

The Translation Zone. A New Comparative Literature. By Emily Apter (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), xii + 298 pp. \$12.95 paperback, \$32.50 hardback.

This book attempts to redefine the academic discipline of Comparative Literature in terms of translation, deemed to have become a key factor in the post-9/11 world. The text begins with twenty theses, the first of which is “Nothing is translatable” and the last of which is “Everything is translatable”. Along the way we have insights like “Translation is the language of planets and monsters” and “Translation is an oedipal assault on the mother tongue”. The stage is set for a discourse that can run all over the place.

And it does. We are treated to an engaging study of Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer in Istanbul, the latter being seen as the origins of (American) Comparative Literature, with Edward Said calquing a new humanism on their work. Then we consider the fate of Algerian literature, selected as a case where relative non-translation excludes texts from international circulation. Then a survey of Oulipo literature and its fellow travelers, in French and English. Then the politics of the Balkans and the role of international English, described as “a nuclear attack on the language of humans”. Then the literary usages of defective and taboo English, contrasted with something called “CNN English”, seen as a world-dominated technological creole. Then hybridity and creoles in literature, and the creative use of media technologies. Then, at long last, some comments on a translation in the narrow sense, which turns out to be a pseudotranslation (a translation with no original), from the Japanese, justified here because it helped the development of American Beat poetry. Such non-constrained translational practice is dubbed the literary equivalent of “cloning from code”, allowing many references to contemporary genetics and informatics: “digital code holds out the prospect, at least, of translating everything into everything else”. All these things, and much else along the way, can thus be legitimately translated into Translation Studies.

The pioneers of this Translation Studies are named as “George Steiner, André Lefevere, Antoine Berman, Gregory Rabassa, Lawrence Venuti, Jill Levine, Michel Heim, Henri Meschonnic, Susan Sontag, Richard Howell, and Richard Sieburth”, with Walter Benjamin churning away behind all of them. This is contrasted with a traditional Translation Studies that has apparently only been concerned with accuracy. One might

also contrast this American literary heritage with the academic discipline of Translation Studies, developed over the past 40 years in many parts of the world that actually depend on translators for much of their social communication, as well as for a good deal of their literature. Is Apter aware of this gap? She finds a definition of “pseudotranslation” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, so she must have at least touched a big book that shows how much has actually been done in recent decades, very little of it concerned with prescriptive accuracy. But she cannot have read much of that encyclopedia; this American literary Translation Studies is only tangentially related to societies that depend on translators. Indeed, Apter might be accused of merely using the aegis of translation, deceptively practical and engaged in real-world exchanges, to repackage the contemporary fare of American Comparative Literature (she completely ignores the many other kinds and origins of Comparative Literature in other parts of the world). Along the way, Apter displays a very fine awareness of French and French-language cultures, a constantly puzzling ignorance of German, scant awareness of what translation technologies actually are (the localization industry is indeed “cloning from code”, in a way far more frightening than anything described here), and a frustrating tendency to make facile links between everything on the contemporary intellectual agenda.

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