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Karen Emmerich. *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals.* New York, Bloomsbury, 2017, 224 p.

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Karen Emmerich. *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*. New York, Bloomsbury, 2017, 224 p.

Literary Translation and the Making of Originals by Karen Emmerich (2017) fits in the relatively recent tradition in translation studies which questions the rhetoric of 'fixed originals.' Although Emmerich modestly prefaces her book by mentioning its "immodest goal of challenging the time-honored tradition" (p. 1), she produces a much-needed and most welcome book in the field of literary translation studies. Indeed, although she is not the first scholar to call into question the rhetoric of faithfulness that is so often associated with translation (see Venuti, 1995; Hermans, 2010), she does so by bringing 'originals' down from their pedestal and reassessing that very notion, thus displacing the root cause of the misconceptions surrounding translations to the faulty notion of 'original' itself.

From the title alone, Emmerich sets the tone: 'originals' simply do not exist. They are *made*. So what *makes* an original? Answering this particular question is the central task Emmerich's book sets out to undertake. Throughout the book, she highlights different ways in which an 'original' comes into being, and shows that 'originality' is not an inherent quality that a work possesses, nor does it precede it. On the contrary, she seeks to show that 'originals' are established as such, mostly retroactively (more on that later). Although a substantial part of the book revolves around her corpus, and around the relationship between the so-called 'originals,' their 'source(s),' and their translation(s), Emmerich also addresses the effects the long-held and enduring framework 'original—translation(s)' has had on the agents that are part of it, including (but not limited to) authors and translators.

One of Emmerich's many strengths is her threefold career: she is a translator, a teacher in the field of literary translation, and a scholar specialized in Modern Greek literature, translation practices, and experimental translation. As such, she embodies what she seeks to encourage, namely "sustained and explicit contact" (pp. 12-13) between translation studies and literary studies. She argues that a better understanding of the sources, origins, and creation/editing/translation processes of a text would be beneficial for their study. Conversely, reinvigorating translation and bringing attention to its literary and historical value would mark a departure from the rhetoric of loss and failure from which it suffers.

Literary Translation and the Making of Originals comprises five chapters, which are organized in chronological order (based on the corpus), in turn discussing the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Ancient Greek folk songs, Emily Dickinson, the poetry of C.P. Cavafy, and Jack Spicer's *After Lorca*. Emmerich's corpus features compelling examples that all convincingly dispel the rhetoric of 'originals,' that is to say, the enduring belief that there is such a thing as a unique, stable, and original work (she further states that the use of 'work' in the singular hides the inevitably plural nature of a work). This belief leads to a conception of translation as the dissemination and inevitable impoverishment of the 'original' work.

At first, the choice of corpus might appear extreme, in the sense that most examples exhibit very tumultuous and fragmented creation, reception, editing, and translation processes. However, Emmerich rightfully points out that "extreme is not the same as exceptional" (p. 21). This statement, which applies to her translation of *Glafkos Thrassakis*—"an extreme case [of translingual publication history]" (*ibid.*)—can surely be extended to the whole corpus. Each chapter indeed features a particularly telling example of how obsolete and irrelevant the singular notion of 'original' is, and how inappropriate it is to properly address the complexity of the source material's many (translingual) versions.

Throughout the book, Emmerich recounts three stories (which she calls "origin stor[ies]," p. 2) that prompted her to write the book. These three stories introduce the reader to the main concerns of the book: dispelling the rhetoric of faithfulness that is still present in (literary) translation studies and in the work of translators, calling into question the notion of stable 'original' and the language used to discuss translation, and ultimately bridging the gaps between literary

studies and translation studies, and between theory and practice. Each story also presents the different facets of Emmerich as a translator, a scholar, and a teacher respectively.

In 2000, Emmerich was hired to complete the English translation of the Greek novel *Glafkos Thrassakis* by Vassílis Vassilikós. She was asked to produce a "faithful rendition" (p. 3) of the 763-page novel, which would neither subtract nor add anything to the original work, while adhering to the formal constraint that the English translation be one-third shorter than the 'original.' Her encounter with such an editorial paradox introduces her discussion on "the rhetoric of faithfulness" (*ibid.*). Although standard in translators' contracts in the UK and the US, it is a vague term that fosters an enduring misconception, namely that a translation is meant to be a semantic transfer. Instead of dwelling on the notion of 'faithfulness,' Emmerich simply but convincingly does away with it by dispelling the smokescreen and stating that "[t]he entire translation is a text that did not exist before: *all* the words are added, *all* the words are different" (*ibid.*). Emmerich's goal is to "consolidate, further, and enhance the rigor of the conceptual shifts taking place in [translation studies and textual scholarship]" (p. 210).

This departure from a widely used—yet elusive and problematic—paradigm is Emmerich's steppingstone towards the notion of "interpretive iteration" (p. 1), which she proposes as a substitute for "rhetoric of transfer" (*ibid.*), according to which translation is a matter of mere semantic transfer and equivalence. "Interpretative iteration" better highlights the inevitably interpretative and, therefore, subjective task that translating represents. By proposing a new concept, she also emphasizes the crucial interpretative and editing role that the translator plays in the making of that new iteration. This new paradigm allows Emmerich to argue that a translation is a textual *extension* of an already unstable text, which is itself influenced by the plethora of literary productions that precedes it. This intertextual approach to 'originals' redefines literary works as beginless and endless entities that are all part of a network of textual productions and codes that—to different extents—influence and reshape each other.

Emmerich returns to the 'intertextual' approach of literature in chapter 5: "The Bone-Yard Babel Recombined," in which she states that "writing is fundamentally citational in nature, though a writer's 'sources' may be more diffuse than a translator's" (p. 162). She illustrates this idea by means of Jack Spicer's 1957 book *After Lorca*.

