

Introduction

The following papers were originally given at a seminar that met over a three-day period at the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in Montréal in April of 1999. The conference organisers had given this seminar the whimsical title "Narrative Chunnels," which turned out to be happily appropriate. "Narrative" identifies the mode, and "chunnels" the subversive and subverting tunnelling that has always characterised the myriad ways in which intellectual traffic travels from country to country, from culture to culture. This traffic has always been polyphonic and multivalent; the traditional, no longer adequate pigeonholing of literature as the product of a hermetic nation-state culture could not do justice to its dynamic complexity. Thus, "translation," crossing, constitutes both literally and metaphorically the topic or matrix of all following papers.

Dror Abend-David's study of renderings of Shylock's speech in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* into German, Hebrew, and Yiddish opens up wide vistas of how language both constitutes and reflects cultural difference. Melanie Eckford-Prossor offers a witty and perspective insight into currencies of identity on the model of the Euro. Michael Hanne explores the boundaries and relationships between metaphor and narrative, both as utterances and as defined fields of scholarly study. Giuliana Perco investigates the manipulated reader, what she calls "the constructed reader" in the works of Milorad Pavić and Italo Calvino. My contribution considers the possible future of literary translation, now that culture and language are becoming increasingly international. Simona Sawhney explores the problematisation of genre theory that results from confronting the Sanskrit epic and the Homeric epic, and the limits on how the former can be read and understood in Western culture. Ian Wilson considers Samuel Beckett's self-translation of *Company/Compagnie*, which presents the reader with the ironic situation of two authoritative texts that differ from each other in important ways, preventing interpretive closure. Steven G. Yao examines how Pound, through creative translation of Confucius, imposes his meaning on the Western reader in the *Cantos*.

City University of New York Graduate School

A Comparison of Translations and Adaptations of Shylock's Speech in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* into German, Hebrew and Yiddish

The following is a comparison of a number of translations into German, Hebrew and Yiddish of what is perhaps the most famous passage in *The Merchant of Venice*: Shylock's speech in act III, scene i. Shylock's "speech," is, of course, a part of a dialogue. However, the passage in which Shylock asserts the humanity of the Jews, declaring that they have eyes, hands, dimensions and emotions, has become such a famous part of the play that it can be thought of as a monologue. I refer to this passage as "Shylock's Speech." In this comparison, I choose to concentrate on three issues that inform the choices of German, Hebrew, and Yiddish translators: the representation of Jews as a "nation"; the declaration that they have bodies and souls equal to those of Gentiles; and the expression of their eagerness, and ability, to take revenge. In Shakespeare's play, Shylock's speech is a declaration of complete similarity between Jews and Gentiles in terms of national existence, physical appearance, emotional reaction, and social behaviour. Such equality is undercut in German, as well as in Yiddish and Hebrew translations of the play, providing various modifications of Shakespeare's text. In his speech, Shylock raises the question of Jewish identity – a question that, after more than five thousand years, is still a source of intense inquiry.¹ Since no Jewish community, up to 1948, existed as a modern nation, different translations take different approaches in repeating Shylock's use of the word, "nation." Similarly, since Jews very often lacked political power, their ability to take revenge is not as clear as it may be represented in Shylock's speech ("we will resemble you in that [revenge]"). Finally, the external appearance of Jews and Christians ("hands,

1 In Israel, the debate between Orthodox and Conservative / Reform Jews has been entitled by the Press: "Who is a Jew?" The debate centers mainly on the status of Jews who are converted by non-orthodox Rabbis – and whether such people may partake in the duties and privileges of Israelis who are recognized as Jewish by the state.