

Arrojo, Rosemary (2018) *Fictional Translators: Rethinking Translation through Literature*, London/New York: Routledge, 183 pp., ISBN: 978-1-138-82714-1 (Paperback), UK £25.99.

Rosemary Arrojo, who is currently Professor of Comparative Literature at Binghamton University, New York, as well a consolidated voice in cultural Translation Studies, brings to the research community a monograph focused on the representation of translation and translators in literature. *Fictional Translators*, published by Routledge in the ‘New Perspectives in Translation and Interpreting Studies’ series, serves as a revision and expansion of extensive work done by Arrojo on the subject at large, which started with her exploration of the connections between text and reality in her 1995 dissertation “Jorge Luis Borges’s ‘Labyrinths’ and João Guimarães Rosa’s ‘Sertão’: Images of Reality as Text” and has been published in, among others, *Translation and Power* (2002) or *Transfiction - Research into the Realities of Translation Fiction* (2014). With her work, Arrojo contributes to a field of study that has also been explored from different angles by scholars such as Anibal González (1989), Else Vieira (1995-1996), Adriana Pagano (2002), Christopher Larkosh (2002) and, of course, Edwin Gentzler in his seminal work *Translation and Identity in the Americas* (2008). Indeed, Gentzler, referring to Vieira’s work, argues, like Arrojo, for the power of fiction to influence theory, since “fiction writers anticipate poststructural thought by making subjective thought —difference— visible, even in realistic descriptions.” (Gentzler 2008: 136). In *Fictional Translators*, Arrojo sheds light on the new possibilities that fiction anticipates and offers for theoretical inquiry about the realities of translation practice and translators’ approaches to their work through a close reading of selected stories and novels. Arrojo explores postmodern notions of authorship, hybridization and identity, as well as issues related to textual interpretation and meaning creation, which are key for current debates around translation.

Can translators repress who they are in their work? Should they? In her first chapter, “Introducing Theory through Fiction”, Arrojo undertakes a comparative exploration of Borges’s Pierre Menard —who the author indicates has been a major influence in the development of her work and the readings included in the book— and Cortázar’s “Letter to a Young Lady in Paris” to reflect on the at times ‘unsettling visibility’ (p. 23) of the translator and to challenge traditional debates on authorship, translation and readership, as well as long-held ideas about the permanence of meaning. Chapter Two, “Fiction as Theory and

Activism”, explores Rodolfo Walsh’s “Nota al pie”. Here, Arrojo continues with her study of issues surrounding the agency of the translator that had been highlighted in the previous chapter, especially in Cortázar’s story. The subversive suicide footnote around which the tale is constructed, which Arrojo argues could be used as a metaphor for the “marginal, ambivalent position generally occupied by translators” (p. 38), explicitly positions the translator within the text and underlines his inevitable intervention. Although the lines between the main text and the footnote remain clear, the latter’s *invasion* of the page gives testimony to the translator’s agency and visibility. Furthermore, the story, Arrojo argues, highlights the precariousness of the translator’s material conditions and the permanent struggle between his labour of love and the financial constraints related to, in particular, literary translation, in an echo of Walsh’s own biography and commitment to the struggle of the oppressed. Through her careful selection of works and her insightful readings, Arrojo offers a rich exploration of some of the most debated and relevant topics in translation theory and practice.

“The Illusive Presence of Originals”, the third chapter, engages in a reading of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Oval Portrait” that challenge traditional definitions of the original as a final and definitive piece of work which translation can only aspire to be a shadow of. By questioning the metaphor by which originals are multidimensional *subjects* and translations can only be two-dimensional *portraits* of those subjects, Arrojo offers a fascinating close reading of these two works, in which the delimiting line between the original and the painting is blurred. In Chapter Four, “The Translation of Philosophy into Fiction”, Arrojo returns to Borges: here, she focuses on his short story ‘Funes, His Memory’ and, indirectly, Pierre Menard, and the two stories’ relationship to Borges’s conception of language as “something that produces rather than merely represents meaning” (p. 66). This idea has a major impact in the Argentine author’s views on translation, which Arrojo explores through the lens of Nietzsche’s notions of truth, representation, “the inevitability of interpretation and, thus, the impossibility of perfect repetitions” (p. 79). The idea is exemplified in “Funes, His Memory” through the protagonist’s inability to cope with his prodigious memory and his tragic awareness that nothing can adequately and fully represent “what seems to be actually present” (p. 76). By highlighting this approach to language, memory and representation, Arrojo brings new light to the idea of translation as a creative process and translations as ‘reconfigurations of texts’ (p. 85) that cannot aim to be perfect copies of originals but that can potentially bring new

