. An icy breath passed over his brow. Then in stammering accents *he asked for particulars*. *Madame Bouland gave them, adding*: 'I cannot undertake the responsibility. The presence of a doctor is absolutely necessary.' Silence fell once more.

17 There follows a passage some 1,650 words long (pp. 1086-92 in the Pléiade edition) in which Zola describes Mme Bouland's quasi-military preparations and her observations of developments during the tense wait for the doctor, setting up a camp bed and explaining to Louise what was happening to her:

> La sage-femme, afin de rassurer Pauline, lui expliquait à demi-voix que les douleurs de la dilatation du col étaient parfois plus intolérables que les grandes douleurs de l'expulsion. Elle avait vu ce travail préparatoire durer deux jours, au premier enfant. Ce qu'elle redoutait, c'était la rupture des eaux, avant l'arrivée du médecin; car la manœuvre qu'il allait être obligé de faire, serait alors dangereuse. (p. 1087)