

RESSENYES

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Translating Italy for the Eighteenth Century: British Women, Translation and Travel Writing (1739-1797)

Manchester: St. Jerome, 2002. 169 p.

This is a book which covers much important and often neglected ground. Studies of the image of Italy in eighteenth-century British culture are not uncommon, while examinations of the exchanges between the two nations and traditions in the same period are similarly familiar. Nevertheless, the role of women in these cultural investments, and the function of this Anglo-Italian contact in the construction of women's culture, have been rarely examined. Agorni's is the first book-length study which seeks to reconstruct and assess this particular intercultural exchange.

Because of the vast task it sets itself, the book touches on a range of disciplinary areas, from translation studies, to literary history and criticism, and cultural history. With such an extensive field in sight, Agorni is careful in staking out her theoretical ground. In particular, starting from a reconsideration of polysystem theory, she embraces the idea of localism, as elaborated by M. Tymoczko, adopting it as the main frame of her argument. As it aims at detailed analyses of specific instances of translation and their effects within a broader system, Tymoczko's notion of the 'local' is particularly useful in that it enables Agorni to avoid generalizations and instead to

concentrate on translation 'in action' and thus produce metonymical models of the wider cultural context in which translation operates. This done, Agorni inserts additional theoretical notions within this broader picture, notions such as André Lefevere's now classic concept of translation as rewriting, Susan Bassnet's idea of 'collusion', and Lawrence Venuti's interpretation of the idea of the 'remainder' as that crucial element of linguistic variation produced by translation within a seemingly homogeneous target system. Further relevant theoretical factors in the book are the reflection on agency in translation developed by feminist theorists, and conceptual models drawn from postcolonial studies such as Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the 'contact zone'.

If at times these gestures in the direction of theory may seem slightly insistent, the book, by its nature and structure, needs this constant negotiation of the intellectual position of its arguments, especially in view of the fact that, with regard to eighteenth-century documents, it examines works produced at different times and of different genres. It is precisely this kind of transdiscursive approach which requires complex and iterated theoretical support.

Although Agorni's book focuses on, in chronological order, Elizabeth Carter's 1739 translation of Francesco Algarotti's *Il newtonianismo per le dame* (1737), Hester Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections on a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* (1789) and Anne Radcliffe's Gothic novel *The Italian* (1797), she begins her examination from the last of these works, resulting in an analysis which takes an *à rebours* itinerary. Radcliffe's is the most familiar of the three works and, as such, arguably provides easy access to her argument and cultural reconstruction; at the same time, however, the book represents an important point of arrival in British women's appropriation of Italy and their use of this cultural geography in the framing of discourses that could be beneficial to the development of British women's writing in the eighteenth century.

In her examination of the function of Italy in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, Agorni's claims strike a true note, albeit one that is familiar enough from recent studies on the geographies of Gothic and their ideological values. The important insight here, however, is that the Gothic must be seen as part of a cultural development which begins in the first half of the century, and that its imagined Italy is a crucial component in the century-long evolution of women's writing and intervention in the processes of established and male-dominated cultural production. In order to reconstruct this development, Agorni turns to Elizabeth Carter's translation of Algarotti, carefully tracing the inception and impact of the original in Italy, as well as of the English translation in Britain. Carter was a famous bluestocking, translator of Epictetus, and a major figure in the burgeoning of female literature in the first half of the eighteenth century. Her interest in Algarotti is peculiar, as Agorni explains, especially because the text had proved very controversial in Italy. An introduction to Newtonian physics aimed at a genteel female reading public, the treatise was polemically peppered with lascivious undertones, and

had been duly included in the Church's *Index librorum prohibitorum*. Through its deft negotiations of these (and other) difficulties, Carter's translation becomes a localized operation of cultural adaptation. As women were excluded from the world of science, Carter's translation offers itself as a female invasion and appropriation of this domain, a translation which, simultaneously, constructs an image of Italy as a country in which women's education and knowledge are prized and encouraged.

