
The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation. Peter France (ed.). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 656 pp.

The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation edited by Peter France is a highly-organized

selection of entries by more than a hundred contributors from all over the world. Peter France talks about how world literature is becoming closer to a reality every day but how the translation of foreign works into English has remained limited due to the rise of English as a world language, as compared to the number of translations that exist in other languages. Although he realizes

the limits of translation into English, he also understands how translated works have contributed to the history of English-speaking culture.

The first part of this book has a focus that is both historical and theoretical. His goal is to show what has been translated, how it has been translated and the effect it has had on English speakers. This, of course, is a huge undertaking: over the centuries, large quantities of literature have been translated into English. This is what the second part of his book attempts to master: the overarching description of these translations into English. He has help for this task from experts in literary translation who specialize in many different languages, from many places on the globe. They contributed articles on subjects such as Arabic poetry, the Bible and French drama. Peter France has structured this medley of sources into a coherent form easily accessible to the average reader. The span of contributors and scope of the *Guide* help the book succeed tremendously well for a wide range of audiences.

One of Peter France's biggest assets is his arrangement of the entries. His table of contents

clearly lays out where everything can be found by language, region and/or subject. In the first part he chooses essays that deal with the theory, history and type of translation the book contains. The essays attempt to give a clearer look at translation and its boundaries for the reader. Peter France addresses the idea that the translation is not the original work and draws attention to the translation as a work in itself: "...the aim of this volume is to suggest to readers that translation involves transformation, and that this transformation is worthy of our attention." Essays such as "The Limits of Translation" by Douglas Robinson or "Norms of Translation" by Theo Hermans make this possible, even for readers with little or no background in translation studies.

Section 'a' of part I explores the different theoretical aspects of translation such as limitations and gender with contributions by Theo Hermans and Douglas Robinson, and also by Peter France himself in "Translation Studies and Translation Criticism" as a way of giving the reader some basis for criticisms of future readings of translated works. Other contributors include: Mona Baker,

“Linguistic Perspectives on Translation”; Sherry Simon, “Gender in Translation”; and John McRae and Bill Findlay, “Varieties of English.”

Section ‘b’ describes the history of translation from the Middle Ages to contemporary North America. Roger Ellis writes on the “Middle Ages” followed by the “Renaissance” (Warren Boutcher), Neoclassicism and Enlightenment” (Lawrence Venuti), “Romanticism and the Victorian Age” (Terry Hale), “Late Victorians to the Present” (Anthony Pym) and, finally, “Translation in North America” (Judith Weisz Woodsworth). This gives an added understanding of translation theory and development in a complete, yet condensed, way.

Section ‘c’ treats the specific problems and histories of different types of texts that are commonly translated into English such as poetry, theatre and opera, sacred texts, children’s literature and oral literature. Each type presents difficulties with translation specific to its genre. The authors that contribute to this section are generally from departments of literature/comparative literature or social sciences, such as Daniel Weissbort (poetry) from the

Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Iowa or Ruth Finnegan (oral literature) from the Faculty of Social Sciences at The Open University in Milton Keynes, UK. Peter France has recruited extremely knowledgeable people from related fields to write about the genres covered in *The Oxford Guide to Literary Translation in English Translation*.

Part II deals with the different regions/languages covered by the contributors; there are more than seventeen different groups, including “African Languages,” German, and “West Asian Languages.” He includes essays on a wide variety of the world’s modern and ancient languages. The languages that are more often translated into English have a subheading of their own, such as French, German and Latin. Those languages that are not so often translated into English, such as Afrikaans and Korean, can be found under a subheading of related languages: African Languages and East Asian Languages.

Finally there are some translations that stand alone. The main example of this is the Bible: its translation history is so long that it required a subheading of its

own. The section is devoted entirely to the Bible and its different versions as well as how and when they came about. The history of the Bible is an excellent illustration of how translation has undergone changes throughout history.

Under each subheading, there is usually a mix of titles, authors and topics. For example, under "b. Arabic" there is a brief introduction, several famous works translated from Arabic into English, such as the *Koran*, the *Muqaddimah* and the *Thousand and One Nights*, a piece on modern literature written in Arabic, and, lastly, an author, Naguib Mahfouz, the Nobel-prize-winning author represents here a significant part of the Arabic writings. Most of the language subheadings resemble this one, with a mix of features clearly outlined in the table of contents. Some of the subheadings emphasize the history of translation for the language more than other elements but all give an abundance of examples of works translated into English. The essays on the translation itself can vary between the comparative (when numerous translations exist) and the analytic (in the case

of a text that has been translated only once).

Given the enormous scope of this anthology, many pieces of literature from a variety of languages could not be included. Peter France, as editor, speaks of deciding which parts were the most important and which parts could be condensed into a smaller number of pages. Those works that have most drastically affected what he calls the "English-speaking culture since the Middle Ages" were given greater space. These were mostly ancient works from Greece and Rome, the Bible, and works from Europe, Asia and the Middle East. However, he also includes other lesser-known translations, even if they are generally given less space in larger subheadings, such as Swahili, which appears under the subheading "West African Languages." Although this is a necessary part of the editing process, it also narrows the selection available to the reader. As Peter France himself acknowledges, it is impossible to have a comprehensive list of all translated works due to the sheer volume of material that exists.

The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation is an

excellent resource for anyone who wishes to learn more about translation in the English language. It gives a good range of the translations available in English as well as some of their histories, and is also written in a remarkably informative and easy to read manner. According to the

editor, it demonstrates how translations have "...shaped for English speakers a 'canon' of world literature." Peter France's organization of a potentially unwieldy amount of material clearly is an incredible asset to the book, making it very user-friendly.

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