BOOK REVIEWS

Translation and Globalization

Michael Cronin
London & New York: Routledge, 2003. Rpt. 2004. 197 pages.

Let me begin with an 'unlikely' question: What has body snatching of saints in 7th century A.D to do with translation? The question is important for the negotiation of distance, which is what translation also does. This sets the tone for Michael Cronin's exploration of translation's *locus standi* in the era of globalization. He sets out to locate the body of translation in the digitized global era. Only, he leaves translation as a living, vital, throbbing enterprise performing its miracles in a radically different socio-cultural context. Especially striking is the way translation practice is contextualized in the current discourse of the organization of society under the sign of global capital to study the consequences of such a shift for translation and translators. For this purpose, the book recognizes and underscores the 'ecology' of translation as it describes the relationship between speakers, translators and texts from different groups and classes of linguistic existence to show how there is translation "into and out of their languages."

Translation activity itself is 'translated' into languages that speak to voice where and how translators and translations belong in the transnational, global world that lives more than 6000 languages. To this end, he understands translation as "a channel of transmission over time" and yet emphasizing plurality, language difference, and interdependence. This pointedly addresses the question of the role of the translator in the twenty first century. A crucial concern that emerges here relates to the way translation and translators negotiate the question of agency in the space of flows that describes the contemporary world order. The translator is a mediator whose work

emphasizes the transmissive dimension that speaks the instantaneous language of flows stressing the critical position of agency in this cultural enterprise. It is not difficult to see Cronin's location of translation practice in the age of informationalism as a continuation of the enactment of what it traditionally has done enacting "the therapy of distance."

A significant area of enquiry in the book concerns the relationship between translation and censorship in the age of globalization. An age that overwhelms us with obvious forms of censorship, Cronin argues, can also ignore translation experience. This is a much more damaging form of censorship; in the age of instant communication, removal from public view is death itself. It is important to recognize here that in times of exposure to cultural diversity across time, when faced with diversity of experiences of language, the city is a cultural text for translation.

The book also draws attention to the impact globalization has on the "future politics of translation" and looks at the pressures that come to bear on translation processes. It is not surprising to find discussions of how machine translation and similar computer assisted translation impact on our thinking to draw out the relationship between technology and creativity in translation. In this context, Cronin examines in detail the crucial question of the invisibility of the translator and 'clonialism'.

Appropriately stressed is the need to consider minority languages in translation today. What the discussion calls for here is a new direction in translation practice, a new translation ecology. Cronin convinces us that "Our narrative imagination – our ability to try to imagine what it is like to be someone else from another language, another culture, another community or another country – is itself a mere figment of the imagination if we have no way of reading the books, watching the plays, looking at the films produced by others." Therefore, "any active sense of global citizenship must

involve translation as a core element." While emphasizing what translation and translators hold out in our era, Cronin also draws attention to our failure to relate to other voices and texts. This is an important insight, much like the old Chinese saying 'The window is important for what it does not contain'.

It is important to emphasize that globalization does not signal the death of the translator or translation; rather there is a renewed demand for translators and translations. Cronin earlier on draws attention to what he calls the 'neo-Babelian' project that speaks a dangerous nostalgia for one language that reaches the skies trying to complete the incomplete project of modernity. Neo-Babelianism is the "desire for mutual, instantaneous intelligibility between human being speaking, writing and reading different languages." What it implies has serious repercussions at levels of agency and even the existence of cultures and languages for in the Babelian construction site, translation ends all translation. It is for this reason that he rightly argues that translators can make legitimate interventions in culture, society and politics.

And so, the function and role of translation continues as it has done in the past. While critically engaging with immediate social, cultural, political discourses to locate the enterprise of translation, the book re-states the relationship between translation and conservation of cultures. It is a call to remember the challenge in the practice and the need for it today. Cronin has consistently underlined throughout the persistent increase in translation between languages as he brings together the various strands of his argument not just to give a compelling reason for translation practice, rather locate the distinctness and interrelatedness of creative interaction in the world order we shape for ourselves.

It was surprising, however, to discover a printer's devil in the first chapter in this Routledge publication.

The book slides with admirable ease through the intricate world of globalization as it gives ample illustrations from a whole range of translation scenarios to establish the importance of not "to be condemned to the sounds of our own voices." The book is truly a meditation on the direction of Translation Studies in particular and opens new avenues in Cultural Studies. This engrossing book is a compulsory read for those who care for translation and Translation Studies.

