Reference: Rosa, Alexandra Assis 2016b. "Review of Bassnett, Susan. 2014. Translation. The New Critical Idiom. London: Routledge." *Target* 28:3. 474-479.

Notice: This article is here reproduced in its preprint version (authors submitted revised version 2015). It is under copyright and the publisher should be contacted for permission to re-use or reprint the material in any form.

Bassnett, Susan. 2014. *Translation*. The New Critical Idiom. London: Routledge. 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-43563-5 (pbk). €22.57

Reviewed by Alexandra Assis Rosa (University of Lisbon, Portugal)

Addressed at the reader of The New Critical Idiom series, non-initiated in translation studies, *Translation* offers a selective introduction focussing on the centrality of the translator and of translation, which both "is at the heart of global communication today, and (...) has played a central role in the transmission of ideas and literatures over the centuries." (15) This instructive and easy to read volume is organized into an introduction and seven chapters followed by a conclusion, and confirms the well-known breadth and depth of the author's scholarship.

The introduction first exposes the fallacy of translation as an unproblematic simple process of mere linguistic transfer accessible to anyone with a knowledge of two languages and a bilingual dictionary. Second, and most importantly, it debunks the idea of translational equivalence as sameness and

introduces the central notion (dear to the initiate in translation studies) of translation as rewriting. “[N]o translation can ever be the same as the original,” because languages are different and translation involves addressing a new readership. (3) Acknowledging the necessity of this reformulation reveals the central role of the often-disparaged translator. The centrality of translation for the conceptualization of the contemporary multilingual world is argued to be a result of the new cultural reality created by the mass movement of people, the increasing availability of electronic media, the need to keep abreast of news, the growing awareness of cultural differences and of the urgency for greater understanding. People are faced with the need to negotiate the familiar with the unfamiliar, i.e. to translate. To present main views on translation over the centuries, the author goes as far back in time as Cicero (46 BC), Quintilian (first century AD), and St. Jerome (348-420 AD) to introduce the still powerful binary opposition between translating word-for-word or sense-for-sense, reinterpreted by Nida, Reiss and Vermeer as the twentieth-century ‘vexed question’ of equivalence. Jakobson’s influential tripartite distinction between intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation is presented to stress the complexities of translation involving different languages, media and contexts, thus requiring an intricate interlingual, intermedial and intercultural negotiation. Pessimistic and optimistic views on translation are also represented by the interpretations of Nabokov (“profanation”, 11) and Benjamin (“afterlife”, 13). The discussion of these views stresses the heuristic value of translation

studies in understanding asymmetric intercultural power relations as well as in identifying both the historical significance of translation and its role in knowledge creation and the shaping of culture.

“The origin and development of translation studies” (Chapter 1) presents the main coordinates of the ground-breaking inclusive field of translation studies, developed as a result of a series of meetings by the polysystem-theory-influenced “Leuven Group” in the 1970s. Their “contestatory and adversarial nature” regarding the academic mistreatment of translation by linguistics and literature is asserted to have evolved in parallel to postcolonial and gender studies, as a challenge to academic orthodoxies. The routes taken by Holmes, Lefevere, Bassnett, Even-Zohar, Toury, Lambert, and Hermans, to promote this interdisciplinary and inclusive approach to the role of translation in the construction of cultures are followed along the 1990s cultural turn, so as to focus on how they have led “to position[ing] the study of translation within the study of culture more broadly, highlighting political and socio-economic factors, while continuing to insist on the importance of close textual analysis”. (24)

