

IS THE GLASS HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL?
REFLECTIONS ON TRANSLATION THEORY AND PRACTICE IN BRAZIL

by Alice LEAL, 2014. [Transkulturalität - Translation – Transfer] Volume 12.
Berlin: Frank & Timme, 334 pp. ISBN 978-3-7329-0068-8



ALINNE BALDUINO P. FERNANDES

This book results from Alice Leal’s doctoral research at the Universität Wien carried out from 2007 to 2011, under the supervision of Mary Snell-Hornby. The main objective of her work is to examine the conflict between translation theory and practice in Brazil as well as “the reception of foreign theories and tendencies in the country” (p. 14), at first anchored in the works of two prominent Brazilian scholars, namely Rosemary Arrojo and Paulo Henriques Britto, and then opening up to translation studies in general. The discussion also tackles both the professionalisation of translation and the standpoints of practitioners and researchers, as in whether they have a more essentialist or anti-essentialist orientation, as well as the curricula of some higher education translation programmes in Brazil.

Part I, “A theoretical practice and a practical practice”, is concerned with reflecting upon the reception of poststructuralist thought in translation studies in Brazil; discussing how translation academics and practitioners perceive the relationship between theory and practice; and, finally, commenting on the current curricula of programmes devoted to teaching translation in the country. The research problems arise from criticizing *Conversas com Tradutores* [Interviews with Translators], a book whose second edition was published in Brazil in 2007 and which intended to “provide an overview of translation in Brazil from the translators’ points of view” (p. 15). Leal examines *Conversas* and offers brief comments on the curricula of some higher education programmes in translation in order to demonstrate the divergent opinions of translators in relation to theory. For some of the translators interviewed, there is a large gap between translation theory and practice whereas others believe that theory should govern practice and, therefore, turn to theory for guidelines. Several anecdotes about these programmes are recalled, most deriving from the Leal’s personal experience as a student in Brazil in order to corroborate that there is a trend towards making these programmes more market-oriented and, thus, separated from language and literature programmes.

Part I also raises questions regarding the role and goals of higher education in the light of Derrida's 1983 article titled "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils." Here Leal ponders whether higher education should be geared towards the market or protect itself from it, thus remaining autonomous in relation to its demands. Moreover, this part elucidates the importance of understanding one's standpoint when arguing for or against theory in relation to practice – and indeed, this approach may serve to make room for different contending views as well as for translation students to understand more clearly their position as professionals on the job market. Central to this discussion is not the notion of *whether* higher education programmes in translation should open up to market demands, but *how* they are to do so. Here we are reminded of the importance of reflecting upon and criticising our own practices.

Part II is dedicated to Rosemary Arrojo, who is currently based at Binghamton University in the US as Professor of Comparative Literature. The first section discusses her personal trajectory, and focuses on how the institutions where she studied and the research topics she chose as a young scholar might have played a role in her standpoint as an academic. The second provides a thorough review of her main publications on translation, such as the books *O signo desconstruído* [The deconstructed sign] (1992/2003), *Oficina de tradução* [Translation workshop], *Tradução, desconstrução e psicanálise* [Translation, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis], as well as selected papers. Leal demonstrates how Arrojo's works are affiliated with reader-response theory and how that theoretical orientation may help to think critically of non- (or anti) essentialist ways of teaching translation.

Part III is dedicated to Paulo Henriques Britto, acclaimed literary translator, writer, and Associate Professor at Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This part of the book follows a structure similar to that dedicated to Arrojo, with sections on Britto's standpoints as a translator, writer, and academic, as well as a final section in which Leal reviews his major publications on translation. In the latter section, Leal pays particular attention to the works in which Britto criticises post-structuralism, such as: "Lícidas: Diálogo mais ou menos platônico em torno de 'Como reconhecer um poema ao vê-lo', de Stanley Fish" [Lycidas: A more or less platonic dialog on Stanley Fish's 'How to recognize a poem when you see one'] (1995); "Desconstruir para quê" [Why deconstruct] (2001); and "É possível avaliar traduções?" [Is it possible to assess translations?] (2007). Britto's views on translation, in contrast with Arrojo's, are presented as more inclined towards using theoretical models as guidelines for translation. His focus is on literary translation, more specifically on poetry translation, and proposes models for translating poetry. The review of his works in conjunction with Arrojo's seems pertinent in the sense that Britto provides a direct response to one of Arrojo's works, titled "As questões teóricas da tradução e a desconstrução do logocentrismo" [Reflections on the theoretical questions of translation and the deconstruction of logocentrism], a chapter in Arrojo (1992/2003). His major criticism towards Arrojo is that her approaches to translation theory have no particular "usefulness" with regard to the practical experience of translating (Leal, p. 265).

