

**WOODSWORTH, Judith (2017): *Telling the Story of Translation. Writers Who Translate*. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 248 p.**

Rosario Lázaro Igoa and Martha Pulido

Volume 63, Number 3, December 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1060179ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1060179ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (print)

1492-1421 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Igoa, R. L. & Pulido, M. (2018). Review of [WOODSWORTH, Judith (2017): *Telling the Story of Translation. Writers Who Translate*. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 248 p.] *Meta*, 63(3), 835–837. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1060179ar>

the volume contains some purely theoretical chapters (namely 3 and 5) that may strike certain readers as being less accessible, in my opinion, they are actually informative and stimulating, largely because these chapters pave the theoretical groundwork for future empirical research. A potential criticism that may be levelled against this volume is that many of the empirical studies reported are exploratory at best and are conducted with a relatively small group of participants. As a result, potential readers could argue that relevant findings may not be generalized to other cohorts of participants and extrapolated to wider settings. While sharing the similar concern, I would like to focus more on the positive role of these small-scale explorations in setting the scene for future research, and to expect more replication studies to be conducted to confirm or falsify previous findings. All in all, this book is definitely worth reading, especially for T&I trainers and educators as well as scholars interested in research-based T&I didactics.

CHAO HAN\*

Southwest University, Chongqing, China

#### NOTE

- \* This review was supported by the China Postdoctoral Science Foundation (No. 2018T110935).
1. FRANCO AIXELÁ, Javier (Last update: December 2018). *BITRA (Bibliography of Interpreting and Translation)*. Open-access database. Alicante: Department of Translation and Interpreting (University of Alicante). Visited 13 December 2018, <<http://dti.ua.es/en/bitra/introduction.html>>.

#### REFERENCES

- HAN, Chao (2018): Mixed-methods research in interpreting studies: A methodological review (2004-2014). *Interpreting*. 20(2):155-187.
- PÖCHHACKER, Franz (2010): The role of research in interpreter education. *Translation and Interpreting Research*. 2(1):110.
- TEDDLIE, Charles and Abbas TASHAKKORI (2009): *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- WOODSWORTH, Judith (2017): *Telling the Story of Translation. Writers Who Translate*. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 248 p.
- In the disciplinary field of translation studies, it has already been demonstrated how productive it is to tell the story of translation with a focus on translators and their activity throughout history (Delisle and Woodsworth 2012). Judith

Woodsworth now associates a foreign language with the concomitance of creative writing and translation, broadening her research. Thus, her new book brings together three writers – Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), and Paul Auster (1947-) – to make a point about writers who translate, and the insights translation studies and translation history could gain by acknowledging and analysing their profiles. Justifying the motivation behind this research, Woodsworth shows, when she describes the life story of each author through the eyes of the people who knew them – Shaw and his translators, Stein and her avant-garde circle, Auster and the authors he translates and reads –, that the three highlighted writers have in common the fact that they:

have achieved little recognition within the sphere of translation. Their work as translators has been only incidentally scrutinized by literary scholars, and their practice and theorization of translation have not received the attention they deserve from the translation studies community. (p. 4-5)

The three of them also share some common characteristics as far as the construction of their literary careers, as Woodsworth cleverly shows in three subsequent chapters. In general terms, there is the assumption that Shaw, Stein, and Auster, among many others, “integrated translation practice and thinking on translation into their body of writing, raising complex questions of linguistic identity and cultural affiliation” (p. 3). The depth and breadth of such a revolutionary, translational influence on creative writing, literary bodies of work, and authorial trajectories, is evidenced accordingly through a narrative that not only combines biography and history as genres, but that also goes beyond the traditional boundaries of translation studies. In fact, it is a given that this book will not be confined to the circle of translation scholars; it will reach out to colleagues in comparative literature and literary history, and even to enthusiasts of any of the mentioned writers, who would most certainly be interested and pleased by the literary style Woodsworth adopts to answer the question that guides her path: “What is translation for?” (p. 5). By telling their stories, as any good story-teller does (subchapters are especially useful for these matters), Woodsworth strikes a remarkable balance between theoretical aspects of translation (the introduction is perhaps the most theoretical part of the book), a dense, comparative, literary analysis sustaining her argument, as well as clarity in tracing the impact of translation on each of the chosen writers.

