

Kaindl, Klaus & Spitzl, Karlheinz (Eds.). (2014). *Transfiction: Research into the realities of translation fiction*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. ISBN 978-90-272-5850-2. EUR 99.00.

As I was preparing this review, notice of the third conference on Transfiction hosted by Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, came through on my listserv. It was held at the end of May, 2015, and was intended as a follow-up to previous conferences, “Fictional Translators” (Vienna 2011) and its sequel, “Beyond Transfiction, on Translators and (Their) Authors” (Tel Aviv 2013). The volume under review here contains material from the first of these conferences: twenty-two essays, not counting the two introductions and a brief afterword. The languages are mostly the major European ones. Exceptions include the Arabic and Hebrew included in Peter Kosminsky’s television series, *The Promise*, analyzed by Salam Al-Mahadin (pp. 51-67), and the languages of South Africa implied in a piece by Alice Leal describing the stage play *Truth in Translation* that was inspired by issues raised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (pp. 233-245).

As the robust series of conferences and the heft of this volume indicate, a literary phenomenon without a definite name – it is more than a theme – though hardly new, has grown constantly over the past several decades, and it shows no sign of letting up. It involves the appearance of translators and interpreters, and of translation processes, within mimetic texts, including prose narrative, drama, and film. In short, transfiction is the “introduction and (increased) use of translation-related phenomena in fiction” (p. 4). The title of this collection already gives not one, but two different names for this object of literature: Transfiction and Translation Fiction. Presumably, the second term is a paraphrastic expansion of the first. (I didn’t arrive at a complete understanding of a third term in the title, “realities,” which is obviously a bit paradoxical when used in the context of fiction studies.) A monograph I published in 2013 proposed a similarly structured abbreviation: transmesis as the mimesis of translation (*Transmesis*, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013). Even before becoming acquainted with the extensive list of authors to be considered under this rubric that are revealed in this collection, my long search for titles in order to survey the field was mocked, as I discovered one relevant title after another, previously unknown to me.

Certain texts emerge from this collection as canonical in this still emerging field, and hence subject to multiple mentions. There is of course Jorge Luis Borges, whose “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” and “Averroes’s Search” have achieved classic status as allegories of the translation process. He is discussed by Klaus Kaindl in the volume’s substantial introduction (pp. 11-13) and his work forms the topic of Rosemary Arrojo’s piece on fiction as translation theory (pp. 37-48). Ludmila Ulitskaya’s *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, first published 2006 in Russian, has enjoyed a great many translations, won prestigious literary prizes, and the author’s name has more index entries than any other in this volume. Its two major treatments include Brian James Baer’s piece devoted to the translation of the novel into other languages (pp. 158-175); and Natasha Olshanskaya’s use of the novel to help “re-think the role of translators in Russia” (pp. 141-155). Jonathan Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated*, written in a creative “translationese” attributed to a Ukrainian with a highly idiolectic English who becomes an American’s interpreter as he researches the true story of what happened to his family, is a close second to Ulitskaya’s transfiction, and is compared with Anne Michaels’s

Fugitive Pieces by Sabine Strümper-Krobb, and Foer’s humor is analyzed – doubly, in fact, as attention is also paid to how the German translation conveys the humor of the English original. Finally, “The Task of This Translator,” a humorous short story by Todd Hasak-Löwy, has also drawn considerable attention, due in part to its intriguing play on the title of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay. The story’s gimmick, reminiscent of a nightmare scenario, is that a young man gets tasked with being an interpreter for a language that he has only a casual acquaintance with. Fotini Apostolou devotes an entire chapter (pp. 69-86) to this story, with much attention paid to its intertextual relationship with Benjamin’s “original.”

Many of the essays have retained the mark of conference presentations, for example in their constrained length (as short as ten pages), abbreviated bibliographies, and limitation in several cases to the task of acquainting readers with a particular work of transfiction by a particular author. Among the more panoptic offerings are: an excellent overview of the role of translation in science fiction by Monika Wozniak (pp. 345-361); Daniela Beuren’s analysis of regendering in feminist transfiction (pp. 315-327); and Sigrid Kupsch-Losereit’s survey of pseudotranslation in 18th-century France (pp. 189-201). Not to mention, of course, the highly useful introduction by Kaindl that ends with six pages of bibliography. The division of the book into four parts (Theoretical Territories, Sociocultural Space, Agency and Action, and Function into Affect) mostly worked, except for the last, which seemed to me more of a pot-pourri of different topics. (Indeed, Karlheinz Spitzl admits [p. 28] to the relative artificiality of these divisions in his more “traditional” introduction that briefly summarizes the different contributions.)

Like most essay collections, then, and especially like most collections based on conference papers, quality and scope vary a great deal from essay to essay. In any case, most readers will pick out the languages, regions, or periods most relevant to their own work for a thorough reading. Nevertheless, the volume will be of interest to translation studies scholars, and of course a must-read for those wanting to know more about the literary phenomenon known alternatively as transfiction, transmesis, or translation fiction.

References

Beebee, Thomas O. (2013). *Transmesis*. London: Palgrave-MacMillan.



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