SALMAN RUSHDIE AND TRANSLATION BY JENNI RAMONE

Salman Rushdie and Translation, Jenni Ramone. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. £18.99.
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Jenni Ramone's *Salman Rushdie and Translation* is a lucid examination of what translation means – as a movement of meanings between languages, and as a metaphor for the transformation and relocation of subjects - in a post-colonial world. As a scholarly work it is sharp, insightful and remarkably readable. Unusually for an academic text, it would reward a casual reader with its approachable but penetrating insights into Rushdie's works and into translation theory as a whole.

If *Salman Rushdie and Translation* is at times a rather breathless work, it is perhaps only surprising that this effect is not more pronounced. In fewer than two hundred pages Ramone discusses Rushdie's entire oeuvre to date, having recourse to a comprehensive selection of translation theories. The book occasionally brings to mind Tate's view of King Lear (a "heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished, yet […] dazzling in their disorder") [Nahum Tate, 1681] because it is littered with brief but provocative insights into a number of – often, disparate – topics. At their finest, these passages would be of interest to any scholar.

Ramone's short treatment of translation as an "unveiling" (57) of the post-colonial body, for example, would have much to offer interdisciplinary gender theorists, and her biographical treatment of Rushdie as a 'split subject' in the context of the fatwah manages to evade the weary inevitability of discussing Rushdie in the context of this defining political event. Ramone offers fresh insight on this timeworn topic by focussing upon the perils of life-writing and autobiography. *Salman Rushdie and Translation* fills a gap in post-colonial and translation studies by offering a series of intelligent and revealing glances into the varieties of Rushdie's work and its reception.

As Rushdie himself remarked in 1991 with regards to his politicised notoriety: 'for many people, I've ceased to be a human being. I've become an issue, a bother, an "affair."' [1991, addresd to Columbia University, '1,000 Days Trapped Inside a Metaphor' published in *The New York Times*]. Indeed, Ramone's most elegant achievement is to have taken on the phenomenally well-known, often and even over-discussed author, invigorating the study of his works through diverse and daring readings.

Ramone ranges over a variety of conceptual frameworks for understanding the act of translation. Exemplifying Ramone's skill in combining scholarly depth with a light and flowing tone, her first section elegantly unpacks the notion of translation as an act of desire. 'Translation as desire' is certainly a concept that would lend itself well to post-structuralist analysis of the more opaque variety. Yet Ramone offers remarkably clean and concise delineation of the issues, beginning with a historicist explanation of the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic understandings of language difference. In her discussion of Islamic discourse concerning language diversity, and the "tantalizing" possibility that "the original state of one common language can somehow be obtained again" (6), Ramone appeals to a binary contrast between Western and non-Western models of understanding. While reasonable, such Manichean distinctions recur even in Ramone's most subtle arguments, and one could object that these poles are not merely simplified but simplistic. There is a tendency to omit details which would trouble Ramone's clear and frank arguments, and which, at their most reductive, would appear to ironically replicate the early colonial discursive strategies about which Ramone writes eloquently.

In a technique familiar to all scholars of empire, Ramone notes that the translation and collection of "existing literary and legal documents" (2) was a key means by which colonial Britain constructed the Oriental as the "depraved" (2) other to its Western, corrected translation. To apply the same lens to Ramone's book, the author constructs binaries between the West and the rest which tend towards reading translation as a threatening process. Such arguments are well-grounded. Steiner's notion, for example, of the translator as someone who "invents, makes up, pretends and bases the translation on something external to the text: a voice in his or her head" (20) supports Ramone's argument that the translating subject contains "a second personality…signifying madness" (20).

This reading then gives rise to the argument that The Satanic Verses' Gibreel Farishta is an "asylum seeker, wandering over geographical boundaries, and an inhabitant of a lunatic asylum", illustrating that "translation intensifies the confusion between insanity and foreignness". Sontag is invoked, for her view that "migration and madness are connected by a metaphorical passport, which provides ease of passage from 'the kingdom of the well' to 'the kingdom of the sick'" (21). While translation between domains – of language, nation and bodily experience – certainly intersects, Ramone's arguments seem to return the reader to a fundamentally degrading and nihilistic view of translation. They position the translated subject as being as mute as Spivak's subaltern subjects, though in this case because only the "refusal to translate [can reclaim] the voice that was so brutally colonized" (31).

Yet this criticism – or its accompanying readerly anxiety that Ramone's reading of Rushdie is one in which the post-colonial text can never straddle languages or cultures without the risk of regression and self-destruction – is only partly justified. A quotation from Ramone's chapter on the translation of real histories from Kashmir will elucidate this. She writes that "histories try to oppress the reader into following a specific route" (135): they operate, as White observes, by "the suppression or subordination of certain [details] and the highlighting of others" (135, White, p.19).

While Ramone's conceptual framework appears, upon first examination, to privilege the alarming and hegemonic aspects of the translation process, one can read the author as being engaged in a meta-textual critique of the way such dominant historical and academic narratives are constructed. As Rushdie absorbs and complicates "the 'discredited' histories" (125) of subaltern subjects, so Ramone serves us iterations of the discursive strategies which marked those subjects as such.

Ramone quotes Foucault, in an excellent section on the impossibility of ordering or structuring histories: "we may wish to draw a dividing-line; […] any limit we set may perhaps be no more than an arbitrary division made in a constantly mobile whole" (124, Foucault, p.50.) The same may be said of the lenses through which such histories – and their non/fictional re/writings – are examined.