

TRANSLATION CHANGES EVERYTHING: THEORY AND PRACTICE
BY LAWRENCE VENUTI

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Translation Changes Everything gathers together fourteen of Lawrence Venuti's essays on translation, thirteen of which have previously appeared in print. The collection tracks, as Venuti explains, the development of his thinking about translation, away from an instrumentalist approach and towards a hermeneutic model which 'views translation as an interpretive act' (4). The volume also records the interventions that Venuti has made within Translation Studies, touching on topics including foreignization and domestication, retranslation, equivalence, and reader reception. Arranged for the most part chronologically and spanning from 2000 to 2013, the collection is testament to the rise of Translation Studies as a discipline in its own right.

Venuti is at his best when describing his own experience in and approaches to literary translation. In the fourth essay he compares two twentieth-century interpretations of the medieval poet and friar, Jacopone da Todi, with his own translations of the *Laude*. Two of Venuti's translations are reproduced in full, juxtaposed with the Italian originals. His combining Skeltonics with the varying rhythms and half-rhymes of contemporary rap is ingenious: 'My dear Pope Boniface, / I suffer your disgrace, / the dreaded malediction / of excommunication.' ('O Papa Bonifazio / eo porto el tuo prefazio / e la maledezzone / e scommunicazione [sic]' (93). Venuti's personal insights into the commercial facets of translation are enlightening (Chapter 9, 'Translation and the book market', pp. 158 – 164). The number and variety of case studies from which Venuti draws is also impressive. In one chapter alone, Venuti discusses Alan Bass's translation of Jacques Derrida, Donald D. Walsh's reworking of Pablo Neruda, his own translation of the short stories of Dino Buzzati as well as William Weaver's take on the science-inspired fiction of Italo Calvino (Chapter 2, 'The difference that translation makes: the translator's unconscious', pp. 32 – 56).

The analysis, however, of the translations under consideration is sometimes less than persuasive. Venuti is interested in how a translator might make unconscious slips in his or her translation. The problem with this psychoanalytic approach is that once Venuti has decided that a given translation displays unconscious errors, he takes this as a *carte blanche* to make other, sometimes far-fetched deductions. Thus in his treatment of William Weaver's 1968 translation of Italo Calvino's *Le Cosmicomiche*, Freud's phallus distracts from what is elsewhere detailed and compelling close-reading. As Venuti explains, Weaver has excluded the description of a giraffe which appears in the original: 'Insofar as the giraffe's elongated neck constitutes a phallic image, the omission can be viewed as a symbolic castration of the paternal author, which was supplied by a greater fluency in the mother tongue' (54). But of all the associations that a giraffe carries – height, safari, elegance, dappled fur – the penis is not one of the most obvious.

Venuti at another moment stresses the limitations of historical scholarship, particularly in the form of the scholarly apparatus that often accompanies translations of historical texts. For Venuti, the 'fundamental anachronism in historical scholarship' is that it 'always asks questions of those [past] moments that they did not ask of themselves, questions that issue from the moment of historical research and the historian's particular methods.' (p. 81). His own analysis, however, would benefit from asking some of these questions. Take his treatment of Thomas Hoby's 1561 translation of Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*.

Venuti observes that Hoby translates Castiglione's 'ottimi maestri' and 'bon maestri' as 'cunning men', a phrase which, according to Venuti, 'carries negative connotations in Elizabethan English, since "cunning" might signify not only skillful, expert, learned, but also crafty, guileful, sly' (pp. 124 – 5). Building on the idea of a translator's unconscious slips, Venuti sees this use of 'cunning' as evidence that 'the different national discourses that inform Hoby's translation, absolutist as well as humanist, issue into contradictions of which he was obviously unaware' (p. 125). If we press on the literary and historical contexts from which Hoby's translation emerged, however, a different account becomes apparent. Between 1500 and 1561, 'cunning' was used in an overwhelmingly positive sense to suggest technical skill or proficiency, and was frequently employed to intimate knowledge of the scriptures. Thus we find the phrases 'cunning in scripture', 'cunning in vnderstandyng of parables' and 'cunning in the worde of God'.¹ The sense of 'sly' or 'crafty' was a much later development. The OED's first example of 'cunning' in this sense is 1590, almost thirty years after Hoby's translation.² I can find only two examples of 'cunning' with the later, derogatory sense which predate Hoby's translation, a stark contrast with the many hundreds of examples of the word in its primary, positive sense which appear in early Tudor literature. And even these two instances are not clear-cut, but take on a negative resonance through juxtaposition.³ This does not rule out the possibility that Hoby was pushing the word in a new, semantic direction, but Venuti's account could be nuanced with some literary and historical context. Etymology aside, it is surprising that Venuti makes no mention of William Thomas's repeated use of the phrase 'cunning men' to describe Italian statesmen in *The Historie of Italie* (1549).⁴ Thomas, who was travelling through Italy at roughly the same time as Hoby, may well have provided the precedent for Hoby's use of the phrase.

This is a wide-ranging and thoughtful collection of essays. Venuti's personal insights into the process and strategies of translation are particularly engaging. The collection will thus be of use not only to students and academics, but to literary translators themselves.

¹ William Chedsey, *Two Notable Sermones* (London: John Herford, 1545) I v r.; Erasmus, *The first tome or volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus vpon the Newe Testamente*, trans. Nicholas Udall (London: Edward Whitchurche, 1548) L iiiii r.; David Lindsay, *The Tragical death of Dauid Beato[n]* (London: John Daye, 1548) E iii r.

² "cunning, adj.", in *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 20 May 2014].

³ 'slye and cunmyng'. *Here be certayne questyons of kynge Bochus of the maners, tokyns, and condycions of man* (London: Robert Wyer, c. 1550) B ii v.; 'that cunning deyul'. Johannes Sleidanus, *Sleidanus Commentaries*, trans. John Dawes (London: John Day for Nicholas England, 1560) cxxxiv v.

⁴ William Thomas, *The Historie of Italie* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549) 155 r.; 198 r. ; 211 r.