

Gentzler, Edwin. (2017) *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 245pp. ISBN 978-1-138-66686-3 (pbk) £28.99

The title of Edwin Gentzler's new book *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies* was striking to me right from first reading, the words 'post-translation studies' seeming to stare back at me, in its mighty, bold proclamation. As someone who teaches translation studies in what could be considered a 'peripheral' area to where most translation scholarship has taken place, I could not help but ask myself: have I missed any arguments developed in recent years? Are we in the age of post-translation studies already? I started reading the book feeling doubtful, and to some extent, powerless that I might not be part of this development. How much more do I need to catch up? In what direction this book tries to steer? Will I find it relevant to the teaching of translation studies here, in Thailand?

Opening the book, I was greeted with the foreword by Susan Bassnett, who, in 1993, provocatively announced "the death of comparative literature", and called for translation studies to replace comparative literature which "as a discipline has had its day" (1993: 161). She deemed translation as "instead a highly charged, transgressive activity, and the politics of translation and translating deserve much greater attention than has been paid in the past" (ibid). Nostalgic as it is, reading Bassnett's support for the use of 'post-translation studies' here makes reading it somewhat uneasy for readers who may question what is wrong with translation studies in the ensuing decades. Why should translation studies now be announced entering its 'post' era? In the introduction, Gentzler explained the term 'post-translation studies' was in fact coined by Siri Nergaard and Stephano Arduini in 'Translation: A New Paradigm' (2011) as a "transdisciplinary research field" which focalized the era translation as "fundamentally transdisciplinary, mobile, and open-ended" (p.1). The prefix 'post' thus is added to call for the increasing *openness* of the discipline. Bassnett and Gentzler however are aware that the term may not be well received. Bassnett predicts that post-translation studies "may annoy die-hards with overly rigid views about translation" (p.x). However, a question still remains—has translation studies not always been open? Why do we need this prefix 'post' to tell us to be more "mobile and open-ended" as an academic discipline?

If we return briefly to Bassnett's own words in her *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993), her emphasis on the potential that translation could bring to the study of culture and literature is striking. "[T]ranslation studies", wrote Bassnett, "states boldly that it

is a discipline, and the strength and energy of work in the field world-wide seem to confirm that assertion” (1993: 160). After establishing its academic credentials, she then widens its remit outside of the academy: “[t]ranslation has played a fundamental role in cultural change” (1993: 161). For her, translation studies as an academic discipline is clearly a vital field of scholarship that allows theories from other disciplines for its very formation. As someone who was trained in translation studies in the UK in the early 2000s, I was taught that translation was the area of unlimited possibility – in other words, you could never study translation without borrowing from other disciplines. The field of translation studies has *always* relies on theories, concepts and methodologies from the *outside* - while questioning what is considered ‘outside’ in the first place. Let us consider how the field of linguistics, for example, added major conceptual frameworks to the discipline when equivalence and shifts were the focus of translation studies. The cultural turn of the 1990s brought theories from cultural studies such as feminist and post/colonial criticisms to the analysis of translation. The popularity of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological approaches shed new light on the agency-related, context-sensitive aspect of translation studies. Bassnett however claims that Gentzler is “seeking to create something new” (p.viii). According to Bassnet, Gentler “invites us to see translation as a revolutionary act, in that it brings ideas and forms across cultural boundaries, offering life-changing possibilities. Translation, he suggests has infinite potential...” (p.ix). But do we need to re-explaining boundary-crossing studies within contexts of ‘post-translation studies’ when translation studies has not been anything but boundary crossing?

In fact, Gentzler is well aware that not everyone will find the new term necessary, given the discipline’s wide-ranging approaches. “I find that this critique is largely valid,” wrote Gentzler. He also mentions that some translation scholars would perhaps find “a renaming... unnecessary and that those scholars who have taken the cultural turn have been open to such post-translation analysis all along” (p.225). Perhaps the benefit of this new term is to give the flexibility and openness of the field a more pronounced indexical label, in the same way post-structuralism identifies the liberation of structuralism from the notion of centre or structural self-sufficiency. Yet, in my opinion, the strength of Gentzler’s usage of the term ‘post-translation studies’ lies not in the notion of expanding boundary or infinite possibility which is already stated and practiced by a number of scholars. The strength of his usage is, in fact, in how Genztler anchors the term in the temporal aspect of its application throughout his analyses of European major literary works. The ‘post’ in Gentzler’s ‘post-translation studies’, thus, refers to the cultural and contextual repercussions occurring *after* translation production.

