
Translating Life. Shirley Chew and Alistair Stead (eds.). Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999, 421 pp.

Translating Life is a collection of essays and interviews compiled by Shirley Chew and Alistair Stead, both of whom are professors at Leeds University in England. The majority of the contributors are from English universities, notably Leeds University and the University of Liverpool. The work is called *Translating Life* because it deals less directly with translation of text and more with practical metaphors for the act of translation. Translating words is treated with less importance than translating connotations, feelings and personalities, the primary elements of human life.

The book consists of an introduction, 18 essays as well as two interviews conducted by Mark Batty with renowned British theatre directors Sir Peter Hall and John Barton. Nine of these essays and interviews are directly related to the work of William Shakespeare and Elizabethan Theatre. The essays and interviews

propose a variety of metaphors derived from the act of moving between languages, including translation as reading, as transposition, as performance, and as sentimental.

The concept that reading is an equivalent of translation is an idea that has permeated the work of many translation theorists, notably Octavio Paz and Rainer Schulte. The editors quote Hans-Georg Gadamer in the introduction as saying that "Reading is already translation, and translation is translation for the second time." Later in the introduction Stead and Chew cite the work of Susan Bassnett to expand on Gadamer's ideas. When Bassnett states that translation "is reading and writing across linguistic and cultural boundaries", she is referring not to routine information transfer but to literary-philosophic translation. Chew and Stead support Bassnett by citing Steiner, who called translation "that exact art of metamorphic duplicities". It is exact because translations seek semantic and functional reciprocity and metamorphic because it demonstrates the necessity for change and knows no boundary in doing so. The idea of duplicity reflects on another of Steiner's

translation ideas; the idea of translation that conceals, as opposed to revealing meaning. This idea appears prominently in the essay that Stead himself contributed about 'gay fiction', specifically Allan Hollinghurst's work, *The Folding Star*. Steiner states that translation must conceal, and this, when dealing with a work of gay fiction, becomes even more pertinent because sexual identity must also be concealed.

Another important consideration of translation in this anthology is translation as transposition. Bassnett's mention of crossing linguistic boundaries touches upon this very idea of moving persons or things from one place to another. In this literary-philosophic sense, it is moving words and their respective meanings and connotations to other languages and cultures. This is translation as metaphor, in the etymological sense of the word. In other words, translation carries across meaning metaphorically. Stead and Chew expand the term transposition to include not only the moving of words, meanings and connotations, but also, the moving of entire works between genres, such as a written play becoming an opera, a theatre production or a film.

This concept sparks other ideas that Stead, Chew, et al propose about translation, first, that it is intertextual, and second, that it is performative. In speaking about intertextual translation, Stead and Chew demonstrate through a quote from Terry Eagleton that every text can be considered a translation. According to Eagleton, translation is "a set of determinate transformations of other, preceding and surrounding texts of which it may not even be consciously aware." Stead and Chew continue to say that "whether intertextuality is understood as culturally determined" as supported by Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author", in which he describes the literary world as "made up of a variety of writings, none of them original", or whether it is constructed intentionally, it does "involve some revision of the source".

Given the predominance in the anthology of texts related to the theatre and performance, it is not surprising that the editors consider translation as "performative". Steiner has described the translator as '*un interprète*' or 'life-giving performer'. Performance transposes the written words into spoken words or non-verbal expressions. This is what the editors call senti-

mental translation: emotions in performance that are given gestures, facial expressions or other physical actions that convey meaning beyond would be written words in a text. For example, a narrator's description of a character's pain or anger could fill pages upon pages of text. However, this same anger can be easily transposed into bodily expression as the text is transposed into performance.

The collection concludes with two interviews done by Mark Batty, professor of Theatre Studies at Leeds University with British theatre directors Sir Peter Hall and John Barton. The interviews present two more metaphors for translation. The first interview discusses the process of creating a speakable translated text. Hall states in broader terms that he feels directing itself is translation. In the second interview, Barton presents the idea of translation as adaptation. He believes that in directing theatre one must generate a visual representation that is literal enough to convey every meaning of the original text, but it must be symbolic enough or free enough to reinvent the text in a performative medium. Translating must achieve

basically the same thing, says Sir Peter Hall, because it seeks to convey linguistic and cultural meanings while reinterpreting the text, not into a visual performance, but into another language.

The text as a whole presents many interesting translation metaphors. This work can prove very useful to translator and students of translation alike, especially for those in the field of theatre and the performing arts. The complex and specific vocabulary makes it somewhat of a work for experts, or a work on translation for translators. However, it does present many practical metaphors from simple to complex: simple as is evident in the very first idea of reading as translation; and subsequent translation, therefore, as a second translation. Complex as is displayed in the meticulous tactics of theatre directors attempting to adapt old texts for the stage. All of the metaphors fit quite well as subscripts to the title *Translating Life*, given that they deal with the translation and communication of elements of human life.

Daniel Sheff
St. Lawrence University