
RESENHAS/REVIEWS

GENTZLER, Edwin. Translation, hypertext, and creativity: *Contemporary translation theories*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2001. 232 p.

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Contemporary translation theories (Gentzler, 2001) provides readers with a thorough historical analysis of how the notion of creativity and autonomy in what regards reading has been transformed – as well as regarding its influence towards the idea of translation. Endorsing Gentzler’s (p.186) view that “in contrast to scholars who have attempted to dismiss deconstruction, its incorporation into models for translation in Latin American and other developing cultures merits serious attention by translation studies”, I set off from deconstructivism as a fruitful space for repositioning the literary discourse. Deconstruction seems applicable to my view on translation inasmuch as it moves beyond any attempt to fit the process of translating within a fixed set of rules, as it advocates for one’s raising awareness in what regards meanings that circumscribe the structure of any (hyper)textual activity. The place occupied by the translator is a place between spaces; a fluid locale where any concreteness has melted. As it is true for interpretation, “however the translation turns out, other translations are always possible, not better or worse, but different, depending upon the poetics of the translator, the initial choices and the points when the languages interlock” (p.101). Within such



poetics, the only thing that exists is a chain of significations – one where originals and copies are intermingled and in constant dialogue. Meaning is not graspable or amenable to be tamed; on the contrary, literature is about opening up more space for the wilderness to be (re)discovered. A text is many texts, a hypertext, filled in with narratives that mutually supplement one another, deconstructing and reconstructing meanings; and, within such picture, translation emerges not as an opportunity to resurrect the body of an original text, but as a phantasm of both sameness and uniqueness. What does exist cannot be seen; it is always on the run; meanings surface from liquefied pages, pages that escape our attempt of defining them for good.

The harmonious view of the world was shattered at the end of the eighteenth century. The production of anything, from commodities to literary texts, is no longer conceived as structured around individual consciousness, but rather around the age, or the discourse of the age, which actually creates the individual. Language, especially literary language, therefore, takes on a whole new mode of existence; it ceases to play the role of the metaphysical reveller/mediator of philosophical truths and becomes more and more self-referential, merely a manifestation of its own precipitous existence. During this period, then, forms of authority cease to impose laws; genres and forms cease to be viewed as eternal – and the structure of any notion of originality breaks down. (Gentzler, 2001, p.152)

As the structure of any notion of originality is obliterated, the creativity of translation also ceases to be a problem. As another manifestation of reading, translation is also liable to alter the text through interpretation; and no individual experience is thereby devoid of the inevitable influences of its social construct. During the act of reading, of decoding, Piglia (2014, p.51) alters us to the

fact that it is necessary to tell another story for the first story to be understood. Narrating again, from another place and time: that is the secret of reading – and that is what literature makes us see without explaining.¹ Through translation, this reciprocal relation of meaning decoding and meaning making becomes blatant: it opens up one's eyes to what resides in between the sentences of a text; it reminds us that no meaning exists if it is not related to other meanings. From the deconstructionist position, translation is taken as “one instance in which language can be seen as always in the process of modifying the original text, of deferring and displacing for ever any possibility of grasping that which the original text desired to name” (Gentzler, p.161). Continually concealing presence, and repetitively thwarting all desire, translation provokes the maintenance altering the object it maintains: it copies through creation, it constructs through deconstruction. As a result, the text survives because it is reborn: and translator's difficulties are turned into their greatest assets: “the language restraints imposed by the receiving culture are enormous, yet the possibility of creating new relations in the present are also vivid” (Gentzler, p.200). This is why translation can be taken as metonym: as s/he recreates the original text within the target context, the translator chooses to highlight those textual elements that s/he deems relevant – those fragments of the text that have touched and determined his/her reading. The experience of translation, that goes beyond dichotomist standards (e.g. foreign/domestic, equivalent/adapted, etc.), is finally taken as a profitable realm for the literary discourse to validate its impalpability. Such shift in the approach towards translation is significant because, even though the process of recreation takes place in every textual practice, tradition has been pressuring translation scholars towards the designing of guidelines and evaluations that only obstruct the task of translating.

