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Baer, Brian James (2021). *Queer Theory and Translation Studies: Language, Politics, Desire.* Abingdon/New York: Routledge, pp. 228, £34.99. ISBN 9781138200319.

Queer Theory and Translation Studies is an invaluable textbook that introduces two disciplines to each other and shows how this collaboration can be mutually beneficial.

This book by Brian James Baer, Professor of Russian and Translation Studies at Kent State University and Leading Research Fellow at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, is divided into six chapters. The introduction gives a clear overview of recent developments in both queer theory and translation studies, rightly assuming that readers are likely to know more about one than the other of these fields. The first two chapters go further to bridge the two disciplines. The first on queering translation, or "what queer theory can do for translation studies" (22–52), explains how insights from queer theory can benefit translators in theory and practice. The second chapter on queering global sexuality studies, or "translation and unease" (53–81), explains that translators' awareness of the context around their texts could be expanded by knowledge of global sexuality studies. The next two chapters take up this challenge of bridging the two disciplines, exploring the evolution of the gay anthology (chapter 3) and the place of translation within this (chapter 4). These are followed by the two most interesting: chapter 5 on translating lyric poetry and chapter 6 on translations of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's memoir (detailed below). The conclusion, on putting the trans* in translation studies, ties the findings from the previous chapters together and points to how readers can apply the methods the author uses.

As part of The New Perspectives in Translation and Interpreting Studies series of "works by leading scholars in both disciplines, on emerging and up-to-date topics", the book is aimed at undergraduates and postgraduates. As is appropriate for this series, it appears that Baer's main aim is to introduce queer theory and history to translation students. Perhaps some teachers will be tempted to use it to tack on one session at the end of a masters' course so they've "covered" queer approaches, but more in-depth engagement between the two disciplines would be desirable. From my experience as a professional translator from Polish, German and Finnish mentoring younger translators, I have the impression that a whole generation of students has had skopos drummed into them during their training. This book offers complementary critical perspectives, drawing on key authors for queer studies such as Foucault, Kosofsky Sedgwick, Butler and others.

The book will also be useful to other humanities or social sciences scholars who want to get a glimpse of how translation and queer approaches intersect. I used it myself to prepare a queer studies workshop with scholars

who find themselves translating, for instance, participant interviews as part of their research, but have no formal training in translation. Baer's work can give queer and cultural studies practitioners a way into understanding the issues involved in translation. One of the strengths of the book is his historical overview of how approaches to texts (particularly homoerotic ones of Ancient Greece) change in translation over time. Baer's method of making the framing explicit can be applied to all sorts of contexts and disciplines.

Another strength of the book is how Baer exposes the limitations of monolingual nationalism — as modern nation states formed, they began to tell a story of themselves through one national language to "assume a monolingual addressee" (29). As is explained in the book, this created linguistic others as outsiders and failed to acknowledge the realities of multilingualism. Baer argues that the queer as other threatened the heteronormative nation state too, but explains that homonationalism — the link between LGBTQI+ rights and nationalist ideologies — creates its own others in a story of Western liberal progress and coming out. Baer tries hard to overcome this Western colonial approach to language, sexuality and power. He does this well with examples from the East of Europe to disrupt readings from Europe's West, particularly from the former East Germany and Soviet Union, with translations from Russian and German. I was struck by his insight that the US model of pride as coming out and marching in the streets resonates very differently in post-Soviet Russia, where it would be activism NOT to march, for instance in a victory day parade. This resonated with my own knowledge of Central and Eastern Europe, whose languages are less well studied and known in Western universities. Thus, Baer succeeds partially in his aim to "provincialise the West".