“Postcolonial translation” (Chapter 2) denounces the initially “little attention (...) paid to the significance of translation in post-colonial contexts,” and stresses how other (i.e. non-Western) viewpoints contribute to reveal that Western and Anglo-American notions (such as the believed superiority of

the ‘original’) are by no means universally accepted. (37) Devy, Rao, Ngugi, Kourouma, Venuti, Niranjana, Cheyfitz, Paz, Borges, the de Campos brothers, Bhabha and Apter are evoked to illustrate the variety of mainly metaphoric perceptions of translation in postcolonial and contemporary contexts. They stress the identitary fragmentation generated by imposed multilingualism and the liminality experienced by postcolonial writers. Such experiences bring about the issue of self-translation and motivate various strategies to subvert colonial languages and decolonize writing. The notions of ‘cultural translation’ and the ‘translation zone’ are also cited as expression of the newness of hybrid migrant discourses developed by contemporary citizens inhabiting the border spaces created by globalization. This chapter emphasizes how, also within translation studies, translation becomes instrumental in denouncing issues of power and intercultural violence, to which it paradoxically also bears witness - as highlighted by Venuti’s ideologically loaded defence of foreignization to dethrone central languages.

“Translation and gender” (Chapter 3) starts by profiling the problem grammatical gender poses to interlingual translation to zoom in on the practical issue of translating linguistic gender ambivalence, i.e. the intentional use of vocabulary that does not have gender markers. The chapter then discusses the intercultural bridging (but also unacknowledged transformation) by means of translation of the divergent agendas of Anglo-American pragmatic and French deconstructionist takes on feminism, as

stressed by Simon. Spivak's research on postcolonialism, comparative literature, translation and feminism is discussed not only because of denouncing the "risks of cultural appropriation through translation" motivated by linguistic and cultural hegemonies but also (and perhaps mostly) because of the author's own counter-current interventionist and transformative translation practice. (66) Quebecois feminist authors Cixous, Irigaray, Brossard, Godard, Lotbinière-Harwood and Simon are also pointed out for proposing a playful "réécriture au féminin" (70) and "woman-handling" (50) to achieve the visibility they advocate for the difference-generating and creative translator/rewriter; in this, they are joined by Levine's notion of a transcreative "subversive scribe" (71) undermining patriarchal discourse through translation focused on verbal games or by Chamberlain's reflection on the sexualization of translation revealed by patriarchal figurative language used for it. Von Flotow's strategies of "supplementing," "prefacing and footnoting" or the most subversive "highjacking" (79) are also mentioned as a means to increase the visibility and agency of the feminist translator.

Chapter 4, "Translating across time," offers a richly illustrated view on evolving ideals of translation, by evoking translations of geographically and/or chronologically distant works into English since the Renaissance, which are strongly subject to time- and culture-specific aesthetic sensibilities and expectations. Despite the prevalence given to the recreation of content or

form across time, an even stronger common denominator is stated to be “the fundamental question that underpins all translation from all cultures and all ages: whether to translate in such a way that the reader is taken towards the text, or conversely, whether to bring the text to the reader” (84), thus underlining the continued applicability of Schleiermacher’s proposals. Two points strengthen the interconnectedness of translation and context across time: the impact some translations have upon the target culture and the development of national literatures (e.g., the canonization of the *Authorized Version*), as well as the sometimes strong contextual influence on how translations are produced, especially in cases where success is achieved precisely because translators manage to attune to target culture preferences (e.g., Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat*).

Chapter 5, “The visibility of the translator,” (a wink at the initiated reader able to recognize the wordplay on Venuti’s title) focuses on translator agency and the specificity of readings performed in order to produce rewritings: “[t]ranslations are visible traces of individual readings.” (124) Such readings are marked from the onset by a double awareness of the two cultures involved and tributary to their relative status and the centrality of individual translators. (107) This results in the binary choice either for a communicatively turbulent and ideologically loaded version displaying the visibility of the translator/agent/interpreter and of the source language text and culture, or for a stable and fluent domesticated version acculturated to

target familiar routines, potentially also influenced by the unwillingness to submit individual creativity to the source's otherness.

