

FLYNN, Peter, et al. Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016, 340 p.

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Contrary to the idea of following a precise conceptual plan in what concerns translation choices and beliefs, and to the detriment of traditional more prescriptive views on translation techniques, the possibility of intuition and creativity surface from contemporary critiques upon the matter. Such shift has not only bestowed translations with a deserved arena for them to perform their task, but has actually provided them with important tools for one to position him/herself socially and politically in what regards an issue that have always been social and political: the text. When I kidnap meaning from the original and suggest it actually belongs to every instance that happens to touch it, the autonomy inevitably directed by this process towards translator and reader ultimately grants both an opportunity to inflict a material and consistent influence on such meaning. That is, when I pose that meanings do not belong to the original, such meanings end up losing their status of “possessions” – and eventually one learns they do not belong to anyone at all. The question one might be asking is: why would this autonomy

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to transform necessarily change anything for those involved in the enterprise of translation? Well, it does change many things; not to say everything. As translators acknowledge the active role they play for the maintenance or alteration of certain narratives, their task is no longer taken as a simple – uncontrollable – code transferring; i.e., translators are turned from rewriters into writers, from carriers of old meanings into inventors of new ones. In the book *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology* (2015) – edited by Peter Flynn, Luc van Doorslaer, and Joep Leerssen – the authors and compiled articles address the fact that it is only through a more autonomous notion of translation that questionable cultural aspects, as well as prejudiced images of this or that tradition, might be finally overcome. As a matter of fact, “in recent decades, Translation Studies has indeed shown a growing interest in national and cultural characterisation and stereotyping, including the selection and potential manipulation procedures involved – other key aspects of the discipline” (Flynn et al, 2015, 2).

As contemporaneity overcomes the insistence to discuss national identities and realise that the concoction of any generalising image for a community ends up excluding more subjects than it happens to include, the translator emerges as a foundational figure to evade pre-given concepts and provide target audiences with pioneering ideas regarding the unknown. That is to say, even though the usual functioning of cultural exchanges and transfers is one that takes for granted prejudiced and stereotypical ideas that are generally empowered when borders are transgressed, translators are now being summoned to help changing such picture for good. In the words of Flynn et al, “media discourse has a considerable impact on the spread of images through translation selection” (5); as, once a narrative has been selected from a foreign culture and taken to the domestic one, it shall inevitably promote the maintenance of certain images – to the detriment of other (in many occasions unacknowledged) ones. It is nonetheless not only when a text is selected that images are maintained and/or surpassed; after

a narrative has been placed within the continuum of literary translation, the choices undertaken by translators are of paramount importance for the recreation of such images. Such epistemological shift regarding meaning making “inscribes translation as a dynamic force co-constructing differences rather than merely reflecting them” (Flynn et al, 6); i.e., the translator becomes analogous to a co-author, whose ideas on a source text and on the images it provides are no longer taken as irrelevant for his/her translated – hence original – text to be devised. Regardless of the obsolescence of traditional archetypes concerning national identities, ethnic attributes, sexual orientation, etc., the fact that, epistemologically, questionable approaches towards the subject and the space s/he occupies are no longer taken seriously by academic discourses does not imply that, in the real world, there are no more battles to be fought in this sense. After all, “images and stereotypes still continue to be framed by the nation and hence it would be unwise to ignore its impact – such images are and have always been constructed, maintained and renegotiated over time” (Flynn et al, 8).

Literature, as an effect of and response to historical time and space constraints, is located within an atmosphere that is thus permeated by varied images and prototypes regarding the most diverse issues. As such, it goes without saying that the writer of an original text might be willing to promote the maintenance of such prototypes or to put them into question – and that s/he is freed from all social and political chains by his/her basic artistic license. It is important to bear in mind, however, that such will either to endorse or problematise certain issues does not materialise out of the blue – i.e., when something that deserves to be put into question is simply taken for granted by one’s narrative, nothing there is going up simply by chance. In “Translating identity”, which integrates the first section of *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology* (Flynn et al, 2015), Simon McKinnon reminds readers of the fact that “numerous texts draw on and perpetuate a negative cultural stereotype of the other as a contrasting mirror image of the

