

## VISIBLE THEORIES AND TRANSLATORS

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GENTZLER, E., (1993). *Contemporary Translation Theories*, Routledge, 224p. and VENUTI, L. (1995) *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* 145-148, Routledge, 353p. Both books in Routledge Translation Studies series, ed. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere.

The excellent distribution system of Routledge has made it into a leader in the market for academic books on translation. However, it seems that demand has not been quite what was expected. The market for books on translation is still small, and Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere are now relocating their translation studies series to *Multilingual Matters*. *Contemporary Translation Theories* and *The Translator's Invisibility* are two of the last books in the series.

I would recommend both to the student of translation theory. Both are grounded in the connection between contemporary literary theory and translation studies theory. Both attack many of the traditional theories of translation studies, the main difference being that Gentzler's posi-

tion is deconstructionist and Venuti's Marxist. The structure of the two books is also very different: Gentzler is more encyclopaedic, with one chapter for each of the main areas of recent translation theory, whereas Venuti is dialogic, contrasting the traditional transparent translations with the tradition he favours, that of the visible translator.

*Contemporary Translation Theories* can be divided into pre-post-structuralist and post-structuralist. Gentzler criticises the narrow bases and blindness of the former theories. He sees the American translation workshops, common in many American universities in the sixties and seventies, as a rearguard action against post-structuralism. Highly influenced by I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929), which stressed the possibility that the trained, educated reader could extract the "essence" of a text, the translation workshop emphasised the transparency of languages: great ideas could be brought into English from all languages.

Gentzler then attacks Nida. He is sceptical of the so-called "scientific" theories, which fail to look at or trust the important element of the

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reader's interpretation and which are based on the Utopian idea of the conception of the translation being able to reproduce the original. He sees Nida merely as a simplifier of Chomsky's theories of deep and surface structures, believing that surface structures are similar across languages, and that the "message", in Nida's case an evangelical one, can easily be decoded and recoded between languages. He applies the same criticisms to Wolfram Wilss' ideas of texts as idealized types and "empirically" derived formulas.

Gentzler is equally critical of theories which generalise translation studies. Though admitting the great advances made by Jirí Levý in initiating a school of descriptive translation and concentrating on the "literariness" of literary translations, he finds them limiting for their concentration on form and their lack of interest in "evolving social norms and subjective psychological motivations" (p.89).

Some of Gentzler's strongest criticisms are made of Even-Zohar and the polysystem school. He finds this school excessively formalist, unable to take account of non-literary translation, and classically Platonic in its emphasis on the unity of the system. Gideon Toury, who has reworked Even-Zohar's theories, also suffers from this excessive structuralism and formalism in his emphasis on the "ideal" adequate text.

Gentzler is clear about where his translational heart lies:

*I suggest the shift to a more philosophic stance from which the entire problematic of translation can be better viewed may not only be beneficial for translation theory, but that after such a confrontation, the discourse which has hunted the development of translation theory will invariably undergo*

*a transformation, allowing new insights and fresh interdisciplinary approaches, breaking, if you will, a logjam of stagnated terms and notions.*  
(Gentzler: 145)

Derrida is central to Gentzler's central thesis: rather than fixed identities and all-embracing theories, we find a chain of significations, deferring and displacing or endlessly supplementing each other. Translation can no longer be tracked down and tied up but is everywhere, according to Derrida, in each naming gesture. And each of these naming gestures needs a footnote and a preface to try to unravel the differing multiple tangential and supplementary meanings lost in transcription. As an example we can try to translate the title of Derrida's essay on translation, "*Des Tours de Babel*".

Gentzler complements his belief in Derridean deconstruction with theories and ideas which have been influenced by post-structuralism. Foucault is another important reference: a translation is not so much a result of spontaneous inspiration but is rather based around the institutional systems of the age. And the relationship between power and these systems is all-important. Doug Robinson in *The Translator's Turn* places the translator at the centre of the stage and proposes that he should have licence to intervene, subvert, divert and even entertain. André Lefevere examines refractions, the ways in which foreign works appear in many different forms, films, plays, television serials, cartoons, abridgements, etc. And finally, Gentzler makes a reference to Haroldo and Augusto de Campos and the Brazilian modernist notion of "cannibalism", "*devouring in a sense which shows respect... absorbing the virtues of a body through a transfusion of blood*". (Ibidem: 192)

While Gentzler concentrates on recent theories and is developmental – recent post-structural theory has been a major advance – Venuti's approach is historical and contrastive. Throughout *The Translator's Invisibility* the transparent translation is pitted against the foreignizing translation: there is a choric repetition of the characteristics of each type of translation: the transparent translation has its plain style, semantic unity, concentrates on the signified, is domesticating, intelligible, author-centred with a strong individual subject, forming part of the dominant bourgeois, individualistic, capitalistic tradition of the west. More specifically, this translation is characteristic of the aggressively monolingual, xenophobic and imperialistic Anglo-American readership. Moreover, it conceals its social and productive conditions; thus the translator is invisible and his or her work goes unrecognised.

