

Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame

by Andre Lefevere · Language: EN

Summary by booksummaryai.com —

<https://booksummaryai.com/country/en/translation-rewriting-and-the-manipulation-of-literary-fame>

Overview

Andre Lefevere's "Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame" is a foundational text in translation studies, arguing that translation is not a neutral act of linguistic transfer but a powerful form of "rewriting." Lefevere posits that literary texts, when moved across cultures, are actively reshaped by various agents—including translators, critics, publishers, and anthologists—to conform to the ideological and poetological norms of the target culture. This process of rewriting is not merely an interpretation but a manipulation that significantly influences how a text is received, understood, and valued, ultimately determining an author's literary fame and place within a new literary canon.

The book challenges traditional, source-text-oriented views of translation by placing it within a broader cultural and systemic context. Lefevere demonstrates how external factors like patronage, prevailing literary trends (poetics), and societal beliefs (ideology) exert pressure on the rewriting process, making translation a site of cultural power and negotiation. By analyzing these forces, he reveals that literary fame is not an intrinsic quality of a work but a constructed phenomenon, shaped by the choices made during its re-presentation. This perspective is crucial for understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural literary exchange and the often-invisible mechanisms that govern literary history and canon formation.

Key Takeaways

- Translation is not a neutral act but a form of "rewriting" influenced by the ideological and poetological norms of the target culture.
- Literary fame is actively constructed and manipulated through various forms of rewriting, not solely based on an original text's inherent quality.
- Translators, critics, anthologists, and publishers act as gatekeepers who shape how a text is received in a new culture.
- Dominant ideologies and prevailing literary trends in a target culture significantly influence how texts are translated and presented.
- Understanding the mechanisms of rewriting helps to deconstruct the perceived objectivity of literary history and canon formation.

- The study of translation should move beyond linguistic equivalence to encompass the broader cultural and power dynamics at play.
- Patronage, whether by individuals, groups, or institutions, plays a crucial role in determining which texts are rewritten and how.

Chapter Summaries

Literature and Rewriting

This chapter introduces the central concept of rewriting, asserting that all forms of literary transfer, including translation, criticism, and historiography, are active manipulations of an original text. Lefevere argues that these rewritings are not innocent reproductions but are designed to adapt texts to a specific audience and cultural context, thereby shaping their reception and influencing their perceived value. He sets the stage for understanding literature as a dynamic system rather than a collection of static, original works.

The System

Lefevere outlines his systemic approach to literature, viewing it as a complex structure comprising an 'inner system' (literary genres, symbols, themes) and an 'outer system' (patronage, institutions, professional agents). He explains how these systems interact and exert pressure on the production and reception of literature, including its rewriting. This chapter establishes the framework for analyzing how texts function within and across cultural boundaries, emphasizing the interconnectedness of literary and societal forces.

Patronage

This chapter delves into the role of patronage in shaping literary production and rewriting. Lefevere identifies three types of patronage: ideological (influencing content), economic (funding), and status (granting recognition). He demonstrates how patrons—whether individuals, groups, or institutions—can dictate what gets translated, how it is translated, and how it is presented, thereby directly influencing the image and fame of authors and works within a target culture. Patronage is shown as a powerful external constraint on rewriting.

Poetics

Lefevere explores the concept of poetics as a key constraint on rewriting. Poetics refers to the dominant literary conventions, genres, and aesthetic norms prevalent in a given culture at a particular time. He explains how translators and other rewritings often adapt original texts to align with the target culture's prevailing poetics, sometimes at the expense of the source text's original form or intent. This adaptation is crucial for a text's acceptance and success in a new literary environment.

The Universe of Discourse

This chapter examines the 'universe of discourse,' which encompasses the ideological framework and shared beliefs of a culture. Lefevere argues that rewritings are inevitably shaped by this ideological context, often subtly or overtly modifying texts to align with the target culture's worldview, moral values, or political agenda. This manipulation ensures the text's acceptability and relevance, but also highlights how translation can be a tool for cultural assimilation or ideological propagation.

The Professional Agents

Lefevere focuses on the specific roles of professional agents—translators, critics, reviewers, teachers, and publishers—in the rewriting process. He argues that these agents are not neutral conduits but active participants who make choices based on their own ideologies, poetics, and the demands of the literary system. Their decisions, from selecting texts to translating specific phrases or writing critical introductions, collectively determine how a work is presented and perceived, thus manipulating its fame.

Case Studies

This chapter provides concrete examples to illustrate the theoretical concepts introduced earlier. Lefevere analyzes various historical and literary cases, demonstrating how different forms of rewriting—including translation, adaptation, and critical reception—have shaped the understanding and fame of specific authors and works across different cultures and time periods. These case studies underscore the practical implications of his theory, showing how manipulation occurs in real-world literary contexts.

Conclusion: Literary Fame

In the concluding chapter, Lefevere synthesizes his arguments, reiterating that literary fame is not an inherent quality but a constructed phenomenon resulting from the interplay of various rewritings. He emphasizes that the image of an author or a work is projected and maintained through these manipulations, which are constrained by patronage, poetics, and ideology. The chapter solidifies the idea that understanding rewriting is essential for comprehending how literary canons are formed and sustained.

Themes

- Translation as rewriting
- Manipulation of fame
- Ideology and poetics
- Cultural mediation
- Canon formation
- Power in translation

Notable Quotes

- "Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text." — This statement encapsulates Lefevere's core argument that translation is an active, transformative process rather than a passive transfer.
- "Rewriting manipulates the reader into reading a text in a certain way." — Lefevere highlights the power of rewriting to guide and control audience reception, shaping their interpretation of the original work.
- "Literary fame is not something inherent in the text, but something that is constructed." — This quote summarizes a central thesis of the book, emphasizing that an author's reputation is built through cultural mediation and rewriting, not solely by intrinsic merit.
- "Ideology and poetics are the two main factors that determine the strategies of rewriting." — Lefevere identifies the primary constraints that influence how texts are rewritten, underscoring the cultural and aesthetic forces at play.
- "The image of a literature, or of an author, or of a specific work is projected onto a certain public through rewritings." — This explains how the perception and public image of literary entities are actively shaped and disseminated via various forms of rewriting.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame about?

It explores how literary texts, especially translations, are not passively transmitted but actively reshaped by various agents to fit the target culture's norms. Lefevere argues that this "rewriting" process, driven by ideology and poetics, fundamentally manipulates an author's fame and the reception of their work. It challenges traditional views of translation as mere linguistic transfer.

Is Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame worth reading?

Yes, for anyone interested in translation studies, comparative literature, or cultural studies. It offers a foundational and influential perspective on how literature functions across cultures, revealing the power dynamics and ideological forces behind canon formation and literary reception. Its insights remain highly relevant today.

Who should read Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame?

Scholars and students of translation studies, comparative literature, literary theory, and cultural studies will find it essential. Translators, literary critics, publishers, and anyone interested in the mechanisms of cultural influence and the construction of literary value will also benefit greatly from its arguments.

How long does it take to read Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame?

Given its academic nature and typical length for such a book (around 150-200 pages), it would likely take an average reader approximately 4-6 hours to read thoroughly. This estimate can vary based on reading speed and the depth of engagement with its theoretical concepts.