Agorni is at her best when she examines primary materials. Her analyses are thorough and acute, and there, after the long opening expositions, theory can be seen in practice, while the fundamental notion of 'localism' is at its most useful and effective.

Unfortunately, however, the British eighteenth century does not offer endless lists of translations from the Italian by women. Agorni's useful summary of translations by British women from French, German and Italian shows that, although there were many translations from Italian, most were printed anonymously. Only a handful, and Carter's is among them, were acknowledged to have been produced by a woman. From this point of view it seems difficult to state that women's investment in Italian culture was a decisive cultural move. Yet Agorni clears this obstacle by considering the discourse of eighteenth-century travel writing (with its now generally acknowledged affinities with translation) and the presence of Italy in it. Here Hester Piozzi's travel book provides an important addition to the Agorni's argument, for it enables her to show that Italy was also 'translated' in the latter part of the eighteenth century through the aesthetic and ideological mechanisms of travel writing. This representation of, and reflection on Italy as culture and society develops a discourse centred on woman and femininity, even as it permits a discussion of the location of woman in culture that is in line with Carter's earlier attempt. Finally, Agorni's examination of Piozzi returns to the book's starting point, as Anne Radcliffe's *The*

Italian is known to bear evident traces of Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections*.

The book is centred on the notion and practice of translation as a contribution to the development of women's literary voice and cultural presence in eighteenth-century Britain. It is a stimulating study which complicates our notions of British women's cultural operations from the Augustan Age to the early Romantic period. In particular, it reminds us that these authors were much more complex, conversant with Continental traditions, and less parochial than a purely Anglocentric standpoint would indicate. The book also shows women's multifarious acts of translation as not merely 'service work' for a culture which tolerated, but ultimately sneered at, their activities. These translations are also, and most importantly, a contribution to the development of women's own cultural references, as well as weapons to carry on their own cultural confrontations and conflicts. More generally, therefore, this book removes us from the traditional approaches

that have long characterized comparative cultural studies in this area. Through Agorni's approach, the contacts between cultures are seen as manifold and supple phenomena, straddling different cultural forms and moving beyond the idea of fascination with another culture and towards notions of the 'use' of other cultures for the benefit of the target culture. Solidly (if, at times, too urgently) theorized, this book deserves to be read by scholars interested in applications of translation theory, scholars of eighteenth-century literature and culture, and comparative literature specialists. What might be gained is an insight into the intricacies of those translational mechanisms by which women in eighteenth-century Britain ultimately imagined, in Agorni's words, a society 'inhabited by modern individuals who define themselves in terms of gendered sensibility' (p. 5).

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Manual de traducció anglès-català

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Tant els professors de traducció com els traductors que treballem principalment amb l'anglès i el català no podem sinó celebrar l'aparició del primer *Manual de traducció anglès-català*. Fins ara (com ens passa encara amb els diccionaris, la manca dels quals en català ens obliga tot sovint a passar a través del castellà per trobar la solució de traducció ideal) ens havíem hagut de conformar amb els manuals existents en altres llengües i, especialment, amb el manual de traducció anglès-castellà obra de dos professors i traductors de la UAB, Gabriel López Guix i Jacqueline Minnett, que va publicar Gedisa el 1997. Potser la diferència d'anys en la publicació de l'un i l'altre marca ja una diferència essencial en la manera d'enfocar-ho. El 1997, encara, la

majoria de persones que es dedicaven a la traducció (especialment literària) venien d'altres camps del coneixement i, només armats amb una mica d'experiència d'estudis i vida, començaven a dedicar-se a la traducció i a qualificar-se de traductors. Ara, sis o set anys després, són legió els alumnes sortits de les diferents facultats de traducció que aborden la tasca de traductors més com a resultat d'uns coneixements adquirits en el terreny lingüístic que com a producte d'una vocació humanista general. Si es compara l'enfocament dels dos manuals, es veu molt clar que allà on el primer parla del «geni del llenguatge» i «el paper del traductor», el que ens ocupa va directe a qüestions pràctiques, com ara les eines del traductor, els procediments de tra-