By contrast, the foreignizing translation is polysemic, introducing the phonological, syntactic, morphological structures of the foreign language into the target language. It is a disrupting opaque translation which concentrates on the signifier and which can never fool the reader into believing it is an original work. This translation is modernist, dissident; it resists ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism. It is not merely a mirror of the original; it can be read for its own value and shows and celebrates the presence of the translator. It is heterogenous, using neglected discourses from the margins of its own language, e.g., the archaic and regional forms and the popular ballad metre of Newman or Pound's Elizabethan, Victorian, American negro and hillbilly languages and Provençal rhyme forms.

The two traditions are clear. Venuti sees Sir John Denham as the founder of the transparent tradition. A political conservative, a supporter of the restoration of the monarchy, he naturalised

the couplet as a standard translation form. Its "*marked sense of antithesis and closure reflects a political conservatism, support for the restored monarchy and aristocratic domination*" (Venuti: 63). Dryden, Pope, Tytler and Charles Lamb, in his bowdlerized translations of Catullus, continue the tradition, "*decidedly bourgeois-liberal and humanist, individualistic and elitist, morally conservative and physically squeamish.*" (Ibidem: 81). Mathew Arnold followed with his demand that Homer should be translated in the "*grand style*"; Newman had destroyed his "nobelness". The tradition runs up to the present day with to J. M. Cohen's Penguin Classics in "*plain English*" and Dudley Fitts' insistence on contemporary colloquial forms in his translations of Classical poetry.

Against them, Venuti places an alternative tradition of the visible translator, but a tradition that has remained quite hidden: John Nott, F. H. Newman, Tarchetti, Ezra Pound, Paul Blackburn, the Zukovskys and Venuti himself. Venuti, in his translations of Milo de Angelis, tried to destroy the idea of the poet as the unified subject, which translations into English of Eugenio Montale had falsely given. He resisted fluent strategies and attempted an "*abusive fidelity*", to "*recreate analogically the abuse that occurs in the original text*" (Ibidem: 291), to reflect the discontinuity and indeterminacy of the original.

*The Translator's Invisibility* is clearly Marxist in its emphasis on the politicization of the translated text. But Venuti's great methodological debt is to Foucault as he attempts to bring to light an alternative genealogy that contrasts with the dominant transparent genealogy:

*For Foucault, a genealogical analysis is unique in affirming the interested*

*nature of its historical representation, in taking a stand vis-à-vis the political struggles of its situation. And by locating what has been dominated or excluded in the past or repressed by conventional historiography, such an analysis can not only challenge the cultural and social conditions in which it is performed, but propose different conditions to be established in the future. (Ibidem: 39)*

This is where the strength of *The Translator's Invisibility* lies. In his quest for the alternative tradition, Venuti unearths ignored translations, reviews and letters from the 17th to the 20th centuries. He uncovers the forthright translations of Catullus of Dr. John Nott (1795), contrasting with the bowdlerized translations of Charles Lamb (1821), and the negative reviews that Nott received; he links Newman's previous work with his translation of Homer and excavates the crushing reviews of Newman's translation; he demonstrates through reference to Blackburn's letters how important the rivalry with his elder mentor Pound was in his attempt to emulate Pound in his translations from Provençal.

Venuti is also very strong on the nuances of the foreignizing translation. Schleiermacher, despite opening up to the foreignizing translation (though his *Essay* was only translated into English, by André Lefevere, in 1977), does so in the service of a German nationalism controlled by an educated German bourgeois elite. Schleiermacher is also prey to Romantic ex-

pressiveness, dominated by the idea of the free, unified consciousness of the individual. Newman translated into Saxo-Norman vocabulary and used the ballad metre, but believed in progress: Homer represented a barbaric age and Newman expurgated his translations of Horace. The choice of translation is also vital. The Italian translator Iginio Ugo Tarchetti (1839-69) challenged contemporary classical individualistic realism by translating fantastic texts into the dominant dialect. His defect is that he is prey to a romanticising Orientalism. Venuti is also aware of the pragmatic demands of the publishing world: Paul Blackburn's introduced Júlio Cortázar into English in transparent translations. Publishing companies would have shied away from more experimental translations, as they did with his translations of Provençal poetry. But like Tarchetti, Blackburn's ethnocentrism lets him down: his democratic translation lies within a framework of a United States hegemony, extending the United States of America to cover the whole American continent.

Here in Brazil we are familiar with a similar archeology which Haroldo de Campos has discovered as forerunners of his own foreignizing translations, of baroque 19th century writers and translators ignored by the prevailing tendency towards fluency, i.e., the work of Sousândrade, Pedro Kilkerry, the translations of Odorico Mendes. Now Haroldo de Campos' translations and views on translation have become canonised by academia in Brazil. I suggest, with the help of *The Translator's Invisibility*, the same may happen in the Anglo-American world.