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Mona Baker (éd), *Unsettling Translation: Studies in Honour of Theo Hermans*, London & NewYork, Routledge, 2022, 262 p ISBN: 978-1-003-13463-3 (ebk)

Karen Meschia

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TEXTE

- 1 Mona Baker, herself a distinguished figure in the field, co-editor notably of the 3-volume *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* and long known to apprentice translators for her pithy and insightful coursebook *In Other Words*, here aims to pay tribute to one of her mentors, Theo Hermans. A quote from the latter's London University inaugural lecture serves as epigraph to the book, both clarifying the choice of title and setting the tone for what follows:

The rather smooth, unruffled picture of translation that I have just painted has an 'other' to it, a more unsettling but also a much more interesting and intriguing side. The smooth, unruffled picture may be part of the conventional perception and self-presentation of translation, but it papers over the cracks. I want to try and poke my finger into at least some of these cracks. And the reason for doing so lies in the recognition that translation, for all its presumed secondariness, derives its force from the fact that it is still our only answer to, and our only escape from, Babel.¹

- 2 The fifteen chapters that make up this five-part volume, while approaching translational issues from widely different subject matter, all acknowledge their debt to Hermans and share his commitment to envisaging the act of translating first as a social process with ethical and ideological implications, always encoding a subject position, embedded in complex and changing power relations, and thus requiring historicisation from would-be analysts and self-reflexivity from would-be practitioners. Baker's introductory chapter gives an overview of Hermans's work, starting from the widely celebrated, agenda-setting *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, first edited in 1985 and reprinted in 2014. The work was key in

introducing descriptivism to Anglophone readers but by 1999 Hermans had already written a detailed critical assessment of the paradigm he helped establish with *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and System-Oriented Approaches Explained*, which, Baker rightly points out “gained wide popularity because of the quality of Hermans’s writing” (3). Interwoven into the discussion of Hermans’s work is an account of Baker’s own academic and intellectual development, which reveals him as a rigorous but benign tutelary figure. Summarising his heritage, she points to “his vision for a broadly conceived, self-questioning discipline that is culturally and politically aware and cognizant of its own place in the world” (8).

- 3 The three chapters forming part 1, “Translational epistemologies” all engage with canonical translation theory source texts, to challenge or “unsettle” their premises. Rainer Guldin, in revisiting translation as metaphor, analyses two essays by Berman, “De la translation à la traduction” and “Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore” to critique Berman’s “definitional essentialism” and “linguistic determinism” (18). He offers an alternative to what he sees as a dualistic approach to source and target text by proposing Maitland’s more fluid conceptualisation of “threads of textual possibility” linked together through the subjective work of the translator. Rafael Y. Schögler, first makes clear his own commitment to trans-epistemologies, defined as “beliefs and practices of knowledge-making that reject binary thinking” (29) whilst eschewing the too great importance given to national, disciplinary or linguistic boundaries as they are not “particularly relevant in creating knowledge” (29). He takes as a case-study a multilingual collection of essays addressing current societal and political developments, *The Great Regression*, conceived by a prestigious German publishing house and involving equally prestigious contributors. Translation was central to the project as each wrote in the language of her/his choice, but Schögler demonstrates the conspicuous absence in the textual, peri- and epitextual material, of any critical thinking about translation “as a practice, a form of knowledge-making, a process of decision making” (31). He concludes that “the epistemic conceptualization of translational knowledge-making has only just begun” (43). Kathryn Batchelor convincingly “open[s] up a fresh discussion” (49) on the proximity of translation to critical reading, via Genette’s suggestion in *Paratextes* that translations are ne-

cessarily a commentary on the original. Through reworking the notions of paratextuality and hypertextuality, Batchelor concludes that Genette's vision of translational hypertexts is essentially "negative, deforming" (52) whereas Derrida's unexpected but enlightening use of four different translational hypertexts from Shakespeare in *Les Spectres de Marx* offers a more fruitful and creative version of translation as an open-ended process, viewed metaphorically as "prism" rather than "channel" (59).

- 4 Translation history, the topic of part 2, is an emergent area, making practitioners especially sensitive to epistemological questions of purpose and disciplinary home, which is reflected here. Hilary Footitt prefaces her contribution by indicating two opposing visions, seemingly offered respectively by Palgrave Macmillan's and Routledge's collections on translation history both created in 2019. Put simply, one focuses on enhancing knowledge of the history of translation studies, the other on how translation can shed light on history by making its distinctive contribution to the historiographical debate. Footitt dismisses this opposition as unproductive, reifying both history and translation, then, "challenging the archive" (67), proposes a form of historical ethnography that changes both the focus of research and sources used. Her study of Allied troops and French civilians in Normandy from June to October 1944, uses a hybrid mix of sources from past and present, to capture her object "both at a specific historical moment, and also in subsequent re-imaginings" (69). Christopher Rundle's contribution, "Freidrich Wilhelm's tailor and significance in translation history", examining the intricacies of defining a significant historical event unequivocally represents the second position above:

■ ...if we set aside the a priori importance that translation historians
■ accord to language and cultural exchange there is no significant dif-
■ ference between translation historians and other historians in terms
■ of the theoretical issues and methodological choices they face; or
■ perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that there shouldn't be.
■ (81)

- 5 It would appear that there are as many ways of doing translation history as of doing history.

