

BOOK REVIEW

NOTHING IS WRITTEN IN STONE

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Translating and Transmediating Children’s Literature, edited by Anna Kérchy and Björn Sundmark, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 337pp, 117,69–€ (hardcover) ISBN 978-3-030-52526-2, 93,08€ (e-book) ISBN 978-3-030-52527-9.

Introduction

As the editors tell us in their *Introduction*, this research anthology focuses on “inter- and intra-cultural transformations, media transitions, iconotextual interactions, metapictorial potentialities, and intergenerational transmissions, which interact throughout the complex conjoint enterprise of adapting, translating, and transmediating children’s literature.” These themes, however, appear to be of unequal importance as *Translating and Transmediating Children’s Literature* consists of five parts of variable length (50-70 pages) which have a variable number of chapters (2-4, altogether 17), so these may have been adjusted to the importance of the topic under discussion, and possibly, to the editors’ preferences (just as my review reflects my preferences). The authors of the chapters come from European as well as North and South American universities—with one token independent scholar, apparently to show that research is still done outside academia. They “deal with translations into/from a variety of languages (including Brazilian Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Swiss, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Korean, Greek, and Latin).” (9) In the sections below, I shall address each of the five parts and then summarise my impressions.

“Inter-/Intra-Cultural Transformations”

The first chapter, “Translated into British: European children’s literature, (in)difference and *écart* in the age of Brexit” by Clémentine Beauvais (University of York), deals with translated children’s literature in the UK which reflects the “British people’s relationships to Europe and to other languages” (p. 31). She discusses (in)difference in relation to the book market and language learning in post-Brexit UK, and borrows the term *écart* from a French sinologist, Francois Jullien (2012), for what Anthony Pym calls intercultural space (1998). She suggests that translation should convey the sense of this in-betweenness instead of

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difference, as evidenced in Sarah Ardizzone's translation of Timothée de Fombelle's *Toby Alone*.

"Picturebooks in a minority language setting: intra-cultural transformations" by Hannah Felce (Cardiff University), discusses a Swiss case of multilingual publishing when an illustrated tale for children was released in two languages and multiple dialects and analyses the language ideology behind the translations.

"Mixing moralizing with enfreakment: Polish-language rewritings of Heinrich Hoffmann's classic *Struwelpeter* (1845)" by Joanna Dybiec-Gajer (Pedagogical University of Krakow) reports on the history of Hoffmann's tale in Poland and describes the three controversial retellings and their illustrations. "Translating place and space: the Soviet Union in North Korean children's literature" by Dafna Zur (Stanford University) deals with translations of two new genres, travel essays and science fiction for children, in the 1950s, and shows how deeply translation practice is embedded in historical times and influenced by ideology.

"Image-textual Interactions"

"How farflung is your fokloire?": Foreignizing domestications and drawing bridges in James Joyce's *The Cat and the Devil* and its French illustrations" by Aneesh Barai (University of Sheffield) writes about the fascinating problem of translating foreign-language inserts in a source text into that foreign language (in this case, French into French), which is a source of endless headaches for literary translators, and the two French illustrators' rather different approaches to move the target text closer to the audience.

As I have talked about the book covers of Tolkien works as intersemiotic translations in different cultures at different times, I was very curious about the chapter entitled "The Translation and Visualization of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* into Swedish, the aesthetics of fantasy, and Tove Jansson's illustrations". Written by one of the editors, Björn Sundmark (Malmö University), this chapter first sums up the history of the illustrated translations of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* in the author's lifetime, then presents Jansson's pictures and their reception. This is a very well-presented case study, although I disagree with the claim that "[t]he mere presence of illustrations" is always "an established marker of childishness in literature," as science fiction also used to be illustrated in the seventies.

"The (im)possibilities of translating literary nonsense: attempts at taming iconotextual monstrosity in Hungarian domestications of Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky'" by Anna Kérchy (University of Szeged) touches upon the age-long question of untranslatability in the context of illustrated nonsense poetry, and introduces four Hungarian translations of Carroll's "Jabberwocky" in detail. She claims that Jónai's use of the word 'Vartarjú' for "Jabberwocky" in his 2011 version puns on the word "crow" (*varjú*) by breaking it up in two syllables and inserting the word "bald" or "barren" (*tar*) in between; this invests the name with ominous implications given that the first syllable means "scar" (*var*). However, I am not sure about this; I think it is just as likely that Jónai has swapped two syllables of "tarvarjú" (Geronticus eremita) in order to create his monster. This essay clearly

demonstrates the author's comprehensive knowledge and love of the Alice books and translations.