collective self. Such an image is, in fact, politically, socially and culturally motivated” (23). Every original narrative is inevitably also a compilation of previous narratives, so it can only be created through the epistemological translation of what precedes it; i.e. for an original idea to make sense it must necessarily be based on things that have already been said beforehand. Such line of reasoning inevitably inscribes the literary text within the temporal and spatial environment it occupies – and is ultimately coherent both with the notion of the hypertext as well as with the idea that there are no longer starting points in the literary continuum, there actually never were. As an object that dialogues with the other objects which encompass it, the literary text also translates political imperatives, cultural tastes, literary conventions, and stereotypes that inevitably change from time to time – and the rewriting of such text cannot ignore such transformation. But when McKinnon says that texts might draw on and perpetuate negative ideas of “the other”, who is this other he is talking about? As he would explain later, “the image of the other is used to determine what is and what is not part of the self-image” (34); a logic that may not be even taken into consideration by the author of the original, but which is integral to any attempt at idealising who is the self and why I should like it and who is the other and why I should fear it.

In this sense, and even though it is already a given that the writers of original literary pieces have a vast panoply of opportunities to perform an active role as maintainers or transformers of the master narratives that precede them, the role played by translators and their autonomy concerning the text they translate still provide researchers with a considerable body of reflections upon the matter. More than selecting texts, translators also exert their influences on the target audiences by the way such texts are translated – i.e. the simple transfer of meanings, marked by the absence of voice from the part of the “carrier”, is replaced by a conscious decoding and recoding of meanings, for which the opinion and beliefs of the translator play a significant role. By the end of

his article, McKinnon concludes that “creativity and translation go hand in hand” (35); and if there is something that marks contemporaneity in what regards the development of translation theory, it is precisely the importance that translators’ creativity has been finally granted with. Notwithstanding its omnipresence within contemporary researches on translation studies, the way whereby such creativity influences the process of translation is in many occasions addressed subjectively and/or completely taken for granted. It would be perhaps not an exaggeration to say that most translators and/or translation scholars disagree with one another in what regards how such creativity should be tackled – or that they are even dubious about what creativity has to do with translation anyways. When the translator makes use of his/her creativity and recreates the meanings of an original text isn’t s/he adapting instead of translating? Isn’t there a difference between translation and adaptation? Isn’t the former less creative than the latter? I shall not extent myself in the several issues surfacing from translation terminology; but I personally see no difference between translating and adapting. This is so for none of these processes asks me to be closer or more distant to the original text than I already am; moreover, as soon as I read the original, my perception is already adapting it, as well as my reader is in itself already a translation.

However, this line of reasoning might seem to be taking us in the direction of a conundrum: if my translation is, at the same time, not a brand new text – for it dialogues not only with the source narrative, but also to the many texts that surround it – as well as it is an original text, inasmuch as the reading of the translator is personal and exceptional, what is, after all, a translated piece and how I can define it? I like and repeat Yolanda Perez usage of the German word *samenstellen*: “to compose or to compile something by using different elements” (38). Applied in early modern times to refer to varied creative processes in what regards intellectual circles, the word belongs to a time and space configuration whereto notions such as ownership and/or originality were completely

pointless. Inferences relating the word to the sphere of translation studies are possible, despite the fact that “translation practices and translation terminology were not that clearly defined in the early modern period. It is therefore not excluded that the term *samenstellen* could also be used to define something new, perhaps created as a result of or inspired by other works” (Perez, 39). *Samenstellen* is then a token that a narrative can be new, at the very same time that it is based on other works – which solves the epistemological controversy mentioned by the beginning of this paragraph. There is, in this sense, no opposition: every text, source or translation, is and is not original at the very same time. Withal, I admit it might sound not enough, for some scholars, to address the source text as nothing but “an inspiration” for the concoction of the translation – as just one among the many elements that lay the groundwork for the creation of a new, albeit translated, narrative. For me, however, the autonomy of translations and their condition as *samenstellen* is not a matter of opinion: it is a plain fact. Since translators are inserted within a particular literary system, influenced by their personal experiences and guided by their varied ideological agendas, the source text enters a realm that is indeed already occupied by many other elements which are blended and reassembled for the conception of the target narrative.