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Translation and the Languages of Modernism: Gender, Politics, Language.

Steven G. Yao (2002).
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Steven Yao's argument in the book under review is that Anglophone modernism, in its constitutive moves, established distinctively literary translation as a critical and creative enterprise whose politics reconfigures not only nation but gender as well, affecting even the gendered position of canonical literary production itself. He formulates his argument in relation to specific translations by Pound, H.D., Yeats, Lowell, the Zukofskys, adding Joyce to make the point that *Finnegan's Wake* is a case of translating from English into a linguistic heterotopia. The fact that Yao reads Chinese and is able to comment on the Pound corpus from that point of view gives his Pound chapters a particular, philological type of authority. He uses this authority, however, to undermine the conventional belief that textual accuracy checking grounded in knowledge of the relevant languages has a crucial role to play in evaluating literary translations. By framing his Pound chapters in a larger argument, he further underplays the specific points he makes that depend on his knowledge of Chinese.

Yao's main point is that a literary translation is a textual production activity that takes place specifically in the target language culture and must be read primarily in relation to that site. He defends the right of literary translators to deploy their translation as an intervention in their time and place and to do to the text whatever is necessary to accomplish this. In his view, this makes it appropriate for them to ignore strictures emanating from philologically minded purists whose conception of proper literary production in the target language is always a couple of generations out of date and who are therefore seldom competent to comment. It follows that literary translators need not regard the source language

text as their starting point; they can and often must use a rough initial rendering into the target language, instead, as the basis that they shall rework. Given this reasoning, it follows further that a literary translator's repertory need not include a sound knowledge or even any knowledge at all, of the source language.

To be sure, Yao is not celebrating ignorance per se. He sees the modernist disengagement of literary translation from philological exactitude as a necessary first step towards the more appropriate model of translation by two persons representing the two cultures and adequately acquainted with each other's languages. However, his concentration on the issue of language, precisely because he wishes to open up the discussion, leads him to sidestep the question of whether it is also legitimate for a literary translator to ignore not just the language but the history and milieu of the source culture. This omission is related to the fact that he focuses on how Yeats or Pound, translating from Ancient Greek or Latin or Mediaeval Chinese, deal with the criticism they face from British classicists or Sinologists (either Anglophone or writing for the benefit of an Anglophone readership). If Raymond Aron had translated Yevtushenko into French, and if Yevtushenko or other Russians had critiqued the specifics of such a translation, the discussion that Yao seems to wish to initiate would include looking at how someone from the translated time and space talks back. The fact that Yao chooses examples vitiated by this asymmetry makes one wonder why he does not reflect on the consequences of this choice, and on what the issues look like when the range of examples is expanded.

To put the matter differently, does Yao in fact succeed in framing the Pound material in a larger interrogation by placing it in the company of Yeats, H.D., Joyce and so on? It seems to me that in fact his quest for other and contemporary examples of a Poundlike move ends up dissipating and diffusing his question. One does not make better sense of Gandhi by considering his parents and his brothers as potential political figures.

Yao chooses to place Pound in H.D.'s company (they were once engaged) or in that of Yeats (Pound had been his secretary) without interrogating Anglophone Modernism at a level that charts its intersection with France. He also chooses to bracket the activity of translating from Mediaeval Chinese to English with that of translating from Latin and Ancient Greek without asking what is involved in the Anglophone assessment of Chinese civilization as a "classical" site in some rigorous sense.

These choices blunt the instruments that any author seeking to advance our understanding would need to use. Yao's book is too polite to the Anglophone readership and publishership, to the point of allowing them to circumscribe what counts as enounceable in his discourse. The absence of any reference to modern texts in Chinese (it is not possible that scholars in China, writing about literary issues in Chinese periodicals, have had nothing relevant to say about Pound's work) is one index of this excessive politeness. Another is his decision to eschew coordinates drawn from any contemporary or other body of literary theory that might help place his sense-making enterprise in the framework of a larger and continuous labour of literary theoretical scrutiny. A third index is the absence of the theme of American culture and literature as a matrix of literary practice and reception whose presence shapes Yao's reception of the material he has reworked with such rigour and care, but shapes it in ways that go unnoticed in a study that strains so hard to notice so much else.