A premise accepted within translation studies is that translation does not take place in the vacuum: translation impacts the culture it is brought to, and instills numerous changes *beyond* itself. The impact of temporality on the reading of translational text and context however points also to the need to understand the cultural conditions *prior to* the act of translation. As Gentzler states:

The other direction post-translation studies is moving, which is a bit deceptive given the ‘post’ in its name, is taking a more detailed look at *pre*-translation culture that conditions not only the production of translated text but *original* writing as well. Post-translation studies examines those conditions, socio-political and linguistic, that *create an environment* in which highly innovative, original writing can flourish. (p.4)

Here we see a theme running throughout this work: Gentzler always emphasizing the importance of the *pre*, as well as the *post*. The approach is in many ways similar to the works done by world literature scholars such as David Damrosch, Emily Apter and Franco Moretti, who all perceive the important role of translation in ‘worlding’ literature in various ways such as circulation, reading and criticism. In these contexts then, I find this direction of post-translation studies a lucid and innovative contribution to current fields of translation studies.

The temporality in Gentzler’s analysis is clearly laid out and signposted in each chapter, making it easy to follow his arguments which are all enhanced by thorough research and well-presented data. In the chapter ‘*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Germany,’ Gentzler walks his readers through an analysis that is carefully-pieced together to portray a picture of the Shakespearean play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as a dynamic phenomenon set into motion by translation. Viewing from the pre- and post-translation perspective, the well-known comedy was virtually absent in its originating homeland, England, for almost two centuries, but received extended and repeated process of rewriting. Only two performances under its own names were known to be staged in England between 1660 and 1816 (p.43). The extraordinariness of this missing play makes us wonder why the play survived. The answer lies in the active rewriting of the play in Germany, Holland, and other North European countries during and after Shakespeare’s time. Gentzler views the translation processes at play then as not only keeping the comedy alive but also instilling the Shakespearean style in the original writing of the German literary tradition (p.48). The post-translation repercussion of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* seems endless as the play as a performed piece of translation

crosses inter-semiotically into the realm of music and ballet. Mendelssohn produced two pieces of music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which became the main repertoire for ballet performance. The play was adapted into a film by Reinhardt and Dieterle in 1935, and then in countless stage performances in the twentieth century, including the notable international theatre production by Peter Brook (1970). The journey of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through translations and rewritings are truly remarkable. It highlights the temporal impact that can only be made visible through post-translation approach as set out by Gentzler.

The temporal aspect of pre-and post-translation analysis also lays out the ground for the study of the translational culture that conditions the productions of the *original writing* as well as translation. To understand how original texts come into being, one must have the knowledge of the environment that imbues their production. In 'Postcolonial *Faust*,' Gentzler explains the historical and cultural background to the tale of Faust before Goethe 'rewrites' the story into his well-known play. The weak and fragmented states of Germany were at that time in need of "translation" as an instrument of national unification. Translation thus provided a path towards German language, culture, and identity. We can see for example a number of literary masterpieces were translated into German to satisfy the urge for increasing its cultural repertoire. It is in this setting that Goethe 'rewrote' Faust from various sources available to him in several forms of translations. Goethe "translated" *Faust*, argues Gentzler, from "earlier oral and underground traditions into the more academic High German language" (p.83). In this way, the normally-held 'original' writings are product of the translational culture that preconditions them. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is by this definition a 'rewritten original' since he 'rewrote' the play from oral folkloric tales that circulated in Scandinavian, Germanic, Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon cultures for hundreds of years (pp.175-6).

Gentzler also sees translation as a trope that allows readers to make sense of the narratives that seemingly have nothing to do with translation. Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, for example, is filled with acts and aesthetics of translation—internal realities, scenes and emotions into language (p.136), translation as a work of art bridging reality to reminiscences and impressions (p.137), recreating the past to fit the present (p.138), and so on. Similarly, *Hamlet* is based on the translational, dual structure that makes the complex characterization possible. Gentzler calls this a *translational* technique which allows Shakespeare to create several 'double' characters of Hamlet such as Fortinbras, Laertes and Ophelia. Each double character functions as a translation, an interpretation of Hamlet in different circumstances.

Fortinbras, the Norwegian prince, had the same fate as Hamlet for he also revenged the death of his father, and yet unlike Hamlet, he was willing to “risk the sacrifice of thousands of his men, even when the reward may be so trifling” (p.184). Fortinbras represents a different interpretation of revenge, a path not taken, a choice Hamlet did not make.

The most remarkable effort we can see in Gentzler’s collection of post-translation repercussion phenomena is his intersemiotic expansion of the translational “unit”. Post-translation studies, argues Gentzler, should go beyond textual analysis to music, films, performances, websites and applications. Translation in this age has been transformed by the emergence of new media, and undoubtedly we need a new approach that caters to this outlet. Whether the term ‘post-translation studies’ will stick or disappear, Gentzler’s *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies* reminds us that it is impossible to avoid that we need new ways to address the changing face of translation we are now experiencing.

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