Drawing on research by O'Hagan, Ashworth, Gile, Pym, Tsai, Bielsa, Bassnett, Schäffner, Cronin, Díaz-Cintas, Hofstede and Trompenaars, "Redefining translation in a global age" (Chapter 6) profiles the new paradigm shift created by a rapidly changing international communication atmosphere marked by increasing mobility and a growing demand for real-time intercultural exchanges enabled by technology, the omnipresence of the internet and the dissemination of electronic devices and platforms. In a work mainly centred upon the translation of literature, this chapter only briefly addresses other text types and media to stress that the translator/interpreter is now required to master additional skills involving electronic or digital literacy and the ability to work in an increasingly interactive atmosphere to tackle complex multimodal translation tasks under growing time constraints (e.g., news translation and AVT). Such complexities are stated to entail a new paradigm of translation and interpretation, which stresses their growing similarities in media translation, challenges the theoretical notion of source text, and even posits the possibility of translating without languages (e.g., intercultural awareness training).

The “Boundaries of translation” (Chapter 7) develops these ideas by addressing the perceived limits to translation, which are argued to be specific to text typology. A translator’s freedom to rewrite a source text appears to be both acceptable and accepted for most text types, except for literary ones. The latter generate dispute especially among critics and commentators, “who fail to understand that no text can be exactly reproduced in another language,” though not so much among translators. (152) But even with literary texts, tolerance to rewriting to the point of acculturation or appropriation appears to differ according to the literary mode, e.g. being considerably higher in the case of playtexts than poetry. Nevertheless, familiarity with contemporary literary theory is invoked to stress the impossibility of a definitive reading of any text and, therefore, of a faithful and definitive translation. Reception theory is explicitly evoked to emphasize that it is the moment of reception that determines the success of a translation. This should supposedly free translators from slavery to the source text and pave the way for creative rewritings by translators, based on individual and context-specific readings (freed from Romantic ideas on authorship and accessible intentionality). The limits of translation are also discussed in the cases of self-translation, pseudo-translation, and also news translation, and translation of political texts in the EU.

The conclusion entitled “Reappraising translation” once again features the (for the non-initiated thought-provoking) idea that “what can be said in one

language can never be reproduced in an identical form in another, not only because languages are different, but also because cultures are different”, as are reader expectations and aesthetic conventions. (170)

Throughout the volume, and against a richly illustrated panorama, three main points stand out. First, the idea of translation as sameness is debunked to stress the centrality of translator agency. The reader is invited to consider that translation is best approached not by reference to its ‘original’ but rather to its receiving context; not by looking back in a merely textual-linguistic contrastive exercise but by looking forward in an inclusive endeavour to understand the relevance of the receiving context, which is mainly discussed in terms of motivations, effects, and of the one responsible for its creation: the translator (not so much by focusing on its receivers). This paves the way to emphasize the agency of the translator as a creative and engaged interpreter and rewriter. Just as it reflects power relations between people, groups, languages and cultures, translation is neither innocent nor politically neutral because it also has the power to distort meaning.

Second, the centrality of translation in contemporary global communication is also addressed but might perhaps have been more convincingly argued by adding information on the contemporary kaleidoscope of audiovisual translation, on developments in interpreting, collaborative, machine and computer-assisted translation. Further consideration of increasingly hybrid

combinations made possible by swift technological changes (and their democratization) or even of the dissemination of literature in various media and platforms also via translation (see Worthen 2007) might be welcome, especially for a reader who is expected to be conversant with more print-culture oriented literary studies and possibly less aware of such recent trends.

Finally, translation as a creative form of (re)writing or as “the creation of a new original for a different readership” is reiterated as central for providing the ‘after-life’ of authors and their oeuvres, for the construction of cultures, world literature and literary canons. (177) If, as the author states in the final sentence, “[f]ar from being a marginal activity, translation is, and always has been, fundamental to literary and cultural renewal and change,” then it must also be of interest for a reader keen on studying literature and culture. (178)

Alexandra Assis Rosa

Department of English Studies and University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies,

School of Arts and Humanities,

University of Lisbon,

Alameda da Universidade,

1600-214 Lisboa

Portugal

a.assis.rosa@campus.ul.pt

25 April 2015

References

Worthen, W.B. 2008. "Shakespeare 3.0; or, Text vs. Performance, the Remix." In *Alternative Shakespeares 3*, ed. by D.E. Henderson, 54- 77. London: Routledge.