

◆ REVIEW ◆

Lawrence VENUTI, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethic of Difference*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, vii + 206 p.

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This book was simultaneously published in the USA and Canada; it was written by an Italian author, a translator himself (mostly from Italian), whose aim is to expose and explain some significant issues regarding translations and their marginalization in research. The book is made up of an introduction, eight main chapters, a section dedicated to acknowledgments, an annotated bibliography and a final index.

In “Introduction” ( pp. 1- 8) , the author offers the definition of the term “scandal”, as it appears in the Oxford English Dictionary, but then he explains that the scandal to which he refers is much vaster than that, being a cultural, political and economic matter. One of the purposes of the book is explaining the current situation of translation, why it is in the margins of research, especially in English, by presenting its relation with practices like translation studies, research or translator training. It is highlighted the idea that these scandals also refer to the fact that research claims to be objective, but the fact that translation actually means “ the creative reproduction of values” is always ignored.

Chapter 1, “ Heterogeneity” ( pp. 8- 31) , pinpoints the fact that the study of translations has never been a vast field and it was never regarded as proper discipline of study, formed by several study objects: linguistics, foreign languages, comparative literature, anthropology and others. The reason why translation has never become an academic success is because it is characterized by a methodological fragmentation. One of the most important questions of the author is if the theorist will be able to bring translations to the attention of a larger audience. After the introductory part of the second chapter, there are 4 distinct sections dealing with different issues of translations: “Writing a minor literature”, “A minoritizing project”, “The limitations of linguistics” and “The scientific model”. One of the most important facts suggested by the section entitled “ Writing a minor literature “ is that English is the most translated language world- wide, but there is little foreign literature that is translated into

English. Venuti expresses his preference for the minoritizing translations, those which imply foreign texts that “possess minority status in their culture” (p. 10), those which imply an innovative linguistic diversity, various dialects, in order to “never acquire majority” (p. 11). Regarding this subject, the author offers examples from his own work – translation from the gothic stories of an Italian author, I. U. Tarchetti, explaining some of the strategies he used to conserve the element of parody. In the “Limitations of linguistics” section, the author discusses the linguistic-oriented approaches that began in the 1960’s, claiming that such conservative approaches should not be necessarily abandoned, but reconsidered. He also pinpoints the fact that the main problem of translation is represented by the way a text is understood. According to Venuti, the scientific model is the most worrisome tendency in linguistic-oriented approaches, as it excludes the social and historical variables from the process of translation, there is no concern for cultural, historical meanings and their effects. This way, translation theory becomes a synchronic description based on 2 ideal objects, according to Harvey (1995) and Neubert and Shreve (1992): the linguistic practices that the translator does to render the foreign text – calque or compensation, and the typical situations in which certain kinds of translation are preferred. Some of Venuti’s own translations are again presented for explaining the usage of Keith Harvey’s concept of generalized compensation. The great importance of Gideon Toury’s work from the 1970’s is highlighted, which emphasizes some norms that should be followed in the process of translation.

The second chapter of the book is “Authorship” (pp. 31-47), a matter which is regarded as one reason for the marginality of translation. Translated texts are received with a fear of lack of authenticity, there is a constant fear of error, of amateurism, literary translations are seen as “an abusive exploitation of originality” (p. 31). There is a general refusal of the idea that cultural values could be conveyed by translation and an assumption that translations in general cannot preserve a true understanding of the text. The third chapter of Venuti’s book has 3 subsections: “The derivations of authorship”, “The prejudices of scholarship” and “Redefining translation”- all of which revolve around the French author Pierre Louÿs’s poems, an example for a concept defined by Venuti – “pseudotranslation”. Pierre Louÿs presented himself as a translator instead of an author, claiming to have translated Greek poetry into French, trying to direct readers’

attention to cultural matters. This also puts to question the validity of scholarship's prejudices; by using invented Greek literary works and archaic forms, Louys tried to deceive scholars in order to demonstrate their limitation.

Chapter 3, "Copyright" (pp. 47- 67), emphasizes the narrow space that the ownership of intellectual works leaves for translations. Venuti offers examples from the laws of copyright in different countries, proving why there is so little motivation and financial reward for literary translations. This chapter has four subsections. "The current situation" presents the various rights that the author has over the translator. In "The contradictory development of original authorship" and "The formal basis of the translator authorship", Venuti presents the uncertain status of translators, the fact that there was a long period of time when the line between translation and authorship was not clear at all – another example from Italian is given, that of Wyatt being identified as the author, instead of the translator. The general ignorance regarding the field of translation and the limitation of a translator by copyright is what worries Venuti the most, so he presents some solutions for this problem in the subsection entitled "Remedies".

Chapter 4, "The formation of cultural identities" (pp. 67-88) has three sections. The author explains that there is an inevitable formation of cultural identities which results from the process of inscribing the domesticated texts with "linguistic and cultural values that are intelligible to specific domestic constituents" (p. 67). Venuti uses several translation projects from different periods of time as examples, including Aristotle's "Poetics" – showing that it can have various forms of translation no matter how strict the academic canons of accuracy of translation are. An interesting aspect that Venuti analyzes is that of Japanese literature translated into English, the small number of authors translated, wrongly interpreted by the American audience as being representative for the Japanese literary style.

