

*Übersetzung als Repräsentation fremder Kulturen.* Edited by Doris Bachmann-Medick. Pp. viii+328 (Göttinger Beiträge zur Internationalen Übersetzungsforschung, XII). Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1997. Pb. DM 76.

This volume brings together fifteen papers from a 1994 conference held at the University of Göttingen. As the title suggests, and as Doris Bachmann-Medick makes clear in the introduction, the word 'Übersetzung' here carries a very great range of senses – virtually any form of transfer 'from experience to text, from field research into monographs, from speech to writing'. Taking her cues from the ethnographic 'Writing-Culture-Debate', from Edward Said's notions of representation and power, and Homi Bhabha's of 'hybridity' and 'in-between-spaces', she addresses the problems of translation between cultures from an ethnological rather than philological angle. Only a reorientation of Translation Studies towards Cultural Studies, she argues, can adequately analyse issues raised by colonial, postcolonial and anti-colonial experience. Translators may hitherto have seemed merely to address the technical problem of finding the right words; but translators are culturally-determined agents. For Bachmann-Medick and her contributors, Translation Studies involves the pragmatics of discourse and the analysis of social context as much as, or more than, the analysis of word and text.

The five essays of the first of the book's four sections take travel writing as a mode of translation. The examples are historical, the arguments focused on problems of eurocentrism. Rejecting the view of it as a defence of European values, Jens Reck sees Fernão Mendes Pinto's twenty-one years of travel in the East as structured between the poles of 'fascination' with the foreign and 'critique' of it, the 'fascination' bringing with it a critique of Europe. Here and elsewhere in the volume there may sometimes be a tendency to attach praise and blame too easily. Michael Harbsmeier's somewhat anecdotal essay on nineteenth-century Persian and English images of the 'self' and the 'other' escapes it, but the others in varying degrees advertise their own political correctness – even at the expense of what is most interesting in their material.

The interest of Haeckel's account of his travels in Ceylon, as discussed by Rheka Kamath, is in the transfer to ethnology of the apparatus of European evolutionary biology: the political inferences he makes, however sensitively teased out by Kamath, hardly get beyond a rehearsal of very old antinomies. Anil Bhatti's study of the Austrian Carl von Hügel's mid-nineteenth-century account of his travels in India similarly shows a European hovering between pretensions to a superior evolutionary status and a nostalgia for lost innocence ('we Europeans are more intelligent and more learned than the Hindus, but not any happier for it'). Doris

Bachmann-Medick's own otherwise fine contribution (though in an essay allowable in this section only by a generous suspension of disbelief) displays an excess of inquisitorial zeal in searching out eurocentric bias. Neither R. E. Raspe nor G. A. Bürger, she argues, are ethnographically up to scratch in their versions of *Baron Münchhausen's Narrative*. But complaining about the representation of the inhabitants of the Dog-star is like reproaching the teller of fairy tales for claiming that wolves can speak or for stereotyping step-mothers. The real interest of the essay is in the contrast pointed up in Bachmann-Medick's account between Bürger's reliance on the German tradition of popular tall tales, and Raspe's mimicking the style of contemporary scientific reports, turning his no less exaggerated work into a 'critique of science and empiricism using the means of science itself'. The essay persuasively shows that these tales, despite their extreme exaggerations, can be seriously studied as encoding 'the "circulation of social energies" between popular culture and science'.

The shorter second and third sections concern areas of resistance in intercultural transfer. Section II, literary in its bias, begins with Ulrike Jekutsch's analysis of Andrej Belyi's symbolist novel *Petersburg* and various German attempts to accommodate its cultural subtexts. Brigitte Schultze goes on to analyse the Polish term *cham* ('peasant') as a typically untranslatable cultural 'keyword'; and Rainer Lotz exposes the complacency of the surprising notion that in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* 'a continent finds its voice'. Section III, ethnographic in its bias, explores two striking cases of cultural difference. Eberhard Berg's admirably straightforward personal essay on his experience with rituals of hospitality in the Sherpa communities of Nepal shows the conception of a 'third-space of intercultural understanding' to be naively optimistic. Berg found rituals of hospitality among the Sherpa to be so much centred on the interests of the host that the guest's role leaves no room for choice on the guest's part (food offered must be consumed until the host regards the quantity as sufficient). Translation (here conceived as the guest's trying to make his hosts understand that he is satisfied) is bound to fail because interaction is ritualized to such an extent that mutual understanding in the form of meta-discourse *about* the interaction is inconceivable. The difficulty of adequately translating between cultures is also the subject of Brigitt Röttger-Rössler's essay. The subtly differentiated lexicon of emotional terms in the Macassarian language (spoken in Indonesia) so closely mirrors the structures of Macassarian society that its translation into the language of any society not so structured becomes impossible without thorough contextual commentary.

The longer Section IV, theoretical and methodological in bias, begins on an up-beat. Andreas Poltermann's long and subtle essay, 'Anti-Colonial

Universalism: Johann Gottfried Herder's Translation and Collection of Foreign Folk Songs', begins with a perceptive (and fairly devastating) critique of the excesses of 'post-modern anthropology' with its 'fashionable universalized relativism, which denounces any form of interpretation, evaluation or hierarchization as the expression of a will to power'. Writing counter to what looks like the general editorial drift, Poltermann sees the more 'advanced' exponents of the 'writing-culture school' as merely shunning any form of critique and fleeing into a realm of self-reflexive rhetoric. Poltermann sees the later Herder's philosophy of history and his way of translating and collecting foreign folksongs as evidence that 'the historical-hermeneutic reconstruction of foreign cultures by no means necessitates mere affirmation and abstention from critique'. Taking advantage of the obvious fact that its representation in writing changes the folksong into a different art form, Herder's perception of alien cultures remains sensitive to difference while insisting on the possibility of understanding without imperialist distortions and self-serving misrepresentation. Indeed, as Shingo Shimada's 'Asymmetry in the Translation of Cultures' shows, the reluctance to believe in that possibility may itself encourage distortion. Shimada's essay begins from an 1897 dispute between the great Sinologist Gustav Schlegel, and Minakata Kumagusu, a London-based Japanese scholar. Minakata corrected Schlegel's failure to account for the etymology of the Chinese word 'Lohszema' or 'Loksuma' ('elephant-seal') by showing it to be a phonetic translation of the Norwegian 'Ros Mar'; but Schlegel's prejudices about the impenetrable integrity of oriental culture prevented him, at least initially, from accepting Minakata's demonstration of this contamination. Under such Western eyes, alien culture is reduced to an invariably 'alien' something, like Eliot's Prufrock 'formulated, sprawling on a pin'. In Shimada's view, cultures are linked through acts and 'discursive processes' of mutual translation.

Two dense essays by Susanne Feldman and Horst Turk, in the latter case dense to the point of impenetrability, analyse the interactive character of intercultural understanding. And Martin Fuchs, in a final contribution, pleads for a larger understanding of what might constitute intercultural understanding, for the replacement of the fashionable textualization of cultural activity by a pragmatics of cultural confrontations. This volume will be of limited interest to scholars of literary translation in the traditional sense; as a contribution to cultural theory, it delivers much of interest.

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