Woodsworth’s first move is a clarifying one: she revisits the definition of translation propounded

by modernists, taking Ezra Pound as a departing point of the movement, as suggested by Steven Yao's in his book *Translation and the Languages of Modernism* (2002). Although the writers she studies don't necessarily align on the spectrum of modernism and postmodernism, Woodsworth points is that, as modernists, they gave primary importance to translation and to the translator, not only to the text or to the profession, but to the whole activity as "a way of being" (p. 2). Yao's own argument is grounded on Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," which he references from the outset of his book, particularly in the introduction (Yao 2002: 1-22). Woodsworth goes on to illustrate her point, citing many other writers who used translation as a stratagem to trigger writing, from Geoffrey Chaucer to Charles Baudelaire, to Stefan Zweig, to Boris Pasternak. Self-translation is also mentioned, with Samuel Beckett and Nancy Huston given as examples. Woodsworth summarizes her approach like so:

The book focuses on the person, but the narrative moves from the purely biographical level to an approach that takes into account the broader context in which these writers operated. Attention is paid not only to their specific reasons for translating, and the ways in which they viewed the translation process, but also to their insertion within specific linguistic, aesthetic, and cultural communities [...]. (p. 6)

In the chapter on Shaw, we witness a *sui generis* situation: Bernard Shaw translating the work of Siegfried Trebitsch, his own translator into German. Woodsworth includes in the long bibliography of the book two works containing the correspondence between Shaw and Trebitsch, edited by Samuel Weiss (1986, 2000), which represents only a small portion of his copious correspondence. Woodsworth states that, besides being a prolific playwright, Shaw "had generated a correspondence estimated at a quarter of a million letters and postcards" (p. 11). This should certainly arouse the curiosity of translation scholars. What interesting and controversial ideas must these two writer-translators have exchanged! Judith Woodsworth allows us a glimpse of these. Trebitsch contributed to Shaw's success and circulation in Germany, where many of his plays were staged, an accomplishment that had repercussions in Shaw's home country, but only at a later date. Paradoxically, success was not on Trebitsch's side, a fact that reflects the unequal status of the translator in relation to the author. Woodsworth then continues with Shaw's relation with his French translator, August Hamon, who translated in collaboration with his wife and who even wrote a book on Shaw entitled *Le Molière du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Bernard Shaw*.

Adding to the rich information already presented, Woodsworth signals some problems in Shaw's translation efforts from German into English. She compares various passages in the original German with their English translations by Shaw, comments on certain inaccuracies, to say the least, and calls his performance "tradaptation" (p. 54).

After extensively portraying Shaw's attitude towards translation and translators, Woodsworth follows with "Gertrude Stein and the Making of Translations." She gives a much-needed overview of Stein's literary activities and of her sometimes-ambivalent relation with France and with the French language:

Stein had a sustained and passionate, though conflicted, attachment to Paris, to France, to the French language, and to all things French; translation runs through her life and lifework not only as an occasional literary activity but also as a theme and, to some extent, a fiction. (p. 67-68)

The fictional aspect of translation in Stein's work is what Woodsworth explores through a survey of the several language- and translation-related activities the American author engaged in over the course of her life, during which translation was "both a trope and an actual practice" (p. 78). To write this "story," Woodsworth recounts Stein's stubbornness regarding French, her "tricks" for translating Flaubert, and her ways of dealing with French influences. There is even more to Stein, namely the bilateral translation project she worked on with Georges Hugnet, during which she devised subversive strategies, and her highly controversial collaboration with a Vichy leader. As with Shaw, the chapter dedicated to Stein showcases her complex relationship with foreign languages, not as utilitarian as Shaw's and certainly rooted in her avant-garde project, as well as her own survival in occupied France. As a result, Woodsworth reflects that:

Stein 'translated herself' in the metaphorical sense, and lived her life in translation, deliberately setting out to forge a new self in a new place, to create the persona of a writer and sexually free being in a perpetual state of foreignness and ambiguity. (p. 117)

The chapter on Paul Auster follows. It is no surprise that it begins with Auster's thank-you note to translators everywhere, since translation is at the centre of Auster's writing, creativity, and development as a writer. Very famous for his works of fiction, in which doppelgängers are always upsetting the story line with repeated interventions that aim to destabilize the reader, Auster is also known for his translation work, which was not the case for Shaw and Stein. His kinship with French poets is

certainly well known. A writer and a translator, Auster is also an anthologist, which entails a critical move of mediation that has already been proved to be closely linked with translation (Frank and Essmann 1990). Auster's case underlines reciprocal influence between reading, poetry, prose, critical writing, and translating. As Woodsworth describes Auster's intellectual journey and his devotion to translation, the difference between the latter and the previous two writers emerges. Reverence and critical/creative mediation are intertwined in Auster's posture towards foreign languages and literature. Auster's sociological, historical, and editorial circumstances may perhaps have been more propitious to this engagement, especially when one considers his French experiences and his place in American academic circles.