“Metapictorial Potentialities”

My favourite intersemiotic translation theme is the relationship between the images on front covers and the content of books, so I anticipated reading “Translated book covers as peritextual thresholds: Comparing covers of Greek translations to covers of source texts” by Petros Panaou (University of Georgia) and Tasoula Tsilimeni (University of Thessaly) with pleasure. Indeed, I was not disappointed. The chapter is a very interesting and thorough presentation of many covers of translated books, though perhaps the object of study is addressed more from the perspective of Children's Literature Studies and Comparative Literature than from Translation Studies. It could have benefited from a reference to Brian Mossop and Marco Sonzogni's works on translated book covers, Gisèle Sapiro's (2008, 2010, 2015) on translation flow, and possibly also Kathryn Batchelor's (2018) on paratexts.

“Translating Tenniel: Discovering the traces of Tenniel's wonderland in Olga Siemaszko's vision of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*” by Karolina Rybicka-Tomala (Jagiellonian University) scrutinizes not verbal but visual transfer (Tenniel's images into Siemaszko's images) and the development of these pictorial translations through time. I am certainly looking forward to reading her doctoral dissertation on “the relationships between Carroll's illustrations and the evolution of Tenniel's redrawings” (p. 193).

“Digital Media Transitions”

“Grammars of new media: Interactive trans-sensory storytelling and empathic reading praxis in Jessica Anthony's and Rodrigo Corral's *Chopsticks*” by Cheryl Cowdy (York University) is the odd one out, as it deals with interactivity, multimodal and multisensory entertainment experience for children through a multimedia novel entitled *Chopsticks*, and does not even mention translation proper in the Jakobsonian sense.

In the next chapter in this section, Dana Cocargeanu, an independent scholar, examines the online Romanian translations of Beatrix Potter's tales and compares them to their print versions. She concludes that “the online environment and digital technology have allowed the Romanian translators liberties which authors of print translations can seldom afford” (p. 237), and that the transmediation process affects both the visual and verbal elements.

“Between light and dark: Brazilian translations of linguistically marked ethical issues in *Star Wars* transmedia narratives for children” by Domingos Soares and Cybelle Saffa Soares (Federal University of Santa Catarina) focuses on ethical and didactic considerations—teaching about morals in familiar dualistic terms, light/dark, good/evil, right/wrong—in translated space opera.

“Intergenerational Transmissions”

“*A Thousand and One Voices of Where the Wild Things Are: Translations and transmediations*” by Annalisa Sezzi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia) is another case study which examines the two Italian versions of Sendak’s work published almost 50 years apart.

“Translating ambiguity: The translation of dual address in children’s fantasy during the 1950s and 1960s” by Agnes Blümer (University of Cologne) looks at the West German tradition of translating children’s fantasy from English and French within a small but varied corpus.

“*Maxima debetur puero reverential*”: The histories and metamorphoses of Latin translation in children’s literature” by Carl F. Miller (Palm Beach Atlantic University) does exactly what the chapter title promises to do and asks an important question: if children’s literature is translated for adults does it cease to be children’s literature?

Lastly, “Newtonian and quantum physics for babies: a quirky gimmick for adults or pre-science for toddlers?” by Casey D. Gailey (Vanderbilt University in Nashville) discusses the use of science board books for arousing children’s interest in the so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

Closing remarks

It seems to me that this research anthology mixes mainly Comparative Literature with Translation Studies, adding occasional borrowings from other disciplines (for example, Adaptation, Media or Visual Studies). Most chapters have a similar theoretical basis (Genette, Lathey, Nikolajeva, Oittinen, O’Sullivan, Venuti), usually combined with a succinct historical background (of which I heartily approve), but the investigative methods cover a broad spectrum from mixed methods to close reading, from online searches to content analysis, from interviews to Multimodal Ensemble Analytical Instrument. The case studies are always well-contextualised and thought-provoking, even for those whose research field happens to be quite removed from Translation Studies. It is praiseworthy that some literary works (for example, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Hobbit*,) and some illustrators (for example, Tenniel or Jansson) are mentioned in several chapters from a different angle, thus creating intertextual dialogues. The text quality is a credit to the authors, editors and copy-editors,¹ although the chapter headings, which try to be descriptive as well as attractive and/or witty, result in rather longish titles, certainly not beneficial to future referencing. If there is anything to criticise, it is the fact that not all chapters have illustrations, which in such a book would have been helpful and illuminating.

All in all, the volume offers a broad though somewhat imbalanced range of studies about translated and transmediated children’s literature, most of which, like a teaser, leave

¹ There is a typo (“A close-reading of Polish-language editions reveals that **non** fail to make the narrator’s voice “more audible” than in the original, with the aim to convert the unconventionally ambivalent, absurd, and abject text into a more familiar didactic exercise.” p. 13), an incorrect hyphenation in a Hungarian name (Tamás Szecskó, p. 150), an absolutely forgivable offence, and a surplus comma on page 192, etc.

the reader wishing for more and feeling sorry that the chapter has ended. I am sure that anybody interested in this topic will find a chapter—or more—to their liking and edification.

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