¹ *“Para entender la conexión hay que narrar otra historia. O narrar de nuevo una historia, pero desde otro lugar, y en otro tiempo. Ese es el secreto de lo que hay que leer. Y eso es lo que la literatura hace ver sin explicar.”*

Through deconstruction, the translation is eventually saved from the ivory tower wherein s/he had been locked; in coherence with anyone who experiences literature; writers, readers, and translators are all in the same boat. Our idea of reading can no longer be the idea of an isolated reading, without the contamination of what externalises the body of the book. It is time to move towards the opposite direction, letting what is beyond the text to impinge upon it: to enter without having to ask. The experience of reading is a technique that, instead of ordering and narrowing down our focus, tends to reproduce chaos and to create a chain of other experiences. Reading is also determined by what is not understood at a first moment, by the surrounding associations, by the turns and the cuts; it is what lives beyond the pages of a book that shall ultimately help the reader to understand it. As Piglia (p.24) suggests, the reader is lost in a library, moving on from one book to another, reading a series of texts and not only one of them. The reader is dispersed in fluidity and trying to trace the untraceable, possessing all volumes at his disposal, and walking through names, sources, and allusions, visiting one city, then another, travelling through references without stopping by in any of them.² It is in this context that translation appears, responsible for dealing with a text that is no longer deemed a single text; conscious of the literary power to adapt, mutate, and survive, the translator can no longer conceive his/her job as simply transferring meanings. “Given such a dynamic conception of ideas, the “meaning” of a work of art can also never be fixed: it changes as language changes. The range of associations of the words within an older work of art differ with its new re-inscription in a different age or culture” (Gentzler, p. 19).

Gentzler’s insight is an evidence that it is useless to discuss, within a literary piece, how much has been domesticated and how much

² “*El lector se trata de alguien perdido en una biblioteca, que va de un libro a otro, que lee una serie de libros y no un libro aislado. Un lector disperso en la fluidez y el rastreo, que tiene todos los volúmenes a su disposición. Persigue nombres, fuentes, alusiones; pasa de una cita a otra, de una referencia a otra.*”

has been foreignised. If texts are interwoven, it is useless to discuss about how much of the original and how much of the copy is present in a book because, as soon as we try to analyse it from such perspective, it ceases to exist as we now it. The hypertext only emerges when references occur, and they only occur through reading, interpreting and, ultimately, translating. It is thus the age and culture where to a text has been taken that determines how much is foreign and how much is domestic; it is the readers' unique background experiences – the references they are able to make – that understand these elements as domestic and those as foreign. What complicates such reflection, Gentzler admits, is the fact that “the activity of translation somehow reveals to the translator that language is simultaneously unstable and stable, that texts are interwoven” (p.30). The book is there, it can be touched, it is a concrete object; at the same moment, there is something that exists prior to such book, and something that goes beyond its existence. This is why, after reading a text, there is always something else there that was not read yet: something that only time and space travel, of the kind translation provides, shall disclose in the long run. This is why Piglia (p.140) calls the idea of reading in isolation (from temporal, spatial, and social context) the myth of robinsonism; even when a subject read because s/he wants to get rid of society it is precisely such society that has determined his/her reading in the first place.³ There is no way to separate text from context, such as there is no way to separate reader from society. The literary translator, similarly, does not simply decode each chunk of a narrative as for repositioning it in another reality.

The literary experience does not entail partition. If one splits up parts of a text, the only graspable unit of meaning is turned into

³ “El sujeto que lee en soledad se aísla porque está inmerso en la sociedad, de lo contrario no precisaría hacerlo. Marx ha criticado la idea de grado cero de la sociedad en el mito del robinsonismo, porque incluso un sujeto aislado por completo lleva con él las formas sociales que lo han hecho posible. El aislamiento presupone la sociedad de la cual el individuo quiere huir.”

something meaningless since “the essential translation unit is the entire text, from which one calculates backwards to arrive at the global proposition” (Gentzler, p. 69). Deconstructing the idea of a text that can be cut into pieces and then reformed (perfectly, with no missing fragments) for the experience of “the original” to be restored, translation reminds us that reading itself already cut the text into pieces and is already reshaping the original meaning into something else. The literary work is read, analysed (consciously or not), and recreated into the translated piece: its fluid status forces translators to work as Frankenstein, picking up the references that soar around their reading and reshaping them according to their specific experience. There is nothing new to that: translation manifests what every reading does, the only difference is that, in the latter, metamorphosis is not necessarily materialised into a new literary piece. “In translation, hidden entities become visible, silently making conditions necessary for particular utterances, ironically, dispelling any notion of truth or literal meaning, and the very concept of ‘meaning’ is altered” (Gentzler, p. 203). Putting these hidden entities in the spotlight, translation unveils not the truth, but the instability of reading, situated between the implicit and the explicit, the said and the unsaid, the palpable and the impalpable. After all, the content of a book is never the same, for writer, for reader, and for translator. In an endless flux, temporality, spatiality, and singularity kidnap fixity and turn objectivity into pieces. What is left is always changing; once a book is published, meanings are forever lost, and when such book is translated, meanings are found just so that they can be lost one more time. In coherence with the axioms of Derrida’s deconstruction, such view on translation is in cahoots with the idea of literary continuity – to translate is to keep the unceasing flow of literature. The task of the translator would be then to take advantage on the fact that books are never finished – so that s/he shall keep writing them in another time and space.