The next chapter, "The pedagogy of literature" ( pp. 88-106) addresses the issue of literary translation as a discipline studied in educational institutions and throughout the entire chapter and its 2 subsections – "Translation in classroom" and "A pedagogy of translated literature" – Venuti tries to raise awareness about the importance of translation studies and answer questions regarding the costs and conditions for translations to be taken into consideration in the teaching of translated literature.

In the sixth chapter, "Philosophy" (pp. 106-124), the focus is on the issue of philosophy in translation and mainly on its marginalization in academic philosophy. Just like in the case of literary translation, translations of philosophy works are used and studied ignoring the original texts, philosophers are used to creating concepts by interpreting only the domestic versions of the foreign texts. Ludwig Wittgenstein's "Philosophical investigation" is used as an example of the marginality of translation in this field of study. The subsection entitled "Strategies of philosophical translation" offers solutions for transparent translations, for the development of a literary philosophy "so as to release an appropriate domestic remainder for foreign concepts and discourses" (p. 122). Among these solutions, Venuti considers prefaces, glossaries and annotations to be of great importance in clarifying some of the key terms and their foreignness among domestic philosophical trends.

In a previous chapter Venuti discussed the fact that, unfortunately, so little foreign literature is translated into English. The seventh chapter, "Bestseller" (pp. 124-158) addresses another important factor for the marginalization of translation – the economic element, revealing how rare the foreign bestsellers which become successful in America are. Throughout the next two subsections of the chapter – "The reception" and "Editing and translating" – the author analyzes the Italian writer (best known for "Don Camillo") Giovanni Guareschi's bestsellers's success in the United States of America, during the post-war period. Venuti presents the reception that Guareschi's translations had, analyzing processes of editing and translation that made these translations cross the linguistic and cultural boundaries, match the cultural and social American values and made them more easy to digest by the American audience: omitting 16 stories, rewriting a much briefer preface or modifying some terms that were connected to political issues of the time. The third subsection – "The highbrow seller" – focuses on the strategy of US's publishers in investing in translations of classic bestsellers, making them available for a popular aesthetic.

The final chapter, "Globalization", consists of four sections which offer details about the situation of translation in different countries of the world, comparing these situations, offering some precise UNESCO statistics regarding the publishing industry. The author dedicates a significant part of this chapter to Chinese literature and its development.

Finally, the last three sections of the book are “Acknowledgments”, “Bibliography” and “Index”. In the first of these three sections, the author expresses his gratitude for all those who invited him to speak at conferences, helping him to start writing the book, for those who helped him with research and offered him valuable materials for his own research.

Lawrence Venuti's book is a great contribution to the field of translation, a very compact volume that covers many of the important issues regarding this field of study. The scandals to which Venuti refers are represented by a series of factors which put translation at the margins of literary studies and make the translator appear as a culturally and socially isolated person, who actually has a crucial role in rewriting an original text so that an author could have the opportunity to have his work known by a foreign audience.

One of these factors is represented by the copyright law that encourages an imbalance in translation (there are few foreign literary works translated into English, while very numerous texts are translated from English), that gives almost no financial right to the translator. As for a solution which focuses on the translator as a beneficiary of the copyright law, Venuti suggests a limited time for the author's copyright, after which the first translator of that work should have exclusive translation copyright, as long as the translation remains in print.

A great advantage of this book for those who are interested in translations is represented by the rich amount of precise statistics, historical data, the analysis of important contributions to the domain of translation made by notable linguists. For example, Venuti discusses the importance of Toury's activity, who manifested his wish for translation to be a legitimate discipline, studied in academic institutions, having an absolutely necessary descriptive branch. Moreover, the author explains important concepts of translation such as Keith Harvey's concept of generalized compensation (i.e. replacing the loss of a feature in the foreign text with a similar feature in the domestic text), the several methods that were used by French author Pierre Louÿs in his pseudotranslations in order to deceive the scholars and prove his point that their prejudices on translations (which suggested that the historical truth represented a verification of authorial originality) were just superficial.

Many examples from various pieces of literary translation appear in almost every chapter of the book. In my opinion, the

complex support that is constituted by the translations from different languages manages to explain the complexity of the processes of translation and the crucial importance of a translator's work. Among these examples, the author reveals some fascinating information that determines us to become aware of all the choices a translator must make in order to match the cultural values of the target audience reading in that translated language. For example, Venuti writes that in the English translation of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* twelve pages of the original book were omitted, a choice that can influence the reading of the book. The author does not agree with the strategies that are often applied by publishers, especially by the American ones: he examines the Japanese literature translated into English, concluding that the American publisher created a canon based on a very unrepresentative, but well-defined stereotype, that made the American audience regard the Japanese literary style as "an elusive, misty, inconclusive style"; that happened because of the publishers' choice to public the translations of only few Japanese writers ( Kawabata, Mishima or Tanizaki) – a situation that started to change in the last years of the 1990's, as Robb Graham observes.

The author is aware of the little interest for translating foreign languages into English, because of the little investment and the few English readers it attracts, so he sees the importance of an educational change that would focus on translations as an object of study in educational institutions. Venuti explains how this would force a rethinking of canons, discipline, courses; it would help students to be self-critical, to consider the cultural background and examine the choices made by translators, eventual differences and contrasts of the original and the translated text.

Therefore, this book represents a call for all of us to become aware of the great importance of translation, of the need for a revolution in translation studies.

### References

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