

**Michael Cronin.** *Translation Goes to the Movies.* London and New York, Routledge, 2009, 145 p.

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Volume 26, Number 1, 1er semestre 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1036957ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1036957ar>

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Publisher(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN

0835-8443 (print)

1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

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Cite this review

Fraser, R. (2013). Review of [Michael Cronin. *Translation Goes to the Movies.* London and New York, Routledge, 2009, 145 p.] *TTR*, 26(1), 255–258.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1036957ar>

## COMPTES RENDUS

**Michael Cronin.** *Translation Goes to the Movies.* London and New York, Routledge, 2009, 145 p.

Sherry Simon puts it well on the cover: "Michael Cronin is great company at the movies. [He] continues to ask the most pressing questions about cultural and linguistic diversity, and movies turn out to be a wonderfully rich frame of investigation." This is not a book on the translation and inter-cultural distribution of Hollywood films. The latter become, rather, a seductive way to further the discourse on globalized modernity that threads through Cronin's earlier work. The translators in this book do not labor behind the scenes in post-production editing. On the contrary, they are featured as characters in the narratives of popular cinema both past and recent, in films like *A Night at the Opera* (1935), *The Alamo* (1960), *Star Wars* (1977), *Lost in Translation* (2003), and *Babel* (2007). In their fictional worlds, they construct valuable representations of real-world inter-cultural dynamics. Cronin is not a cinema theorist here, but rather a culture theorist who happens to have chosen popular film as a forum to vitalize the key questions of his field.

We are the luckier for it. Cronin takes us into the charmed spaces of Hollywood's dream work, where a conception of translation developed previously in *Translation and Globalization* (2003) and *Translation and Identity* (2006) gains something of a glamorous exterior while losing none of its integrity. Coming to grips with this conception, however, requires a mode of reflection conditioned by the more expansive conceptualities developed by the cultural and post-colonial turns of the last three decades. For Cronin, translation is not confined to the narrow view of an inter-linguistic transfer of texts. It is extended, rather, to encompass any and all modes of mediation within the mobile liminal zones opening up and generating tension between the denizens of different cultures.

Part and parcel of this more expansive conception is Cronin's position on globalization: it is naïve to conceive of this phenomenon simply as a homogenization of world cultures on the model of the West. What globalization entails, on the

contrary, is a new and more profound explicitation of *difference* as cultures, once remote, come into contact in increasingly complex ways, as the liminal zones multiply, generating tension and the need for mediation. This same argument informs the book's first chapter, "Translation: The Screen Test." In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there reigned the illusion that "the picture that moves is a universal language, a way of undoing the mishap of Babel" (p. 1). Silent cinema, Cronin suggests, can be seen as a way of silencing difference and turning the immigrant into the ideal American consumer. Then, after the advent of the talkies, large-scale production, and genre diversification—all coinciding with an increasing international circulation of American movies—it became clear that, like any other migrating object, cinema had to enter into a dynamics of inter-cultural re-contextualization, and would therefore demand mediation.

The rest of the book, chapters two through five, examines representations of the inter-cultural arising from a number of Hollywood films spanning from 1935 to 2006. These chapters are thematically rather than chronologically organized, so I feel justified in a minor quibble regarding their organization: Cronin misses a wonderful opportunity for a meaningful inter-chapter dialogue by separating chapters two and four, "The Frontiers of Translation" and "The Long Journey Home," respectively. These chapters really do belong together—perhaps not integrated in a single chapter, but certainly compared and contrasted in two consecutive chapters—as colonial and post-colonial visions of the same theme: the West's incursion into, and mobility within the space of, the Other.