The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is adjunct, a subaltern instance which takes-the-place [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. (Derrida, 1997, 145)

This emptiness is an emptiness of points of departure and of arrival; literature has no beginning and no end, every new text is a surplus to previous ones, simply disclosing meanings which were veiled beforehand. It is not that the original author has consciously hidden meanings in the source text, but s/he has inevitably provided his/her work with a vast array of possibilities and modulations – finishing a piece that can still be finished in many other ways. Given its abstract condition, no institution shall be able to handle literature; similarly, “translation necessarily subverts its own institutionalisation” (Gentzler, p.48). Translation does subvert its own institutionalisation for institutions are not enough for grappling with the complex nature of translating. Furthermore, when it goes to literary translation, the idea of the hypertext, of this endless web of interwoven meanings, institutions require that an open structure be enclosed, oblivious to the fact that this need to define destroys the object of definition. What the dichotomist idea of a good versus a bad translation choice – supported by the symptomatic comparison of source and target texts – implies is that what enables translation is submission and compliance: the veneration and deference to an invisible authority, regardless of the fact that the authority, for now on, is the translation itself. What this ambivalent thinking also sets aside is the fact that “between the text and its tradition, subjective qualities of style –

emotional, irrational, expressive – as well as idiosyncrasies of style – irony, abstraction, brevity, joviality – can be determined” (Gentzler, p. 87). Texts might indeed be bursting with in between prompters of irony, abstraction, brevity, and joviality; and it is only through my emotional, irrational, and expressive responses that I, as a translator, might set forth any endeavour to recreate them – and no translation guideline backs me up thereby. Gentzler (p.67) avers that, whereas many strategies taught to translators inhibit their creativity at the expense of more learned behaviour, “the uncontrolled, unconscious, and intuitive judgements are perhaps more important than the cognitive, controlled, and rational choices”.

Gentzler thus stands up for the autonomous and creative nature of translation, posing that translators should rely much more on their irrational than on their rational solutions to come up with their best solutions for the meaning metamorphosis that the task requires. Understanding the necessity to play with words and language as inherent to translating is indeed an important step for the associations of the original to be reconstructed and empowered – as new associations are manifested by the reading experience of the translator. Piglia (p.25) brings us back to that image of the reader who, surrounded by books, can only reread what has already been read by others. Jorge Luis Borges is the one who better defines the experience, as he grants readers with their necessary freedom to use the texts as they wish – arbitrarily, and eventually establishing connections that no one else can repeat. Since reading is always out of place and out of place (controversially because it is always located in another place and time), Borges’ reader is the ultimate reader: an effect of fiction that, in response, produces its own reading.⁴

⁴ *“En ese universo saturado de libros, donde todo está escrito, solo se puede releer, leer de otro modo. Por eso, una de las claves de ese lector inventado por Borges es la libertad en el uso de los textos, la disposición a leer según su interés y su necesidad. Cierta arbitrariedad, cierta inclinación deliberada a leer mal, a leer fuera de lugar, a relacionar series imposibles. La marca de esta autonomía absoluta del lector en Borges es el efecto de ficción que produce la lectura.”*

Therefore, and before getting then to Borges' fertile insights upon translation, it is important to bear in mind that it is this aspect of intuition which consists in the very channel whereby meanings can be recreated – after all, if something is impalpable the means to access it shall also be behaviour as such. As such, and since intuition is the very opposite of the prototypical concepts that translators have got used to be based on, Genzler (p.65) concludes that both spheres, the systematic and abstract, contribute to the practice of translation. “While translators must systematically orient themselves to a conceptual plan, they must also stand outside the accepted methods of translation and intuit aspects of the text, a risky behaviour, but that is always part of the process”. I am aware of both these realms importance: the systematic and the intuitive; a lot has been said nonetheless about the former, hence my ambition in this review to advocate in favour of the latter.

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