

To Blur the Boundaries of Fiction and Translation

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Abstract:

The Fictions of Translation gathers papers from the third *Transfiction* conference, which took place in Montreal in May 2015. As with the previous publications of the conference series, this volume aims to establish the concept of ‘transfiction’ as the basis of a new subdiscipline in translation studies. The 16 chapters of this collection explore a wide spectrum of ‘translation fictions’ that range from pseudo-translations, (non-)translator and (self-)translator biographies, to the discourse of translation institutions to show the potential of translation and ‘translation fictions’ in providing insights into past or contemporary social and political situations.

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Woodsworth, Judith (ed.): *The Fictions of Translation*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2018. 307 pages, 95 EUR. ISBN: 978-90-272-0019-8.

Abstract:

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In the wake of what has been described as the ‘translational turn,’ translation “has [...] become a master metaphor epitomizing our present *condition humaine*, evoking our search for a sense of self and belonging in a perplexing context of change and difference” (Dirk Delabastista and Rainier Grutman: “Introduction. Fictional Representations of Multilingualism and Translation.” In: *Linguistica Antverpiensa*, 4:2005, pp. 11-34; p. 23). In a similar fashion, this volume explores various uses of translation as a metaphor and narrative device in order to expand the discipline of translation studies.

Fictions of Translation was edited by Judith Woodsworth, Professor of translation and translation studies in the French Studies Department at Concordia University, Montreal, where the *Transfiction 3* conference took place in May 2015. Selected papers from the First International Conference on Fictional Translators and Interpreters in Literature and Film, which took place in Vienna in 2011, were published by John Benjamins as well, in *Transfiction: Research into the realities of translation fiction* (Klaus Kaindl/Karlheinz Spitzl (eds.), Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2014), and papers from the second edition, *Beyond Transfiction: Translators and (Their) Authors* (Tel-Aviv, 2013) were published in a special number of the journal *Translation and Interpreting Studies* (Volume 11, Number 3, 2016). These three collections of essays aim to lay the groundwork for a new subdiscipline of translation studies, namely

‘transfiction’, which is understood as “the introduction and (increased) use of translation-related phenomena in fiction” and which “investigates what this development means for translation studies, what theoretical and methodological issues it raises, and how we might respond to them” (Kaindl/Spitzl 2014, p. 4).

This volume contains 16 essays and is divided into two parts, each made of eight articles. Part I, “Translator and translating studies: Status, Identity and Process”, deals with “translators and the process of translating, addressing the sometimes problematic questions of status and identity in addition to the complexities inherent in the fashioning of the translational self”, while Part II, “Texts, paratexts and contexts: Realities and fictions”, examines “texts and paratexts, which link translation to truth, authenticity, loyalty – or their opposites” (p. 4). It should be noted that some chapters (7, 11, 13) are written in French.

In Part I, Rainier Grutman (chapter 1), Jane Koutsas (chapter 6) and Elizabeth Saint (chapter 7) explore various self-translatory phenomena. Grutman opens the volume by arguing against the idealization of self-translators as an “exception to so-called normal translation” (p. 19), stating that the freedom of self-translators should not be overestimated. Although he does agree that self-translators are privileged by their access to their own memory of the original writing process, which an external translator can naturally not access, this does not stop them from resorting to similar solutions as ‘common’ translators: “If they want their translation to achieve its goal – i.e., to be read in the target system – they must take into account the linguistic and cultural (including ideological) parameters of that system, which undoubtedly puts limits on their freedom” (p. 27). In the next chapter, Judith Woodsworth, the editor of the volume, focuses on how Gertrude Stein engaged with the idea of translation (without necessarily *doing* translation, per se) to construct her identity as a writer. Stein claimed to have translated Flaubert’s *Trois Contes* as an ‘exercise in literature,’ although there are no traces of that process in the archives, and later ‘translated’ a cycle of poems by Georges Hugnet with such freedom that critics tend not to use the word ‘translation’ to describe her resulting work. In 1941, she was commissioned to translate Maréchal Pétain’s speeches into English, and worked on that project until 1943, leaving it unfinished. For Woodsworth, the fact that Stein “harnessed the idea of translation, both real and fictionalized [...] reflects both the hybrid voice she adopted and the hybrid space she inhabited” (p. 46).

In Part II, Sabine Strümper-Krobb (chapter 12), Katrien Lievois (chapter 13) and Nicole Nolette (chapter 15) explore different forms of translational ‘pseudos’. Nolette, in her account of various theatre adaptations of a ‘pseudo-bilingual’ text by Franco-Ontarian author Patrice Desbiens, posits that the “performance of translation fiction had built an ephemeral community, gathering French-speaking

and English-speaking Montrealers around the affirmation of a Franco-Ontarian identity.” (p. 269).” Lastly, Gillian Lane-Mercier (chapter 16) probes the role of fictions in the discourse of the Canada Council for the Arts and its national translation program. For Lane-Mercier, the discrepancy between the optimistic discourse of the Council on the success of its program and the rather stagnant reality of the translation market “points to very real tensions between, on the one hand, a [liberal] legacy that must be upheld if the Council is to honour its mandate of translational justice as defined by official bilingualism and, on the other, a socio-cultural and economic reality that has increasingly questioned this legacy” (p. 294).

The Fictions of Translation goes beyond the previous two *Transfiction* conference publications, which focused more closely on literary depictions of translator figures. By shedding light on phenomena as diverse as translation in the discourse of non-translators (chapter 2), the importance of early (even when particularly ‘bad’) translations in the reception of novels (chapter 10), and the discourse of translation institutions (chapter 16), this volume broadens the scope of the ‘transfiction’ concept and, at the same time, of translation theory, thus making a compelling case for the emergence of a new subdiscipline in translation studies. In doing so, it complements especially well the body of research that has been published since the emergence of the ‘translational turn’ in cultural studies and shows, as Woodsworth alleges in the introduction, that “the concept of transfiction also has the potential to provide insights into problematic personal or social situations such as displacement, migration and hybridity, all characteristic of this modern world” (p. 2).

German Abstract:

Übersetzung und Fiktion: Verwischte Grenzen

The Fictions of Translation sammelt Aufsätze aus der dritten *Transfiction* Tagung, die in Montreal im Mai 2015 stattgefunden hat. Wie auch die vorigen Bände dieser Tagungsserie versucht dieser Sammelband, den Begriff 'transfiction' als Grundlage einer neuen Teildisziplin der *Translation Studies* zu etablieren. Die 16 Beiträge untersuchen ein breites Spektrum von 'translation fictions,' von Pseudoübersetzungen, (Nicht-)Übersetzer- und (Selbst-)Übersetzer-Biografien bis hin zu Diskursen innerhalb von Übersetzungsinstitutionen. Dadurch zeigen sie eindrucksvoll das Potenzial von Übersetzungen und 'translation fictions,' um zu neuen Erkenntnissen über vergangene sowie zeitgenössische soziale und politische Lagen zu gelangen.

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