By depicting Shaw (his belligerence, his inaccuracies, and his "tradaptation"), Stein (her ambivalent yet productive ties to French), and Auster (his oscillation between translation and creative writing), Woodsworth does much more than tell a mere story: she offers another way to approach literature and literary history, one which gives a central role to translation. In fact, we can presume that many other authors, from all ages and belonging to vastly different literary movements, could have been selected to demonstrate the importance of translation. It is a research topic that Woodsworth is certainly inciting us to study, along with the one she exposes in the epilogue, in the section "*I am you and you are me: Translators and writers in recent works of fiction.*" The latter can be related to the contemporary Latin-American literary context described by Martin Gaspar (2014) in *La condición traductora*.

But Woodsworth does not stop here. She follows the present book with *The Fictions of Translation* (2018), a collection of papers that she edited, in which we expect to find fresh perspectives on translation and literary creation.

ROSARIO LÁZARO IGOA  
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina,  
Florianópolis, Brazil

MARTHA PULIDO  
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina,  
Florianópolis, Brazil  
Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia

## REFERENCES

- FRANK, Armin Paul and ESSMANN, Helga (1990): Translation Anthologies: A Paradigmatic Medium of International Literary Transfer. *Amerikastudien/American Studies*. 35(1):21-34.
- GASPAR, Martín (2014): *La condición traductora. Sobre los nuevos protagonistas de la literatura latinoamericana*. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo.

WEISS, Samuel A., ed. (1986): *Bernard Shaw's Letters to Siegfried Trebitsch*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

WEISS, Samuel A. (2000): Bernard Shaw's Further Letters to Siegfried Trebitsch. In: Dan H. LAURENCE and Fred D. CRAWFORD, eds. *Bibliographical Shaw*. Shaw. 20:221-245.

YAO, Steven (2002): *Translation and the Languages of Modernism*. Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

DELISLE, Jean et OTIS, Alain (2016): *Les douaniers des langues. Grandeur et misère de la traduction à Ottawa. 1867-1967*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 491 p.

Qui dit histoire de la traduction au Canada dit Jean Delisle. Professeur émérite de l'Université d'Ottawa, Jean Delisle écrit cette histoire depuis plus de trois décennies. Ses apports à la pédagogie de la traduction mais surtout à l'histoire de la traduction au Canada sont très nombreux. Pensons, notamment, aux ouvrages suivants: *La traduction au Canada: 1534-1984* (Delisle, Gallant, et al. 1987), *Les traducteurs dans l'histoire* (Delisle et Woodsworth 1995), *Portraits de traducteurs* (Delisle 1997), *Portraits de traductrices* (Delisle 2002) et *La terminologie au Canada: Histoire d'une profession* (Delisle 2008).

L'histoire de la traduction au sein du gouvernement fédéral canadien avait déjà fait l'objet d'une étude par Jean Delisle lui-même dans son ouvrage *Au cœur du dialogue canadien. Croissance et évolution du Bureau des traductions du Gouvernement canadien* (1984), publié pour commémorer le cinquantenaire de cet organisme fédéral. Après avoir abordé sommairement l'histoire de la traduction au Canada, de l'arrivée de Jacques Cartier au Canada en 1534 à la création du Bureau en 1934, Delisle reconstruit cinquante ans d'histoire de l'organisme: de son organisation et ses premières innovations, en passant par la diversification des services dans les années 1950 et 1960 (la mise sur pied de l'interprétation simultanée ainsi que d'un centre de terminologie), jusqu'à son rôle en matière de promotion des langues officielles au début des années 1980.

Dans *Les douaniers des langues*, Delisle couvre une période bien plus large. Ainsi, il nous emmène découvrir le fonctionnement des services de traduction dans l'administration fédérale canadienne de 1867, année de la Confédération, à 1967, année du centenaire de cette dernière. Ce passionnant chapitre de l'histoire canadienne est raconté par Delisle de la main d'Alain Otis, ancien professeur de l'Université de Moncton (2002-2014) qui a travaillé au sein du Bureau de la traduction pendant vingt-