There is a cultural subtext to this, given the reputation of East Asia as a traditional nurturing ground for the highest levels of politeness in all civilizations. However, the problem in this case is that there is a self-defeating element to this particular exercise. Yao as a critic is practising a certain type of cross-boundary transmission of textual material close enough to translation to make his own ideas applicable. You would expect him to transmit into a recognizably contemporary and therefore theory-laden space. But this expectation

is not met. Practising the conventionalness that the protagonists in his narrative oppose and supposedly overcome, his exposition itself hugs closely, and exclusively, the ground on which his Anglophone Modernists walked.

One might, however, wish to defend these decisions by Yao, methodologically, along the following lines. His project is to ensure that the canonical methods of evaluation in the Anglophone academy are revised specifically on the matter of ranking original writing relative to translation in the constitutive moves of modernist practice and its standard interpretations as factors shaping what critics today can do with the textual corpus of modernism. In order to accomplish this, Yao needs to leave nearly everything intact so that his intended readers are forced to concede that even if other factors are held constant his point about the constitutive importance of translation does stand, within the framework of Anglophone Modernism itself. If we construe Yao's intervention in this fashion, it becomes possible to retrieve a viable point by contextualizing it vis-à-vis highly specific interlocutors and perlocutionary trajectories. However, such retrieval is hardly a straightforward or routine job. We need to reopen his questions at several points and extend his inquiry.

Pound's espousal of a certain Confucianism is an invocation of history that counterpoints the resistance to historicity that constitutively characterizes the brave and free land of manifest destiny. One cannot usefully read this invocation in isolation from the counterpoint role it is structurally compelled to play in an American mind. A literary comparatist might with profit focus on Cordwainer Smith's (1975a, 1975b, 1978, 1979) science fiction to explore the matter in greater depth. Science fiction in general is a domain where American narrative talent has achieved serious peaks that reflect the sense that living as an American is a permanent experiment.

Choosing Cordwainer Smith as an example in this context is pertinent in at least three ways. First, he was an American who grew up in China. Second, Smith's fiction draws not just on the Confucian tradition but on the twentieth century experience of coping with unsettlement. Third, his work too represents major explorations in the reconfiguration of gender under the circumstances of a total experiment, explorations clearly continued in the widely known more recent work of Donna Haraway and Octavia Butler, which however lacks Smith's Chinese background. What is striking about the Smith corpus in the context of comparative inquiry with Pound in mind is the cyclical narrative, combining intracyclic historicity with themes of cross-cyclic renewal rooted in perennial principles of a broadly Confucian type.

At the level of what the narrative holds up for our direct inspection, Smith's perennial principles and Pound's rather different take on Confucius both appear at first blush to belong to the pretheoretical genre of an ahistorical quest for human universals. But things are seldom that simple. Smith's and Pound's invocations of the perennial are imbricated in very different histories. They reflect contrasting stances towards the second world war, towards the use of heroic and antiheroic figures as narrative devices, towards the gender interpellations that drive fictional construction, and towards the larger utopian project of constructing a real political basis for an intelligible, if cyclical, future. Consequently, somebody who does undertake a comparison of the two corpora will be forced to ask in just what ways the imaginary of science fiction and the postulated seriousness of Modernism make contrasting use of strikingly similar materials in a project of a broadly utopian sort.

The operative words of course are Seriousness and Imaginary. Both Pound and Smith make evident use of certain subgenres of the American willingness to play around with what traditional cultures hold in reverence; they both display on their

lintel the Emersonian declaration "Whim". But they are circumscribed by generically different compulsions.

Pound's Modernism inherits a certain seriousness from the liberal humanist project through which the British imperial mantle, problematically at a level unexamined in Yao, enters all Anglophone modernist projects. Smith postulates a remote and much palimpsested future where the sheer succession of formats of glory has compelled a distancing from the categories of the classical state, and where the management of extremely varied pursuits of happiness has reached the point where those who exercise a managerial hold over events realize that they cannot possess power. However, both of these interrogations assume an overall Americanization of global history as a default.

