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Carol O'Sullivan (2011). *Translating Popular Film*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. xi + pp. 256 £55.00/$90.00. ISBN: 978-0-230-57391-8 (hardback)

In recent years, a small number of book-length studies in English have highlighted the role of translation in the development of film as an art form. Quite apart from the linguistics of subtitling and dubbing, these studies have examined the ways in which film and translation have interacted with each other as distinct forms of processing images and texts. To an extent, this interaction mirrors a more time-honoured — and perhaps more evidently symbiotic — relationship, that between literature and translation. Arguably, however, film and translation are interrelated in ways that are specific to modernity and beyond, and have more to reveal about contemporary culture, politics and aesthetics. By way of example, one of Michael Cronin's arguments in his book *Translation Goes to the Movies* (2009) was that the contemporary polarities of universality versus locality and standardisation versus particularity are equally central to translation and to film. By focusing on representations of translation on screen, Cronin was able to demonstrate the relevance of translation issues in understanding cinema as a global idiom. In an earlier study, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (2007), Abé Mark Nornes remarked that both translation and film were predicated upon advances in technology and the possibility of generalised traffic – thus signalling their emblematic position in a globalised world. Carol O'Sullivan's substantial contribution to this discussion is based on the simple but as yet under-explored idea that, historically, cinema has simultaneously refused translation *and* made ample use of it in order to establish itself as a global medium. From the "myth of film as a universal language" (42) to the plain fact of multilingualism in cinematic storytelling, *Translating Popular Film* explores the "translational transactions used to manage foreign languages in the cinema" (5).

By "translational transactions" O'Sullivan means the diverse and often sinuous ways in which linguistic otherness has been represented in film. Broadening the concept of film translation so that it includes less obvious transpositions than those of post-production subtitling and dubbing (for instance actors speaking accented English to suggest foreign ethnicity, the use of interpreting as part of the narrative, or untranslated foreign dialogue), O'Sullivan demonstrates that these transactions have been integral to filmmaking from the start. Indeed one of the great strengths of this book is the wealth of examples and case studies that show how imaginatively bi- and multilingualism were assimilated and harnessed from an early stage so as to enable cinematic narratives that remained highly intelligible and universally appealing. Such broadening of definition entails a widening of theoretical reference; O'Sullivan draws equally on literary theory (from Russian formalism to Genette to studies on literary multilingualism) and film studies (especially Michel Chion), in addition to standard references to Audiovisual Translation scholarship.

The analysis extends over six chapters, the first of which provides a theoretical context, while the remaining five identify and examine specific translational mechanisms as part of storytelling and filmmaking. For example, in the chapter entitled "The dream of instant translation," cinema's visions of universalism are problematised through the examination of such devices as the translating dissolves (the "magical" replacement of foreign on-screen text by its English translation) or the abrupt shift of foreign dialogue into English, even if the action is plainly set in a non-English speaking environment. According to the author, the purpose of such shifts is to use foreignness as a token of authenticity, before immersing the audience in a familiar and homogenising English.

The uses and abuses of translation as an authenticity device is a central preoccupation of this book and adds extra layers of theoretical depth to it. Subtitling, voice-over narration, the use of invented languages and other such strategies are considered as part of a dialectic of recognition and refusal of foreignness, through which the illusion of immediate contact with the Other is created. Without being openly critical, O'Sullivan questions the outcome of these dialectics and raises the issue of the ethics of representation of identity, ethnicity and cultural and linguistic specificity through translation in film. For instance, with regard to pseudosubtitling (as in Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*), she notes (121): "Pseudosubtitles are potentially problematic not because they are inauthentic, but because they exert such a strong authenticity effect." This kind of analysis of translational transactions leads to fascinating comments that ultimately touch on the nature of cinematic realism, the limits and resistances of film audiences, and the tensions between dominant and peripheral cultural idioms in a globalised world.

On the issue of these tensions, it is perhaps worth stressing that *Translating Popular Film* is predominantly a book about English-speaking film and native English-speaking viewers. This is indirectly acknowledged in the Introduction (5-6), while both the majority of case studies and the overall vantage point of the analysis is that of the English-speaking world. Thus, when the author discusses "multiplex audiences" (116, 150) and complains about inadequate exposure to foreign film, she clearly, though not explicitly, has only the Anglo-American context in mind. There is nothing wrong with that, but it would have been helpful to state and discuss this particularity for two interrelated reasons. Firstly, because the effect and interpretation of translational transactions in English-speaking film vary dramatically depending on whether one is a native speaker of English or not (arguably, the majority of viewers aren't). Secondly, because foreignness is not a formal attribute defined by simple opposition to domesticity, but a historically determined one; thus, examined from within an English-speaking context, foreignness carries connotations of exoticism and marginality, whereas examined from outside of it, it carries diametrically

opposite associations of dominance and hegemony. It is foreignness of the former kind that the author is concerned with for the most part.

Translating Popular Film remains a truly original book in its conception and execution. It is a labour of love — born of "a lifelong love of film," as the author admits from the start (1) — but also, undoubtedly, the fruit of painstaking labour of rigorous academic standards. Through a multitude of examples, it makes a solid case for its principal thesis, namely, that foreign languages have played a key role in the development of film and that they have been negotiated through complex and diverse translational processes. It shows how each of the translation strategies used to manage linguistic difference in cinema has had a discernible aesthetic and ethical impact on the way otherness is represented. It teaches us that, notwithstanding conventional wisdom, subtitling can also be used as a cinematic device to manipulate and misguide the film viewers' perceptions of authenticity. Finally, *Translating Popular Film* constitutes a confident step towards a new methodological paradigm in audiovisual translation research, whereby input from literary, cultural and film studies helps to enhance and refine our understanding of the relationship between moving image and text.

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