

Graduate School Review Competition

Review: Voices in Translation

Voices in Translation: Bridging Cultural Divides, edited by Gunilla Anderman, Clevedon/Buffalo/Toronto, Multilingual Matters, 2007, xii + 160 pp., £24.95, €34.95, \$49.95 (paperback), ISBN 9781853599828

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I frequently consult Gunilla Anderman's *Europe on Stage* (2005), her stylish and innovative exposition of the staging of canonic European playwrights in translation. But the edited volume under review is a melancholy book in some ways, marking the passing of two pioneering scholars: the translator and theatre academic, Bill Findlay, and Anderman herself. Anderman's brief first chapter on Findlay's dialect translations embodies this loss in its tantalising glimpse of what admirers might have enjoyed had these two scholars been spared for longer.

Under the main title, *Voices in Translation*, the collection assembles a tempting array of experienced theatre and literary translators and academics. In many cases, these professions are combined by the authors, resulting in several chapters in which the translator theorises their own practice, to illuminating effect. The volume's subtitle, *Bridging Cultural Divides*, represents an approach taken by many of the contributors, including Anderman herself, which analyses the translator's aim to give 'speakers of other languages and countries voices that "sing" in translation' (p. 14). However, certain essays, sometimes obliquely, also recognise the voice of the translator.

Among the contributors, Helen Rappaport insists that a playwright creating a new version must 'constantly resist the injection into the script of their own personal bias and linguistic tics' (p. 71). But is it possible for writers and translators to suppress their own voice? Joe Farrell, in a valuable historical survey of thinking on translational style, characterises the dialogue between the translator and author as an act of *gareggiare*, in some ways a gladiatorial combat (p. 58). David Johnston, however, offers a fresh perspective on the voice in translation, noting that even an 'acceptable text in English' may well be 'a ventriloquising text [that] will fail to connect intimately – or

memorably – with its audience' (p. 82). This image depicts the complexities of the multiple voices competing in translation and, in drawing the audience into the debate, introduces a second theme.

Whereas the first eight chapters are written from a theatrical perspective, the final four focus on literary translation. Here, the discussion of voice is tempered by an awareness of the receivers. Margaret Jull Costa's painstaking case-studies ably portray the challenges and solutions of translating culturally specific references for non-Portuguese-speakers, detailing the assumptions made about her readers; Sintra requires no explanation, because accessible, through Byron, to 'thousands of British tourists', whereas most readers 'would know nothing of East Timor' (p. 121) and therefore need footnotes and a glossary. Her conclusion that all translation is 'filtered through one particular person's imagination and perception and fixed in a particular time' (p. 122) recalls Mona Baker's narrative theory, querying the translator as mediator. This might seem in direct confrontation with the bridge-building title of this volume. However, it turns attention back to the translator, as indeed does this book itself.

Taken as a whole, this selection of papers supplies material for a challenging discussion of the existence, representation and identification of voices in translation, questioning how, and whether it is possible, to bridge cultural divides.

Note

Taylor & Francis have an exclusive licence to print a longer version of this review in *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, March 2012, Vol 20, Issue 1.