The weakness of the book is acknowledged by Baer himself — the languages he knows are European, he is a white cis man and mostly discusses homosexuals, or gay men, though one chapter is on translating a work by a trans woman. Other genders, sexualities and places, particularly women and the global South, therefore, receive much less attention. Naturally it makes sense for the author to focus on contexts he knows well. To bring in more voices, perhaps the next volume to follow this one would be another more inclusive anthology? As Baer shows in his in-depth study of their queer history, anthologies serve to "confer value, or cultural capital" (83). Baer makes a strong case for examining the social and political context that frame every text and translation choice. A less Eurocentric and less homosexual collection of chapters examining different translations from across sexualities, races, ethnicities, and continents would be desirable. Baer already co-edited one with Klaus Kaindl (2017). However, in its threefold focus — queer theorising of translation; queer activism with translation; analysis of case studies of queer translations — *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer* remained very Eurocentric. Baer's chapter in Epstein and Gillet (2017) was more gender diverse, postcolonial

and global. Yet by ranging wider, these two volumes were less able to go deeper, and could only begin to touch on the contexts studied in each case. By restricting himself to one or two contexts, Baer is able to go into more depth.

The book makes the reader ask: how can we translate queerly? What does that mean? For Baer, it means embracing lyric poetry because it "continuously confounds Western mimetic theories of translation" (151). The author argues that, unlike the realist novel, which Western literary canons have reified, poetry transmits meaning in a less literal and more holistic, somatic way. Using revealing examples, this work opens up more space for queer interpretations.

Indeed, as Baer shows using Aleksei Apukhtin's queer translations, removing pronouns or gender markers altogether can make a love poem more inclusive. When the translator's gender or sexuality is different from that of the author, a love poem can read very differently in translation. The book makes us aware of the importance of being familiar with the history, the politics, and the culture — with this type of knowledge, you can see, for instance, that coming out may mean staying in (not marching). It also makes us recognise the power moves in paratextual material like footnotes, translator's afterwords and introductions. It demonstrates how queer terms, including the word "queer" itself, get imported out of English into other languages more often than the other way, because that is the way the linguistic power flows, but it also highlights that what is ostensibly the same word acquires new meanings in new contexts. Translating the queer means not only countering epistemicide but also translating these other queer meanings into English.

The book answers another question: what does translating queerly not mean? Queer translators would do well to avoid power moves such as those made in the English translation of von Mahlsdorf's autobiography. The Anglophone framing of von Mahlsdorf as a self-empowered gay hero or activist rebel is clear from the title, "my own woman", and subtitle, "The Outlaw Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, Berlin's Most Distinguished Transvestite". However, the German subtitle is much less loaded: "Ein Leben" (171–172). This work supports the view that queer translating does not aim to smooth tensions or resolve ambiguities, but to enable uneasy readings.

According to Baer, not striving to be accepted in the heteronormative nationalist metanarrative means not trying to pin down and flag up the sexuality of the author or translator. This has implications for the demand that translators become visible as writers (Basnett and Bush 2006). Baer is worth quoting at length here: he shows that making the author's or translator's sexual "orientation" visible is based on recognising them both as "writers", just as social recognition of queer folk requires them to become

"virtually indistinguishable from heterosexuals, processes that exclude many alternative[s] embodiments of nonnormative sexuality and gender. Queer theory draws attention to this contradiction, which is built into the Western notion of visibility, or of civil rights as visibility" (51).

Queer translation means not incorporating, appropriating or excluding, neither foreignising nor domesticating, but creating a space between and beyond this binary. It means allowing yourself and your translation to sit with dissonance and difference. All students and readers need to be reminded of the fact that "translation is not a simple linguistic matching game; the final glossaries are the product of an extended, deeply dialogic, collaboration" (76).

The language and politics of desire make translation infinitely more exciting. A "queer counterhegemonic pedagogy, one that is grounded in Dinshaw's notion of indeterminateness, Halberstam's notion of the queer art of failure, and Amin's notion of unease" (18), will make translation more inclusive, and — dare we say it? — better. Baer's focuses in a gay context on "the elephant in the room: Anglophone global … culture" (197) to acknowledge that sometimes before and elsewhere can be better than here and now. A critical stance and self-reflexiveness should inform all our translations.

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