light and new richness to them. Chapter Five, “Texts as Private Retreats”, undertakes a comparative reading of three texts: Kafka’s “The Burrow”, Borges’s “Death and the Compass” and Kosztolányi’s “Gallus”, again through the light of Nietzschean’s philosophy, in particular his notion of the “will to power” (Nietzsche 1999), his idea that “language shapes meaning [and thus] there can be no clear-cut distinction between creation and interpretation” (p. 93) and the implications that this idea has for the reading of these stories and the development of new theoretical considerations in Translation Studies. Arrojo explores ideas such as the obsession with control of one’s creation through Kafka’s obsessed labyrinth constructor, the inability to come to terms with our impossibility to master meaning through Borges’s characters Scharlach and Lönnrot and, finally, the indeed complicated relationship between creation and interpretation, between authors and translators, through her fascinating reading of Kosztolányi’s kleptomaniac translator.

In Chapter Six, entitled “Authorship as the Affirmation of Masculinity”, Arrojo reads José Saramago’s *History of the Siege of Lisbon* and Isaac Babel’s “Guy de Maupassant” to reflect on the connections between traditional gender stereotypes and assumptions about authorship and translation, in which a distinction is made between masculine active, *creative* endeavours and feminine passive, *reproductive* practices; again, this conception of the passivity of the translators is, following Arrojo, not linked to the reality of the practice but rather to the “interests of those who claim to possess or control texts and who would like to keep their privileged positions” (p. 127). The idea of ownership of texts is continued in Chapter Seven, “The Gendering of Texts”, which brings together “Notas ao pé da página”, by Moacyr Scliar, and Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*. The chapter delves into the representation of both women and texts as property and objects of desire and, thus, places of struggle for the traditional debates around authorship and translation, as well as into the need to redefine the position of the translator as an active participant in the creation of the translated text and thus end the “fantasy of the author as an all-powerful patriarch” (p. 149). The final chapter, “Translation as Transference”, returns to the idea of the translator’s invisibility from a different perspective. Borges’s Pierre Menard is reprised by Arrojo, this time to explore the protagonist’s relationship with ‘his’ author—which she relates to Borges’s own bond with his favourite poet, Walt Whitman—through the light of Lacan’s notion of transference (1975): Menard, Arrojo argues, uses translation as an attempt to effectively ‘become’ Cervantes and turn the *Quixote* into his own legacy, blurring the lines

between creation and translation and, again, bringing new possibilities for the theorization of translation.

Through her insightful and innovative readings of the works selected, Arrojo vastly succeeds in challenging preconceptions about the translator's work and in sparking deep reflection on how we see the process of translation. Arrojo's rich body of research and her engaging style in delivering it make this volume a remarkable tool not only for researchers and students in the field of cultural Translation Studies and Literary Studies, but also for translators who want to engage in deep reflection around their identity as practitioners. *Fictional Translators* is, furthermore, a most timely publication at a time in which views on the position of the translator are profoundly changing, not only in the academic arena, but also among society (and I am aware that I speak mostly of the Western, English-speaking context) at large, as exemplified in the ever growing number of publishing houses directing their attention to foreign literature and the increasing visibility that translation is getting in general media (Cook 2017; Flood 2017; Parks 2017, among others). As Arrojo herself states in her introduction, the volume is organized in a way that allows for the chapters to be read as individual essays as well as together; in any case, whether it is as a whole or in discussion of its parts, I am sure that this volume will serve to encourage deep and vibrant conversations around the role of translators and translation in the development of culture, as well as around the relevance of fictional texts for the construction of new theoretical frameworks.

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