
Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature.

Daniel Balderston and Marcy E. Schwartz. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002, 266 pp.

-¿Por qué tú no escribes?-le pregunté de pronto

-¿Por qué no te preguntas mejor por qué no traduzco?

- No. Creo que podrías escribir. Si quisieras...

Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Tres tristes tigres*

As Daniel Balderston and Marcy Schwartz, editors of *Voice-Overs:*

Translation and Latin American Literature observe, “translation has become both a mechanism and a metaphor for contemporary transnational cultures in the Americas.” Their anthology is an enormous collection of thirty-one essays written by diverse authors, translators and critics of Latin American literature. They explore important themes such as issues over language, cultural identity and other literary aspects, as well as new concepts pertaining to translation.

Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature is divided into three parts that are all different in length. Part I consists of fourteen essays in which writers speak about their understanding of translation, Part II contains six pieces drawn from the translators’ perspectives and Part III is made up of

eleven essays written by critics.

The first part, "Writers on Translation" is the longest one, with fourteen authors expressing their perception of translation. They include such renowned individuals as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Rosario Ferré, Cristina García, Diana Bellesi, Luisa Futoransky, Junot Díaz, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Nérida Piñon, Ariel Dorfman, Cristina Peri Rossi, Tomás Eloy Martínez and Ricardo Piglia.

In "The Homeric Versions" by Jorge Luis Borges, a term "definitive text" emerges, which for the author corresponds only to religion or exhaustion. In translation, therefore, no such concept can apply, because no text is definitive. Borges adds that to assume that every recombination of elements is necessarily inferior to its original form is wrong, due to the idea of the "definitive text." He further explains that the inferiority of translation, in keeping with the well-known Italian adage, exists only as a result of absentmindedness. Borges concludes that no matter how good a translation may be, it is never truly faithful to the author.

Cristina García, in "Translations as Restoration," touches on this idea

when she speaks of the flavor that is lost in translations of her books into Spanish, such as "The Agüero Sisters." She says that a very faithful and literal translation simply does not capture the Cuban seasoning. She provides a great analogy by declaring that "It's like putting a pork chop with salt and pepper in the oven versus the garlic and sour orange marination that goes on for three days; it just doesn't taste the same." García also laments the fact that many publishing houses in Spain consider the translations of her books as substandard Spanish that would be unintelligible to a Spanish audience. She thinks it is preposterous for the publishers to make such statements, yet she says that she is left with no choice but for them to retranslate some of the passages. The effect is that García is not satisfied many times because the book is left with little Cuban flavoring.

In part II of the anthology entitled "Translating Latin America," six translators offer their insights into the world of translation. Margaret Sayers Peden coins a great term for translation in her essay "A Conversation on Translation with Margaret Sayers Peden." She suggests that we might use the term "transemanatics" for translation,

which simply put, means *bringing meaning across*. Here she also speaks of the three triads of translation: transliteration on one side, version or the imitation on the other and the middle road. The middle road approach to translation, according to this translator, should be called explanation. She suggests that this approach is the best approach and also the most difficult one to accomplish. Another very interesting comment she makes is that translation cannot be improved, as each one is unique and provides a closer interpretation of the text.

Similarly, the characterization of translation as betrayal or treason is handled by Eliot Weinberger in "A Talk on Translators and Translation." In his opinion, it is impossible to supply the original text with an exact equivalence. To illustrate this, for example, he uses the metaphor of a slice of German pumpernickel used in describing a lover's body to a fresh steam bun prevalent in the Chinese culture. The metaphor does not apply, because it is not identical to the original. Here Weinberger adds, "The translator must be a great editor, a psychologist, a judge of human taste, if not, his translation will be a nightmare."

While Part I and Part II of the anthology show writers' and trans-

lators' comments and observations on translation, the third part centers on the critics' interpretations. In "Critical Approaches," eleven critics speak out, including José Quiroga, Gerald Martin, Walter Carlos Costa and Israel Reyes among others. In an essay titled "Translating García Márquez, or, The Impossible Dream," Gerald Martin points out the mishaps which occur in translation. In his brief review of a few problems arising from translations of Márquez, the problem of "creative transposition" (a term invented by Jakobson) surfaces. The term means that there are definite limits when one expression is translated into another language. Martin concludes his analysis by stating that translation may be the best example of the fact that communication is imperfect, "a necessary but impossible dream."

Voice -Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature dramatizes the integral role that translation has played in the evolution of Latin American letters, as well as reviews the different politics of translation. The publication provides a great resource for the world of literature and translation. Most contributors explain the nuances associated with the never ending process of bringing meaning across

cultures humbly and personally, mostly by telling very intimate stories about overcoming the obstacles. This collection edited by Balderston and Schwartz reveals that there are many gaps that need to be filled in the understanding of the complex relationships between individuals, texts, languages and cultures. Besides providing reflections on “cir-

cuits” of cultural production, *Voice -Overs* leaves the reader pondering the contemporary culture of Latin America and the imprint that translation continues to leave on it.

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