In Part IV, Leal returns to the topics considered earlier in the book. These revolve around the goals of higher education and professionalism in translation in the light of the introductory discussion on theory and practice. At the heart of the closing remarks is Freud's notion of the *savage horde*, and the philosopher and

former psychoanalyst François Roustang's views on psychoanalysis, published in *Dire Mastery: Discipleship from Freud to Lacan* (1976/1986). In Roustang's epigraph cited by Leal, Roustang suggests that should there be stability of views and opinions in psychoanalysis, that very stability would forgo "the Freudian discovery," in which "disintegration" is part and parcel of any group of psychoanalysts. Following Roustang, Leal suggests "savage" to be read "not necessarily as wild but rather as a state of disagreement, conflict and lack of unanimity" (p. 302). For Leal, to acknowledge the heterogeneity of views and approaches towards theory and practice in translation studies is to embrace the *savage horde*: "We can but strive to reach a consensus, but that should not prevent us from acknowledging the impossibility of this consensus. We can but hope for reconciliation, though we should be aware of the fact that full reconciliation is neither feasible nor desirable" (p. 308). Such a statement seems to acknowledge that, if anything, the heterogeneity of views in translation studies is a healthy way of moving forward, at the same time always bearing in mind the need to think over our approaches critically.

The metaphor in the book's title refers to how one sees translation studies in terms of the theory-practice relationship. As presented by Leal, nonetheless, the objectives are ambitious and broad for both the theory-practice discussion at stake as well as for her intention to investigate the reception of post-structuralist thought. Although she sets out to tackle translation studies in general, all of the examples and conclusions derive from literary translation. Particularly troublesome is the lack of a clear-cut timeframe for the research, which makes some of her main arguments a bit too loose, particularly when commenting on the syllabi and curricula of translation and/or language programmes that involve translation studies as well as on the (lack of) study of post-structuralism in translation studies in general. Some generalizations appear problematic, e.g. "Although most translation scholars in Brazil are probably not too keen on poststructuralist thought, her [Arrojo's] works remain canonical, making up the syllabi of perhaps all translation courses in the country" (p. 107). And elsewhere:

At the heart of the reconciliation debate is the question of the impact of poststructuralist thought in translation studies [...]. Though I have no well-regarded numeric source to quote, the influence that the so-called poststructuralist views has exerted in the area appears to be negligible. (p. 308)

When discussing the curriculum of Brazilian translation programmes, Leal asserts, "[the] merits of this curriculum aside [that of Universidade Federal do Paraná], around Curitiba and in fact *almost everywhere in Brazil* there are *no* alternatives as far as translator and interpreter training are concerned." (p. 31, my italics). An actual mapping of translation programmes or reference to the works of researchers who have been engaged in mapping the discipline in Brazil would have provided more substance to the discussion (for a recent Brazilian example of that, see e.g. Guerini, Torres, and Costa 2013).

To conclude, it would have been helpful, and perhaps more enriching, if the discussion had been centred, for instance, on a particular text genre with regard to translation training, theorization, practice, teaching, and market demands. In my view, to examine the supposed resistance to poststructuralism in translation studies in Brazil by relying almost exclusively on the author's personal experiences at two Brazilian universities and on conferences she has attended renders the argument

merely anecdotal. In the final analysis, it is true that informing the reader of the author's background and personal experiences is a pertinent attitude towards research with post-structuralist affinities. Indeed, as Mark Fortier has put it, one of the most crucial contributions that feminism has brought to cultural theory is the notion of "positionality": the "need to articulate the position from which one speaks. Who one is (one's experience, biases and investments) is thought to have an inevitable effect on how one reasons" (1997, p. 14). As transformative and enlightening this can be to the ways we perceive and conduct research, one cannot but ask whether personal accounts should constitute the basis on which the research stands. (And perhaps, this serves to demonstrate the vitality of the *savage horde* in translation studies.)

Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes

alinne.fernandes@ufsc.br

Profa. Dra., Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

References

- ARROJO, Rosemary, *Oficina de tradução: a teoria na prática*. São Paulo: Ática, 1986/2002.
- _____, (ed.), *O signo desconstruído: Implicações para a tradução, a leitura e o ensino*. Campinas: Pontes, 1992/2003.
- _____, *Tradução, desconstrução e psicanálise*. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1993.
- BRITTO, Paulo Henrique. "Lícidas: Diálogo mais ou menos platônico em torno de 'Como reconhecer um poema ao vê-lo', de Stanley Fish". In: *PaLavra* n. 3, 1995, p. 142-150.
- _____, "Desconstruir para quê". In: *Cadernos de Tradução*, n. 8, 2001, p. 41-50.
- _____, "É possível avaliar traduções?" In: *Tradução em Revista*, n. 4, 2007, p. 1-12.
- DERRIDA, Jacques, "The principle of reason: The university in the eyes of its pupils". Trans. by Catharine Porter and Edward Morris. In: *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, n. 13 (3), 1983, p. 2-20.
- FORTIER, Mark Fortier, *Theatre/ Theory: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- GUERINI, Andréia, TORRES, Marie-Hélène Catherine, and COSTA, Walter Carlos. *Os Estudos da Tradução no Brasil nos Séculos XX e XXI*. Florianópolis: Copiart/PGET-UFSC.
- ROUSTANG, François. *Dire Mastery: Discipleship from Freud to Lacan*. Trans. by Ned Lukacher. Arlington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 1976/1986.