It is this shared postulate that will become the focus if comparative work is undertaken. For Pound's formalization of seriousness and Smith's formalization of fantasy unpack some of the same modes of work and play as they formalize generic opposites and thereby subtend a shared genological stage (in the sense of genology as the formal theory of genres). It may be unnecessary to add that a study that juxtaposes Smith with Pound will need to do business with Smith's fellow science fictionists and with Pound's comrades in modernism, and will have to disaggregate and reassemble them in ways that the easy generic labellings do not encourage. Now that tools from the politics of gender and race have forced a repositioning vis-à-vis the once axiomatic unseriousness of science fiction, this is perhaps obvious to many readers.

What is less obvious is the translationlike place of science fiction in the literary critic's imaginary. The science fiction writer J.G. Ballard has suggested (these words are not Ballard's own, but mediated by Burgess 1978: vii) that "the kind of limitation that most contemporary fiction accepts is immoral, a shameful consequence of the rise of the bourgeois novel. Language exists less to record the

actual than to liberate the imagination." Literary criticism has only recently begun to view science fiction as a valid creative enterprise. If we are to extend Yao's argument to the point of rendering its logic visible, we must ask if the reranking of science fiction in relation to conventional fiction is in any way cognate to the reranking he advocates between translation and original writing. Yao would have us stop regarding translation as secondary and on the contrary give priority to it as a constitutive strand in literary production. Where does the reranking of science fiction stand on such a road map?

Where we stand on this matter has everything to do with how American we think the global future is. Where Heidegger and following him Derrida posed the issue of an unavoidable Europeanization of the planet ("all thought must pass through the Greek element") at the moment of Nietzsche's "last man", our period has been compelled to reformulate this as an Americanization process that other forces can only hope to modify or inflect, never actually reverse or prevent.

The term "liberal humanism" in literary theory, especially in the context of translation studies, becomes uninterpretable if its users do not articulate it in relation to neutrality with respect to national identities and heritages. Anglophone America has provided an explicit set of images of what neutrality can come to mean, a specific anti-historical economy that downsizes national narratives into little stories fitting limited attention spans, an economy that claims thereby to overcome the hang-ups of nations and to empower the free individual. This formally neutral world is the default utopia implied by Anglophone literary criticism's vectors, including a comparative literature and translation studies enterprise focused on translations into English alone and deploying critical apparatuses in English as the sole medium of critical discourse. If we are to change this default, we have to work to change it. As Mao Zedong once wrote, "If you don't sweep it away, dust doesn't move away on its own."

It is most reasonable for us to make the choice of trying to read Yao as working towards articulating a non-American default utopia and a correspondingly non-formalistic literary critical methodology. However, he is doing this within a disconnected or abstract subenterprise that does not, as it stands, build bridges with its counterparts elsewhere. As we take up and use his work, we will need to make it concrete by doing such bridge-building ourselves, as is often the case with useful ideas. Originators are seldom in a position to provide the continuity factors that many users need.

In this sense of the terms abstract and concrete, America is emphatically an abstract utopia. Its economy plays out an aesthetic of peaks. It is a country where people are taught from day one to cheer for the fastest runner in the world or the biggest building in the world or various other maxima, to exaggerate numbers ("the driver in the car that is slowing us down must be 290 years old"), to buy the best brains from everywhere, and so on.

This hyperbolic mode of speech and living does not bore a triumphalist mind. America is designed as a centre from which a planetary triumph will spread to as much of the cosmos as this fervour can populate. The basis of American anti-historicity is the fervent rooting for this active future, an activity that has set its coordinates in terms of putting all human achievements together in one place and deliberately forgetting their irrelevant roots.

This forgetting is forged in the hedonic crucible of play and childishness. American irreverence is a reaffirmation of the fact that in forsaking the old world every true believer has said goodbye to forces that thought they owned him (and that now know they have another think coming). The economic migrations of later centuries may not have mimicked the psychological content of what the early seventeenth century pilgrims aboard the Mayflower thought they were doing. But their narratives as immigrants joining the American formation took on the same format of abandoning old, rooted,

ethnic, historical hopes and forging together new, scheme-focused, ethnicity-despecifying, history-cancelling expectations, the same format of using a universal economy to destroy particularistic histories. That format inherits the religious history of the English-speaking white settlers. American playful irreverence is steeped in, and indelibly angry with, the old reverences. The wow and yay adoration of secular biggests and fastests and tallests is a displaced version of the forms of counterworship that the early white settlers had pitted against the religious beliefs of their various persecutors in Europe.