In coherence with this logic, Perez relates the concept of *samenstellen* to that of pseudo-translations, that would be basically the same thing for her. “Pseudo-translations have to be understood as belonging to an intertextual continuum. The selection of texts used as inspiration does somehow match a certain grain in the mind of the author” (47). Perez’ usage of the terms “*samenstellen*” and “pseudo-translation” have nothing to do with an attempt at endorsing any separation between more traditional views on translation and these former notions of the target text as an “original rewriting”. On the contrary, her critique is deployed as to make it clear that, historically, the idea of literary discourses as an intertextual continuity shall not be abandoned – such dialogue is there to be highlighted, and not to

be undermined. As time passes, more texts are written and, as a result, more ideas are rewritten – i.e. the invention of new originals is accompanied by the many retranslations it entails. Getting into different literary systems belonging to varied times and spaces, the translation of certain narratives have always served purposes that go way beyond them – and acknowledging the dialectic status of translated literature consists in a significant step for translators to perform consciously what they have unconsciously always done. “Translations – and pseudo-translations – are not produced in a void, but in a continuum of textual and extra-textual constraints. The history of translation is rich in examples of the way translation can be used in the service of ideological agendas” (Perez, 50). It is true that it is much easier to resist the adoption of an ideological agenda when a translation is promoted – after all, the translator is still not asked to think, interpret, or judge the original information; by the same token, the translated text shall be used politically, as the work gets within the literary system of the translator and as readers’ are objective and subjectively affected by what is written therein. It is not because I ignore my task that I am magically going to be set free – the translator is responsible for the text s/he is putting out and such responsibility gives him/her carte blanche to expand, alter, recreate, and/or get rid of certain elements that are present in the source text.

Even though such logic might sound far too modern, modernity has actually been the moment marked by a symptomatic oblivion of the hypertextual character of literature – as we learned to overestimate notions of translation faithfulness, which were later replaced by ethics, which are integral to later ideas of foreignisation and domestication... In the following section of *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology* (Flynn et al, 2015), Raphael Ingelbien’s article “National images in transit” is built upon the premise that “literary texts play a key role in the construction, diffusion, and maintenance of generalisations, including constructs of national identity” (60). Not only the concoction of literary text,

but also – and perhaps more importantly – their translation has been chief for the construction, diffusion, and maintenance of the ideological prototypes of a given culture. For that reason, translation is also about (re)constructing, (re)diffusing, and (re)maintaining according to the taste of the translator. Translating, after all, is like cooking: the original provides us with many ingredients that we can put together and come up either with a certain food (text) that we do not enjoy or with something else that we would eat (read) with satisfaction – why would anyone privilege the former option? There is no recipe: the translation is the recipe. This is why my deployment of Borges’ creative infidelity dialogues with older – and erroneously taken as obsolete and/or improper – ideas on translation. “Translation in the Romantic era was not bound to high standards of faithfulness to originals: older views of translations – as *belles infidèles* – still influenced many a translator’s practice, and translation frequently entailed radical transformations” (Ingelbien, 62). My view on translation is indeed much closer to the notions of pseudo-translation, *samenstellen*, and *belles infidèles*¹ than it is, for instance, to Venuti’s simplistic categories of foreignisation and domestication and to Berman’s deformations. These ideas of both authors have been thoroughly applied by many translation scholars in a vast array of researches – which has contributed to their success, on the one hand, and prevented translation theory from “moving on”, on the other.

Bearing in mind that I am dealing with a Canadian work written in 1912, I set off my analysis and translation cognisant of the space and time boundaries of my own reading – hence my view on the translation activity as a reinvention rather than a transfer. After all, the only thing which is transferred is my own understanding – and the way I decided to put it into words. In “Comparing national images in translations of popular fiction”, Marija Moe and Tanja Zigon allege that, when a literary piece travels, through translation,

¹ In a nutshell: privileging beautiful choices to the detriment of faithful ones.