In chapter two, Cronin takes on the Hollywood Western—*Stagecoach* (1939), *The Alamo* (1960), *Dances with Wolves* (1990)—as a representation of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century frontier, where new territories and peoples are translated into the political state of the colonizer. Here, the hybrid denizens of the liminal zone—the mestizos, the Apache women (Yakima in *Stagecoach*), and the educated Mexican women (Graciela in *The Alamo*)—are either instrumentalized by the colonizers as informants, or simply demonized in their bi-cultural provenance. In every case, their shifting loyalties generate an atmosphere of suspicion around them.

The films examined in chapter four—*Lost in Translation* (2003), *The Interpreter* (2005), and *Babel* (2006)—generate a perfect counter discourse to those of the second chapter. The focus here, as before, is the Western citizen's mobility in the space of the Other. In the post-modern context of these films, however, imperial idealism is replaced by disillusionment and alienation. Here, a liminal zone opens when the cosmopolitan, the self-proclaimed citizen of the world, crashes against the refractory terrain of the local. This crash can take the form of a malaise resulting from an encounter with difference in the foreign metropolis (*Lost in Translation*), or of a real risk of death, incurred either by suspicion surrounding the citizen's role in the global exchange of information (*The Interpreter*), or by the citizen's false conception of a foreign culture made deceptively accessible by the West, compressed spatio-temporally into a series of post card images (*Babel*).

After drama comes comedy and sci-fi fantasy. Chapter three, "Translation Howlers," is about cinema's comic treatment of inter-cultural misunderstanding. Cronin takes us, in a perhaps abrupt half-century leap, from the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera* (1935) and Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940) to *Borat* (2006). Chapter five is about the six Star Wars films, where a number of real-world situations of mediation are given the space camp treatment: the protocol droid C-3PO is the beleaguered interpreter for hostile agents. A host of fantastic secondary characters (androids, monsters, clones of every imaginable stripe) underscores its alien nature by speaking constructed languages translated into English subtitles. An evil empire tightens its grip on the galaxy by suppressing translational modes of communication.

Through it all, Cronin advocates for "the movies"—that loaded term bringing Hollywood production a significant notch down from auteur cinema—by playing deftly with theory's ongoing advocacy for the translator's "visibility" (pp. xii-xiii), challenging the latter to one end and defending it to another. The challenge: the translator is not invisible because he or she has been consistently present—front-and-center in the most visual sense—in many of Hollywood's most popular films. There is no invisibility here, only academe's blinkers, as bias prolongs its suicidal contempt for the objects of popular culture. Ironically, however, it is in this very

same challenge that our continued advocacy for visibility finds its most compelling purchase and defense: there is a pressing need to make popular culture an acceptable terrain of investigation. Our discipline's relevance to future generations depends on it.

### References

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**Áurea Fernández Rodríguez. *Le monde de la bourse en Espagne et en France. Description, glossaire et lexique. La bolsa y su entorno en España y Francia. Descripción, glosario y léxico*. Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2010, 221 p.**

Cet ouvrage publié par les Presses Universitaires du Mirail (PUM) de l'Université Toulouse-Le Mirail présente les résultats d'une étude de corpus menée par Áurea Fernández Rodríguez, professeure titulaire à la Faculté de traduction de l'Université de Vigo. Ce travail se nourrit d'une certaine expérience de la terminographie, puisque l'auteure a collaboré, entre autres, à l'élaboration du *Lexique panlatin de l'énergie éolienne* par la Direction de la normalisation terminologique du Bureau de la traduction du Gouvernement du Canada. La présente livraison, qui s'ajoute à la liste de la collection didactique dédiée aux études hispaniques, sous la rubrique «Amphi 7 – Langues. Espagnol», présente selon une perspective comparative les caractéristiques du monde de la Bourse dans les deux espaces concernés, à savoir la France et l'Espagne.

L'ouvrage s'adresse aux enseignants, chercheurs, professionnels et étudiants de traduction et d'interprétariat de France et d'Espagne, mais s'avère également très utile aux communautés francophones qui s'intéressent aux échanges linguistiques avec l'Espagne et l'Amérique latine. En effet, le texte, rédigé en espagnol,