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## REVIEW

Edwin Gentzler. *Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. Pp. xvii + 214. \$170.00 (cloth), \$44.95 (pbk). ISBN: 9780415774512.

*Translation and Identity in the Americas* is an exciting book. With an abundance of examples both vivid and delightful, Edwin Gentzler (University of Massachusetts Amherst) demonstrates the richness and complexity of cultural negotiations in and through the context of translation, arguing primarily that translation is not something which happens between cultures, but rather something that fundamentally constitutes those cultures (5). Hence, for the groups at the center of his analyses, “translation thus was not derivative in any sense, but primary” (20). Drawing on a broad definition of translation put forward by Sherry Simon, Gentzler explains that he will attend not only to texts designated as translations but also to “translation phenomena” that manifest either inadvertently or under a different name. In many respects, this orientation is what makes the book so complex and provocative. This, coupled with its reliance on poststructuralist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks, positions the book to make a very strong contribution to the field.

The five chapters that form the heart of the book represent a collection of critical explorations into instances where the construction and contestation of cultural identities are conditioned by and revealed in translational acts. Beginning with “Multiculturalism in the United States,” Gentzler demonstrates the latent traces of various ethnic groups embedded within the landscape of the U.S. national identity, albeit either buried beneath layers of mistranslation or neglected altogether. Repeatedly, Gentzler demonstrates that what is *not* translated is more indicative of national identity than the translated texts of stories to which we traditionally lay claim (e.g., 15, 21–22).

In his treatment of “Feminism and Theater” in (Quebec) Canada, Gentzler considers instances in which women act as translators by “translating from a patriarchal discourse into a discourse that is more suited to articulating women’s ideas.” Working from within the culture, they attempt to expose the limitations of available discourses in order to open up alternative forms of expression for the feminist ideas of the authors they are translating, making translation an instrument of countercultural action (51–52). The result is “translation not as a form of reproduction or opposition but rather as a form of productive writing in and of itself, meshed or interconnected with ‘original’ writing,” overturning notions of “secondary” status, and also nullifying any need for legal contracts (54).

Gentzler’s fourth chapter, “Cannibalism in Brazil,” analyzes the indigenous use of cannibalism as a metaphor of resistance to European culture. Through a careful reading of the writings of Haroldo de Campos and the literary criticism of Else Vieira, Roberto Schwartz, Sérgio Bellei, and Randal Johnson, Gentzler illustrates how translation exemplifies Brazilian culture itself in a fundamental way. “The cannibalism metaphor becomes the very site for original artistic expression and one of the primary tools for expressing one’s own identity and independence,” which in turn allow for a re-imagining of one’s own past (107).

In his discussion of “The Fictional Turn in Latin America,” Gentzler argues that “understanding translation becomes a key to understanding both the fiction itself, and, by extension, the cultural formation” of the region (108). The chapter deals with works by Jorge Luis Borges, García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa to demonstrate forcefully that translation complicates simplistic conceptualizations of language and identity, largely by transgressing linguistic boundaries and highlighting their inherent (though often concealed) interconnectedness. Furthermore, translation at once locates points of origin and disseminates meaning. This, Gentzler insists, epitomizes the very core of Latin American identity.

Gentzler’s penultimate chapter, “Border Writing and the Caribbean,” begins with a series of questions that not only follow from the preceding chapters but also compliment and act as a bookend to the questions that opened Chapter Two. “If the borders between languages are in a constant flux . . . what does that say about the nature of the border? Of distinct and separate nations? Of translations? If the story of the Americas’ collective cultural histories can only be told in translation, what does that mean for traditional definitions of translation in monolingual cultures?” (143). In order to answer these questions, Gentzler analyzes Caribbean writers who actively reflect upon borders. Having illustrated the extent to which Caribbean identity is founded upon translational activity, with all the instability that accompanies it, Gentzler drives home the point that he has been making throughout the volume: “as the ever-changing nature of the floating, fluid islands indicates, so too, in a Derridean fashion, might all translational phenomena in the Americas be seen as groundless, the original disappearing into a paradigm of an endless signifying chain of translations of translations, language disappearing into language, ideas disappearing into ideas” (179).

This leads Gentzler, in his concluding chapter, to make a case for “tracing this chain of signification,” and its ideological and psychological implications, in order to deal with “the language oppression so common throughout the Americas” (179). To do this, Gentzler recommends that “the next turn in translation studies should be a social-psychological one, expanding a functional approach to include social effects and individual affects” (180). Such a turn would entail the study of translations for the purpose of revealing the processes of language and culture assimilation (183). This last remark provides a potentially fruitful point of intersection between (Bible) translation and biblical criticism. The question is this: How do indigenous language translators creatively write their cultures into the biblical text so as to resist hegemony while simultaneously appropriating the biblical text in meaningful and culturally relevant ways? Some might argue that this would reflect in a profound way the very embodiment of the biblical message insofar as it personifies the characteristics of the text itself. That is to say, the biblical message—if we dare still speak of it in any singular way—is shaped by the text’s composite nature, its plurality of voices, its multiplicity of styles, and, perhaps most significant of all, its own self-reflective concern with language and translation (*vis-à-vis* identity, no less) inherent throughout.

Admittedly, these suggestions and much of what surfaces in the individual chapters will not find their greatest audience among Bible translators. Nevertheless, I would recommend *Translation and Identity in the Americas* to Bible translators without reservation, especially to those who have abandoned the notion of the Bible as an *Urtext* and who are increasingly inclined to recognize rewritings as translations. They will find in this book useful tools for critically assessing such rewritings, which will in turn open up fresh possibilities for both criticism and experimentation. A text like the Bible, which simultaneously creates and crosses so many borders, and that has such vast translational history, begs such an approach.

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