

Translation Practices. Through Language to Culture. Edited by Ashley Chantler and Carla Dente. (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 279 pp. 56 euros / 76 USD, paperback.

This is a collection of papers from “interdisciplinary research activities which have developed for over a decade by a group of scholars working in the Universities of Pisa and Leicester”, although there are also contributions from other institutions. As such, the book is a commendable example of international cooperation, enabling experts in at least two languages and two cultures to talk about a set of shared concerns. The articles include proposals from basic translation theory, contrastive linguistics, difficulties in translation practice (the problems of rendering slang and humor), literary translation history (Proust’s translation of Ruskin, Romantic versions of Ovid, sainthood in Michèle Roberts, Dario Fo in Britain, John/Giovanni Florio as an intercultural figure), Lorna Hardwick on performative translation for the stage, plus creative reflections on editors as translators, the use of aliases as self-translation, photography and fiction as translation of landscape, two engaging and well-explained poetry translations by David Platzer, with many dalliances in between. The Italian-English focus is present but not exclusive; the range of issues must be impressive to anyone wandering in from beyond Translation Studies.

So much for what is in the book. I now risk a reflection that concerns Translation Studies as a proposed “interdiscipline”, of which this book might serve as an excellent and well-intentioned example.

There is no way that straight contrastive linguistics is going to be of great interest to creative cultural studies, and vice versa. Do we really expect a comparative study of intensifiers in Italian and English, or lists of slang words and possible translations, to reach the same reader as a study of photography and fictions as translations of landscape? There will always be readers prepared to stay the distance (the editors, a reviewer), but to what extent can we talk about this range of interests as being a common discipline, rather than due to some intelligent passers-by?

The will to unity is a little forced. I note, for example, that the editors’ introduction overlooks the linguistic lists, and the article on editors only mentions translation at the very end, perhaps for inclusion in the volume. The book’s section divisions shed little light here: “Language as Means” includes the contrastive linguistics and the textual comparisons; “Culture as Target” has basically the same CompLit

approaches; and “Languages of Culture” includes the Cultural Studies stuff, more or less, although the problems of translating for the stage, included in here, could also have gone in any of the other sections. I cannot see how these three sections illuminate each other.

Interdisciplines like Postcolonial Studies or Women’s Studies undoubtedly suffer similar problems. They can, however, engage in basic central debates that potentially inform all the individual aspects being worked on (I would not say the same of Cultural Studies, but that’s another issue). Translation Studies has trouble doing that, as might be indicated by the range and structure of this volume. Although none of that is the fault of these editors and writers, it is still worth reflecting on.

My copy has a page missing. Will anyone notice?

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