- 6 The chapters featured in “Performing translation”, foreground reception, in engaging with concrete instances of the materiality of translations available to an audience. Gabriela Saldanha suggests that in literary translation “the notion of performance captures more aspects of the translator’s art than that of voice” (97) and aims to construct an anthropological theory of performance. Based on three very different translated versions of Mercè Rodoreda’s *La plaça del Diamant* she argues that translation is more than just the skilful use of literary language or creative problem-solving but “requires the conscious embodiment of doubleness” (105). Different outcomes are as so many prismatic refractions of the same object. Saldanha’s avowed aim is to position translation within an art theory that does not automatically undermine it. A similar intention to enhance the status of the profession underlies Geraldine Brodie’s “Gatekeepers and stakeholders: valorizing indirect translation in theatre”. By placing her problematic firmly within the social arena of relative power relations, she demonstrates how and why literal and indirect theatrical translation are relegated to subordinate positions. She concludes that “theatrical literal translation activity deserves greater visibility, deeper understanding of its role in the performance process and fuller acknowledgement of the expertise and engagement of the translators” (122). Karin Littau Media builds on two notions central to Hermans’ thinking: that of translation as manipulation and rewriting, then its crucial role in shaping literary culture, to analyse Anne Carson’s translation of Catullus’ poem 101, the elegy to his dead brother. This became *Nox* “a fold-out book in a box” (133), incorporating Carson’s private, hand-made scrapbook, in memory of her own dead brother. Littau Media reminds us how Carson belongs to a Canadian feminist tradition that views translation as a “womanhandling” (134) of the text, flaunting signs of manipulation, and concludes: “As a bookish translation that draws attention to itself as book and as translation, *Nox* is emblematic of changing attitudes to translation” (134).
- 7 “Centres and peripheries” takes us to more culturally distant contexts, with discussion in each case articulated around situations suggested by the spatial metaphor, be they geopolitical, cultural, or both. Hephzibah Israel’s compelling account shows how “untouchable” Tamil Dalit writers have mobilized “offensive” literary devices to comic effect since the 1990s, in seeking to challenge elitist literary

and social structures in contemporary India. Scatological humour, swearing, name-calling and mockery, all written in non standard oral registers of Tamil, figure notably in these literary forms which, in their effects, are celebratory and inclusive for the socially marginalised communities they serve. Israel's theoretical development offers a new approach to the vexed question of translating humour. Daniele Monticelli and Eda Ahi provide a fascinating insight into translation and ideology by mapping the fortunes of Russian and Estonian translated versions of Italian Gianni Rodari's *Adventures of Cipollino*. Little known outside Italy, the "Onion boy" has been popularized and variously instrumentalised since the 1950's, throughout the Soviet period and up to the present day, with Ukrainian political prisoner Nadia Savchenko currently exhorting fellow citizens to "make a revolution, and build Ukraine, your new home – read them the story of Cipollino" (175). Sebnem Susam-Saraeva proposes an ecofeminist re-reading and re-translation of the traditional Turkish folk song "Kara Toprak", written by fellow Anatolian Aşık Veysel Şatıroğlu. She explains how the song came to symbolize love of the land, the local and the Anatolian, gained recognition in Turkey within the context of the state- and nation-building efforts of the 1930s, and has been highly popular ever since, with numerous Turkish covers in a variety of genres. For Susam-Saraeva, ecofeminism offers a "useful and timely framework" (181) for consciousness-raising about the natural world, here by revisiting the song and its English translation, to challenge gender-specific representations of the earth and nature. The original and her proposed translation are presented in an appendix.

- 8 No serious overview of translation today can afford to ignore the massive presence of translated material, much of it done by non-professionals, in cyberspace. "Digital encounters" concludes this volume with two articles that both provide a useful formalisation of social network communities, whilst raising countless questions, some disquieting, about their purpose for users. Robert Neather examines a Buddhist online discussion forum as a discursive and epitextual space, underlining the centrality of translation as a vector. F. Wenger's notion of "community of practice" serves to establish a typology of usages, revealing how debate about the quality of a translation can become "a touchstone for polemicizing over the politics of religion" (211) by rival sects. It is probably no coincidence that Jan

Buts' corpus-assisted study also tackles a religious theme: that of creationist discourse from two websites: *Creation Ministries International* and *Creation Worldview Ministries*. Buts uses Hermans's complex formalisation of "equivalence" to reveal how creationist, anti-evolutionist discourse blurs the frontiers between scientific statement and belief, as in this example: "The greatest scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus. There is no such thing as consensus science. If it's consensus, it isn't science. If it's science, it isn't consensus. Period." Buts' conclusion is chastening: "If one considers the theory of evolution as no more than a narrative on offer in the marketplace of ideas, accepting its veracity becomes less of an obligation" (228).

- 9 The preceding remark echoes uncannily back to the liminary quotation from Herman, finding in translation an answer to, and escape from, Babel. Similarly, each of the articles here shows how his often inspirational writing has enriched their own thinking and the whole book is a rich and thought-provoking celebration of his independent, non-elitist approach and considerable contribution to the field of translation studies. As Baker herself puts it: "More than anything else, it is this confident, self-reflexive, critical and inclusive vision which constitutes the hallmark of his legacy as a scholar and mentor to all the contributors featured in this volume" (9).

NOTE DE FIN

¹ Theo Hermans, "Translation's Other", Inaugural lecture, University College London, 1996

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Rubriques

Recensions

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Karen Meschia

Université de Toulouse [2karen.meschia@gmail.com](mailto:karen.meschia@gmail.com)