It is disturbing to see that many people today buying into the notion of an English-language globality or even some of their opponents who critique what they call American imperialism in Marxist terms (but consenting to use English as their language of critical reference) fail to notice the character of the beast that they love or hate. For even an "opponent", if she swears by scholarly or moral excellence as she inveighs against the American empire, may get locked into the same coordinate system of seeking to build coalitions of the excellent, and thus committed to constructing simply another America repopulated by her own friends. If one imagines a utopia with the same geometry, it does not matter which faces flesh out the dots on one's diagram: if you let your adversary dictate your format, you lose the deeper war that has to do with choosing the kinds of challenge you wish to accept.

It is now possible to turn to Yao for aid. I find in the part of his work that looks at the gendered location of literary self-fashioning a direct counterpart to the substantivist take on history, rationality, and conceptual parsimony in theories and practices. Space prevents me from rehearsing here (see Dasgupta 1996) the full apparatus of that formulation of the substantivist notion of economy. Its main point is that the rationality that drives an actor's historicity must come from that actor's sense of herself as an active inhabitant of her concretely co-managed place as a home, not from an

ethnicity's official historical narrative or American-style despecification of old narratives, both of which would be patriarchal alibis. In the present context, suffice it to say that a person's act of concretizing her adoption of a conceptual structure involves shaving all the Platonic beards as she begins to own that structure's categories, thus bringing Occam's razor to life in her active resistance to the conceptual content of patriarchal codes that keep trying to preempt her self-fashioning. To the extent that she does this Aristotelian labour (as any anti-Platonic manoeuvre is bound to take on such a colour) as part of a self-conscious renunciation of unchosen commitments and privileges, she disengages herself from strategies that she would otherwise buy into by default. This enables her to move from strategic action to communicative action, to use an enlightening pair of Habermasian terms. Once she has become her own communicator, she is then able to choose to inhabit a history that she has begun to own, one that is concretely continuous with the time and place she has chosen to continue to fashion with significant others.

Does such a utopia perhaps root for Esperanto rather than for English? For many readers of a text such as this, such a question may look too abstract to form part of this exercise. For me, it is entirely concrete, as I find that Esperanto enables its users to imagine a world-forming process that differs from the Anglophone hegemonic systems in the ways that many English-using opponents of the American empire find congenial. But this is an issue that individuals need to address in their own contexts, as these contexts expand to take on board the viewpoints of colleagues with whom the necessary bridges have not yet been built. However, Esperanto is very close to the concerns that Yao would like us to take seriously, for China and Japan have cultivated the internationalism of Esperanto on a much larger scale than other Asian countries, and have from day one engaged white users in a civilization-level dialogue that their presence has prevented from degenerating into Eurocentrism. Those of us who wish to take up and continue Yao's

enterprise will need to do business with the voluminous and rigorous translations of Chinese and Japanese classics into Esperanto by Chinese and Japanese translators, and to compare what happens in these translations with the work of a philological Waley or a poetic Pound. This is yet another point at which Yao limits his inquiry to the point of forcing us to withhold assent until others have enlarged his scope and continued the fresh (and welcome) modes of scrutiny he brings to bear on much-revisited texts.

While we are on the subject of Americanization and its others, I must underscore the fact that Yao's extended study of issues of Irishness in relation to Yeats cry out for connection with the America question, for the Irish element in the formation of American history is one of the frequently studied strands of the troubled relation between Anglo and American partners in the English-using literary system. If Yao's project needs to tease apart various strands in the standard hegemonic characterization of this system, then continuations of his project must interrogate not only how Irish contributions have helped shape twentieth-century British literature, but also the way in which the peculiar partial freedom that the Irish have had to manage within the British Isles has impacted on the equally idiosyncratic sense that America has of being autonomous vis-à-vis Britain and vis-à-vis continental Europe and yet of remaining caught up in and dependent on its definitional troubles.

One way to make sure that Anglophone literary work becomes self-conscious has been to resort to linguistics and its various spin-offs. Yao has worked at such a vast distance from these resources that it is hard to turn the argument in this direction. And yet eventually his project will have to engage with those of linguist colleagues. The sense of balance and proportion that he seems to seek cannot be even formulated if one excludes these participants, as he and many other literary critics. However, that discussion will

have to be initiated elsewhere; we must, most of us, reached the very end of our attention span.

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