

REBECCA BEARD AND BRENDA GARVEY

Introduction: The Role of the Translated Text in Britain Today

Poetics and politics: in theory

the translator. Translation is undertaken in order to carry a text from one language into another. The act of translation allows this movement from source to target language, while reading the product as a translation entails moving back from target to source. Just as we hoped would be the case for our seminar contributors, source and target languages are made to talk to and, ideally, enrich one another. It was clear from the start, therefore, that it would be naïve to believe we could enter into one another's linguistically and culturally foreign worlds without taking account of the translation process that had

This had been our own experience so far. We had wanted to read translated literature first and foremost as good literature that would have the added benefit

auspices of Literary Fiction or Recent Fiction, terms entirely untroubled by source and target, domestic and foreign, losses and gains. It is with this in mind that selected papers from the conference are presented in this volume under the wilfully ambiguous title, “Shelving Translation.” We ask the reader temporarily to put to one side those current debates within Translation Studies that work with a strong sense of ethical judgement and focus instead on the product on the shelf. What kind of roles does the book market in its widest sense encourage translated literature to play in our lives?

The chapters in this issue

Anthea Bell’s opening chapter provides us with an initial stance from within the industry. Referring back to the arguments associated with the ethics of maintaining a visible foreign presence within the translated text, she first puts her own argument for the idea of the process of translation as one of “spinning the illusion” that “the reader is reading not a translation but the real thing,” and then points out that in practice “there is not much difference between the results produced by self-confessed invisible translators ... and the proponents of the school of visible translation.” However one might theorise the process of translation, in practical terms in today’s publishing industry the finished products are both “completely literate” and “good entertainment.” The predominant “culture of reception” (Peter Bush’s term, chapter two) in the English-speaking world, on the other hand, seems less able to relinquish its own visi

him, it is the major anomaly of a particularly British “culture of reception” that literary reviews in fact so often overlook translations—both specifically as translations and indeed generally as books. By contrasting this British situation with that of France and Spain, he argues that the way in which the media treat translations is symptomatic of a far greater “‘invisible’ cultural presence.” “Handling the foreign” is linked to “complex national issues.” Thus Spain, with its recent change in political fortunes, propounds a positive image of the foreign. The liberal Spanish press gives extensive space to translated literature and a resoundingly positive tone is in evidence throughout. France, on the other hand, feels its own culture to be under pressure from Anglophone dominance. The result is that French attention to translated literature has started to go the other way, with both media gossip columns and government policy concerned to raise awareness and activity of translations from French into English. What both France and Spain display, however, is an inherent belief that the translated text should and does act as a visible player in international relations. This contrasts with a distinctly British form of “cultural Imperialism.” Not only do English-language writers dominate the literary pages, any need for the foreign is considered best and most pleurably fulfilled by the British genre of the Englishman’s travel diary, what Bush terms “the Orwell syndrome.” Reviewers’ apparent lack of interest in foreign-language literature stems from a feeling that it does not contribute anything over and

translation and how this is presented. Johnson's chapter takes a postcolonial approach to the same kind of ideological issues affecting text selection as Bush observed in reviewing practices. Focusing on the fate of Pablo Neruda's *Resonance* in English translation, she traces how its reception has been conditioned by a marked tendency within the culturally dominant Anglophone world to project not only its own understanding of the Other but also its self-understanding onto Latin America. The supposedly more primitive culture is understood within this pattern as p0 TD-0.0o beenattern ion aksT*

one of these facets results in the “red-herring” of what Carol terms the “pseudotranslation:” a home-grown product which is both marketed and read as an authentic representation of the foreign. In the case of crime fiction set in contemporary

Mandelstam, Joseph Brodsky, Czeslaw Milosz and Zbigniew Herbert has resulted in Heaney developing a specific “poetics of exile” within his poetry. Tracing the Eastern European understanding of poetry has allowed him to gain distance from his own historical situation, and this sense of distance has been crucial in allowing him to find a way of tempering a lyrical poetry of celebration with its socio-political context. The result is a poetics that understands itself as opening the way into “alternative worlds:” the

this principle of potential appropriation, so that “the reader can appropriate it according to his or her reading experiences.” In this understanding of translation, the role of the translated text is no longer one of reproducing an original effect, but rather of specifically enacting a postmodern poetics.

In the final chapter of this issue, we return discussion of literature in translation to those actively involved in its production. Christopher MacLehose’s overview of the British publishing industry traces the practicalities of translated literature from the first readers’ reports through to the final stage of literary reviews. Just as the original “Shelving Translation” conference ended with a round table of professional practitioners and theorists of translation, here his insight helps draw together various strands traced throughout this volume: the role of professional readers, editors, authors, translators, publishers and reviewers in determining the position of translated literature in contemporary Britain.

Poetics and politics: in practice

So what is the role of the translated text in Britain today? No matter how theoretical the academic approach, running through all contributions in this volume are distinctly practical effects. A first, clear-cut, and we would argue most traditional role for translated literature is educational. When Heaney forges a poetics based on his reading of Eastern-

A second role that emerges for the translated text is linked to the idea of travel literature. Evoking the exotic is clearly a marketing ploy used to sell translations that cannot immediately rely on the reader buying them out of a desire actively to engage with and learn from the foreign. This is certainly the implication of the strategies employed to sell crime fiction set in Italy, a genre not generally associated with broadening the mind, but certainly entertaining. Translated literature can quite simply function as a good read, and this is clearly something which publishers are increasingly beginning to recognise. As translations are shelved alongside both pseudotranslations and clear non-translations, the English-language reader's chances of hitting, as much by chance as by design, on well-written and entertaining literature are significantly increased. If during this process the playful nature of such deviously entertaining texts as results in confused shelving policy—the said example of learned literary fiction was last sighted in “Erotic Literature”—then this sort of inadvertent education-by-stealth is perhaps no bad thing.

A final, third role for translated literature goes one step further again from the initial pedagogical stance. The interests of translated and English-language literature overlap arguably to the greatest extent in the current post-modern understanding of both as art for art's sake. The postmodern text demands the reader fulfil its offer of linguistic play. The appeal of engaging with translated literature as a whimsical (rather than pedagogical) intellectual pursuit is something which both flatters and entertains the small

stimulating. We hope that our readers will be able to say something similar of what follows.

Notes

- ¹ Peter France, "Translation Studies and Translation Criticism," in Peter France, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-10.
- ² Umberto Eco, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003).
- ³ Susan Bassnett, , 3rd edition (London: Routledge, 2002).
- ⁴ A stimulating collection of essays that follow this line: Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., (London: Routledge, 1999).
- ⁵ Lawrence Venuti in particular stands for a markedly political line. His (London: Routledge, 1998) focuses on the political ramifications of certain translation issues.
- ⁶ Gideon Toury, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995).
- ⁷ Theo Hermans, "Norms of Translation," in Peter France, ed., 14.
- ⁸ This markedly political approach to theorising the industry behind translation is the unifying aspect to two