from one culture to another, “the cultural images they contain inevitably change, whether to avoid overloading the target reader with new, trivial information, or because of the stylistic, poetic, ideological norms, convictions and opinions of the translator and the target reader” (2015, 145). Such change occurs regardless of one’s intention; it does not matter if here I am willing to transform foreign items into more domestic ones, or if there I think it is important to explain a cultural reference or “keep it as it is”. Translators do not translate “the” original: they translate their idiosyncratic reading of an original – an original that does never represent the same thing for another interlocutor. Individual translation solutions are the source of every original metamorphosis; translators do not get in front of the text and say “ha! Here I’m gonna transform it!” – it is a little bit more complicated than that. “Those changes are most probably not motivated by a conscious wish to change an image, but rather the result of more mundane dilemmas that every translator faces when translating a text from another culture” (Zigon and Moe, 159). Of course the receiving culture plays a decisive role in what regards these changes; but it is how the translator responds to this encounter between the foreign text and the target values, norms, tradition, and self-images that shape the translation. The translator is between “other” and “self”: his/her text is something that is beyond such poles at the very same time as it hovers in the middle of them.

The status of translation and translator as placed “in-between” is already a common ground for researches within the field, as it consists in the predictable response of translation theory to the ideas entailed by deconstructivism and, afterwards, postcolonialism. Today, there is no way to think of target and source cultures as stable entities. This is, apropos, precisely why I believe it is useless to think in terms of privileging the source culture to the detriment of the target and vice versa – there is no way for one to come up with separations, definitions, and generalisations regarding each of them. Source and target cultures are both dynamic realms where everything is different, dynamic, and unfinished – through

translation, both finally negotiate and allow new hybrid meanings to be devised. Translation, more than a cultural transfer, adaptation, reaffirmation, or reconstruction is but a cultural fusion. For such fusion to occur, many agents are involved – e.g. translators, proof-readers, interpreters, publishers, critics, readers. (Re)shaping the social reality of the original into something else, according to their particular reading, these agents emphasise, diminish, and/or transform certain elements of the narrative as such narrative is provided with a continuity – with an appendix: the target version. It is with such an idea in mind that I get to the reflections set forth by Zrinka Blazevic in “Nation and translation”, the last article of *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology* (Flynn et al, 2015). The author explains, therein, how deconstructivism has helped researchers to dodge the idea of an equivalency between original and translation, as there would be no longer stable units to be rebuild from scratch, but actually only one more text (among many) to be continued. The translation, as a result, would ultimately stand for “simultaneously supplementation and substitution, surplus and lack, extension and compensation of the always already absent original” (Blazevic, 302). Given the absence of the original, the translator can do whatever s/he wants with the messages that s/he has built by his/her particular reading, destabilising meanings that s/he is eager to reconstruct, eliminate, and/or elaborate on.

For a narrative to function effective, it shall rely on specific stereotypical articulations as its ideas are developed in a unique manner, but often based on the knowledge common to the public whereto it was originally directed. Redirecting these ideas to a new public, means such articulations are amenable to be transformed, as they might be accepted, rejected, and/or reconsidered by the translator who positions him/herself between this process of meaning (re)making. Such process consists then in a journey, whereby cultures are transferred, exchanged, diffused, or, to summarise everything, translated. There is no simplicity here, the journey is not devoid of power relations and it does not move from one

direction to the other – on the contrary, the time and space of the other and of the self are culturally pluri-directional, moving within the target and source cultures, as well as between one another. It is in this sense that deconstruction can be ultimately related to the idea of hypertext, as this notion of literature as “entangled history is focused upon the processes of multilateral temporal and spatial entanglings and intercrossings, which are subsumed under the key concept of ‘networks’” (304). This is a network of hybrid, transitory, ambivalent, and transformative historical relationships, that the translator might harness to come up with any narrative s/he desires. To bring, within the translation journey, a Canadian text for Brazilian readers also means, therefore, to problematise the very idea of what is Canadian and what is Brazilian. After all, the purported dichotomy local versus universal proves to be ineffective thereby, as the translation evinces the palimpsest and hybrid nature of every narrative – including the national narrative. Texts are written by people, but they are also written by times and spaces, by the historical relationships inherent to the fictional narrative and unveiled by the processes of literary analysis and translation. If “conceptualizing the nation as a phenomenon that can be translated is an exercise in de-bordered understanding of the networks, interconnections and intersections” (Blazevic, 310), the dual idea of foreign and domestic no longer apply. The translator does not transform the foreign into something domestic: the translation transforms the domestic through the experience of the foreign.

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