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Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice

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from the time of Dante onward, and many articles are devoted to the great lights of this critical tradition, such as *Croce*, *Curtius*, *De Sanctis*, *Spitzer*, *Nardi* and *Singleton*. These articles fascinate with their introduction to the history of critical vocabulary and concepts, such as Singleton's anti-Crocean stance, "much influenced by the work of Michele Barbi, Erich Auerbach, Ernst Robert Curtius, and Leo Spitzer, and by the theological studies of Jean Daniélou and Étienne Gilson." In many articles, long valuable bibliographies provide all the means necessary for a student to continue making discoveries in the area represented by the article. An example is the article *Veltro*, which provides a complete road-map of scholarly interest in this mysterious figure, and in the series of linked articles on the *Commedia*.

Two discoveries which affected me the most, as a reader of this *Encyclopedia*, were to learn of the importance of *Light* and hopefulness in the writings of Dante. An awareness gradually comes through in many articles, of the special quality and essential importance of hope throughout the *Divine Comedy*, the *Monarchia*, and the *Vita Nuova*. In the *Paradiso*, Beatrice explains to Dante that the cosmos is imbued with the hope of immortality, culminating in the amazing statement "that everything directly created by God is undying." Hope is further central to Dante's understanding of *Law*, and to the entire journey undertaken in the *Divine Comedy*. Dante will be led by Virgil to a realm of true freedom, in a setting of natural beauty, and be restored to the presence of Beatrice. Ultimately, he will experience a vision of God's face and the glory of God.

Light is ever present in Dante's poetical world, even in the depths of hell. As a symbol of vision and understanding, of goodness, light was a pervasive medieval symbol. The light of the stars becomes the most touching, perhaps, of all his images of hopefulness. Certainly, "Plato said that the Good in the realm of ideas is similar to the sun in the material world." God himself was compared to light in medieval theology, and Dante had his own perspective on these matters. Finally, Dante "repeatedly calls the eyes *luci* and often speaks of a light (*lume*, *luce*, *raggio*, *splendore*) that shines out of them. Perhaps the most desired light of all, in the fabric of Dante's ideas,

theology and poetry, was the glance of the beautiful eyes of *Beatrice*.

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Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice. By Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2013), x + 271 pp. £25.99 paper.

This is a collection of fourteen essays written by Lawrence Venuti since 2000, promoted by the publisher as "incisive" and "essential reading for translators and students of translation alike." In most of the essays, Venuti speaks eloquently as a literary translator working in the United States, explaining the aims of his various projects, his reviews and rejections by publishers, and his strategies for a more proactive and politically engaged translation culture. That discourse should be welcomed by literary translators: it reveals numerous ways in which translation is still sidelined in the United States and helps to give translators a voice in a culture that would otherwise keep them silent.

For students of translation, however, and thereby for the international academic discipline of Translation Studies, the scorecard is more mixed. Venuti puts forward three basic propositions: that translations bear traces of the translator's unconscious (fine in theory, but questionable in Venuti's practice), that translators should engage in more theory (ditto), and that translations themselves should no longer be either fluent or resistant, but should instead function as events (where I could be the only scholar prepared to agree with him, almost).

The problem with the psychoanalysis is that Venuti spots things that no one else sees. For example, the Chilean Neruda's "los ojos más extensos del mundo" was rendered by the American translator Donald D. Walsh as "the sky's most spacious eyes," which is fair enough except that the English makes Venuti think of a line from "America the Beautiful" (I asked twenty-three other translators in the United States, and none made the association), so the translator Walsh was uncon-

sciously promoting the CIA's infiltration of Allende's Chile. Wow! That kind of analysis probably tells us more about Venuti's own unconscious or about his frustrated desire for literary translation to be overtly political invention.

As for literary translators engaging in more explicit theory rather than just writing in the shadows, the idea is great and connects with Venuti's previous calls for visibility. The argument, however, is not well served by his belittling of all non-theorizing translators as being locked into historical "belletism," which is a huge self-interested reduction (and a rather strange label to throw around anyway, in an age where many literary translators are also academics, like Venuti himself). And then, when Venuti claims that some up-front theorizing would add "precision" to the discourse of translators, one might legitimately worry that Venuti's own theoretical terms are now not particularly precise: we used to understand what he meant by good "resistant" versus bad "fluent" translations, but now even that opposition has disappeared. To be replaced by what, precisely?

By "events," it seems. Never one to miss out on the latest French Theory (in this case quite old theory, newly discovered by Americans), Venuti is referring to Alain Badiou in order to conceptualize translations in terms of an ethics of the event as non-representative truth. Thus a translation "should not be faulted merely for exhibiting features that are commonly called unethical: wholesale manipulation of the source text, ignorance of the source language, even plagiarism of other translations" (185). All those things are now more or less secondary, it seems, as long as a translation's "interpretants initiate an event, creating new knowledges and values by supplying a lack that they indicate in those [knowledges and values?] that are currently dominant in the receiving situation" (185). As long as there is permanent revolution in the here and now, don't worry too much about representing a past that was elsewhere. I will go along with that, I think: far worse to have a translation that is accurate, correct, boring, and forgotten.

Venuti's attempts at translatorial events nevertheless seem a little comic: he turns a twelfth-century Italian poet into a rap artist (to entertain his students), and a Catalan's

commentaries paintings by Edward Hopper are converted into a "nourish" gangster-like discourse that Venuti considers appropriate to Hopper himself—flaunting domestication and eclipsing the Catalan.

The problem here is that the Western translation form is only specific in terms of representation—since translations are texts that represent other texts, their status as self-contained truth-generating events seems compromised from the outset. After all, if you really want to write incisive political texts, revealing your inner nourish gangster and/or part-time student rapper, perhaps you should go straight to original creation and critical theory, and forget about the translation bit?

So why did Venuti get those rejection notices? Hadn't the publishers read up on the truth value of events? Or did Venuti happen to mention that "translation changes everything"? And so they wondered if he was still a translator?

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Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed.

By Mary Heimann (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), xxi + 406 pp. \$30.00 paper.

Mary Heimann's book on Czechoslovakia has provoked much controversy among fellow academics, especially Czechs. Indeed, scholarship on Czechoslovakia, especially by Czech and Slovak authors, has tended to be biased and one-sided. Czech scholars have often treated Czechoslovakia as a sacred cow and have blamed foreign powers for the country's shortcomings. Slovaks have often emphasized how they got the short end of the stick during the First Czechoslovak Republic and under Communism. Likewise, many Slovak historians have tended to downplay the dark side of the wartime independent Slovak state and its complicity in the Holocaust. Sudeten German scholars have emphasized the fact that the German minority in interwar Czechoslovakia did not receive sufficient constitutional protections from the dominant