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Timothy Weiss. *Translating Orients: Between Ideology and Utopia*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004, 249 pp.

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*Translating Orients: between Ideology and Utopia* by Timothy Weiss, an American author who

lived abroad in Hong Kong for seven years, analyzes the transformative process of texts and experiences that originate in Asian, North African and Middle Eastern societies. He organizes his book into two sections: the first section (chapters 1 and 2) discusses the term 'Orients' first as text and then as experience, while the second section (chapters 3 - 6)

Weiss analyzes the translation of orientals through contemporary writers who address the relationship between place and identity, post colonial Hong Kong, transcultural values and 'cultural imaginaries.' *Translating Orientals* views translation as an opportunity to understand cultures by providing a "give and take process, an open system of exchange among interrelated networks."

In the introduction, Weiss presents the Discourse approach that the author Edward Said uses in his well known work, *Orientalism*. This approach affirms that "knowledge is constructed through discourse that regulates what can be thought and said during a particular historical moment." Although he agrees with parts of Said's theory, Weiss criticizes this approach by arguing that it "minimizes the role of interpretation and innovation." He offers the translational approach as a means of understanding the world through translation. For Weiss, this approach can be defined as the interdependence of mind and world, the active role of the reader, knowledge as a source of interpretation, reality as constantly emerging, and interpretation as translation.

In chapter 2, 'Without Stopping': The Orient as Liminal Space in Paul Bowles, Weiss applies practice to theory by demonstrating how reality is constantly emerging through the Buddhist idea of liminal space in works by the North American author, Paul Bowles. Liminal space suggests a middle way of viewing interpretation and is described as "a place of translation and transposition into something else," as well as the translation of experience into identity and the interdependence of mind and world. In his writings about traveling abroad, Bowles demonstrates how experience is a process of translation, as the subject reinterprets itself and is changed or transformed as a product of experience.

Bowles's book, *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue* (1957), is composed of travel essays written in the '50s during the Asian and African struggle for independence from European colonization. Weiss argues that, in Bowles's essay 'The Rif, To Music,' landscape must be translated to be understood. He believes Bowles achieves this by "ingenious pictorial comparison that conveys a sense of the incongruous, the surreal, and the sinister" (61). By

translating his experience as a traveler, Bowles found a social and political reality that was constantly emerging. Weiss points out that this emerging reality was derived from the existential transformation of the traveler.

Weiss examines the interdependence of place and identity, and of mind and world, in Chapter Four, "Locale and Identity in Ishiguro and Piglia." Here translation is used as a tool for transforming identity into place and place into identity. Weiss considers identity as the means of interpreting/translating the world which in turn affects our sense of place. He analyzes the highly regarded Argentinean author Ricardo Piglia's book, *The Absent City*, which he states is "one of the most innovative and enigmatic reflections on locale and identity in contemporary literature." This book addresses concepts of translation and language environments and demonstrates how novels are life experiences translated into written works. Weiss also analyzes the relationship between place and identity in *When We Were Orphans* by the Japanese author Kazuo Ishiguro. Weiss uses this book to demonstrate that place is not neutral, but instead is always

affected by one's interpretation and reflects consciousness, mindset and perspective. This chapter proposes that the notion of place comes from filters and lenses of our identity, through which we see the world.

Weiss also addresses the topic of myth as a narrative that is passed down through generations and therefore undergoes translation from past to present. He makes reference to Cantonese tiles used in the end of part I of, *The Moor's Last Sigh* by Salman Rushdie as a metaphor for the process of translation and the transformation of myths from one epoch to another. The tiles are a source for legends which are created within the Moorish culture. Weiss views new translations of old legends and myths as a way to project new identities and re-describe realities of Oriental cultures. By reinterpreting myths from the East and West, Weiss says that one also recomposes history and awakens to the possibility of multiculturalism.

In the final chapter, "Neither Subject nor Objects: In the Middle Way," Weiss outlines his theoretical approach to translation, which entails bringing cultural and historical relevance to translation and

highlights the importance of translation in the formation of identity. Weiss affirms that identity is translated according to the context and the situation of the historical moment. He suggests that there is a bond between the observer and the observed and that translation is a dual directional relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted. The goal of translation is to translate a text or experience into the interpreter's familiar world and then translate the interpreter into the foreign text or experience.

*Translating Orients* attempts to use translation as a process by which to understand cross cultural differences between the East and West through literary analysis. Throughout his book, Weiss clearly applies his translational

theories to practice through literary analysis of Oriental literature. Although Weiss offers tools with which to interpret the text from an open minded and analytical perspective, this book was written for a graduate level audience. A well-informed reader of translation theory who is familiar with Oriental Literature will have an easier time understanding the more advanced material that the author proposes. As Weiss concludes, "it is because life is a fable (a translation that is neither subject nor object) that there can always be hope." In *Translating Orients*, understanding and translating are constantly evolving processes that transform experiences and texts into emerging realities.

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