The book features translations and pseudo-translations of Federico García Lorca's poems, and letters that Lorca and Spicer allegedly exchanged (although García Lorca had been dead for 20 years at that point). Emmerich draws on Spicer's notion of 'dictation' (Spicer, 1998), that is to say, his vision of the writer as a radio picking up signals from outer space. Spicer's metaphor echoes Derrida's notion of *différance* (Derrida, 1967), according to which meaning is never really there and endlessly escapes fixation. Emmerich expands Derrida's *semantic* instability to a *textual* instability that takes place "'within' and 'across' languages" (p. 196), and even goes so far as to suggest that the so-called 'original' is already the "afterlife" (p. 20) of the material at hand, thus displacing the origin of a text to a 'there' that cannot ultimately be located.

The conception according to which translations can and should be considered 'originals' is often at the center of debate in literary and translation studies, and has given rise to, among other things, the notion of translator as a 'co-author' and the subsequent instability around the notion of authorship (Pym, 2011). In his writing, Spicer does away with this debate by considering all writing to be, in fact, an act of *rewriting*, a term theorized by André Lefevere in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992). Emmerich's book is in line with Lefevere and Spicer's idea that any derivative of a text, including its translations, is an act of interpretation and rewriting. It ultimately brings her to the heart of her book in which she states that Spicer's work does not posit "translation as 'original' creation" but that it presents "all writing as rewriting, all authorship as multiple and at least partly anonymous, and all claims to authorial originality wishful thinking at best and damaging ideology at worst" (p. 184). This statement alone shows the nature of Emmerich's work, which seeks not only to reassert the value of translations, but also to demonstrate that the notion of 'original' and the hierarchy between an 'original' and its derivatives confine textual studies within a paradigm that will ultimately impoverish its findings, its scope, and its development, while also systematically undermining the importance of translations and translation studies.

The translation of Greek poems, among which "The Bridge of Arta," prompted Emmerich to write chapter 2: "Monument of the Word," in which she examines the historical importance of fixed originals. Folk songs, before they are given a stable form in the pages of heavily edited anthologies, exist in various versions, modes (written

and oral), and forms. Emmerich points out that treating each version of the song as the "faulty rendering of an ideal, inaccessible original" (p. 66) suggests that such an 'original' exists, instead of considering this large body of work as an ensemble of unique iterations of a source material. In that chapter, Emmerich also contextualizes the eagerness to stabilize Greek folk songs as being part of a nation-building effort. She highlights that the notions of stable origin, origin story, and source are fundamentally flawed, as they do not *precede* the building of a work or of a nation but succeed it, in an attempt to stabilize what has already been created. It should be pointed out, however, that this criticism could be directed towards Emmerich herself who, in order to legitimize her book, gives it *origin* stories. This suggests that one cannot escape the language that one seeks to call into question without difficulty (which I also fail to do in this book review). Emmerich herself is nonetheless very much aware of the paradox: "Thus, while I invoke the language of originals and sources throughout this book, I do so largely to contest the understanding of translation that these terms represent" (p. 14). By putting the emphasis on the complexity and the plural nature of 'source texts,' she also acknowledges the complexity of translation as a plural process and product, which, if and when taken into account by scholars, could lead to a more in-depth and complementary analysis of the many iterations (translingual included) of a text (p. 11).

Emmerich's book ends on a coda that features the third origin story of her book. While teaching literature humanities at Columbia University in early 2000, Emmerich noticed that the topic of translation was seldom brought up and when it was, it was usually done within the "rhetoric of failure, shortcoming, or inadequacy" (p. 192), that is to say, in a way that heavily suggests that translation cannot measure up to the 'original' and necessarily represents a loss. As her frustration with the lack of consideration grew, Emmerich took to revising the syllabus in order to include more resources on the 'origin(s)' of a text, its editorial journey(s), and its multiple manifestations. She suggests that doing so is the condition to avoid circling back to the sterile notion of 'original' and the passé tendency to dismiss translation as a transfer of meaning that inevitably loses the substance of the 'original.' Furthermore, being aware of the mediated nature of translations allows readers to keep the consequences of the mediation in mind, whatever they may be, instead of treating the translations as faithful—yet of lesser quality and importance—

renditions of the 'original' work. As Emmerich reminds her students: "we are reading not Dante's words but Alan Mandelbaum's" (p. 193). Although this particular aspect may seem obvious for most translators and translation studies scholars, it is still commonplace—almost intuitive—for readers to take that shortcut which, if never closely examined, will keep the hierarchy between 'original' and 'translation(s),' and the translator's invisibility alive.

Questioning the rhetoric of loss and failure is central to Emmerich's book, as she actively seeks to deconstruct it and replace it with an entirely different and less hierarchical approach that accounts for a more flexible conception of literature as a whole. The coda adds a pedagogical dimension to her book, emphasizing her desire for her consideration not to be limited to the academic realm, but also to seep into the practical and professional space of translation and translators, and of whoever relies on them. This last aspect is crucial to Emmerich's thesis: instead of suggesting changes in the way we translate, like Lawrence Venuti (1995) and Douglas Robinson (1997) did, she urges for a change in "our broader cultural discourse [on translation], including academic conversations" (p. 193).

Emmerich's book is a needed addition to the field of literary translation. Not only does it suggest a different paradigm to approach Literary Studies/literature, Translation Studies/translation, and the teaching of these disciplines, it also does so in a way that combines them and that constantly seeks to bring theory and practice together. Her goal is ultimately to bridge gaps and start an interdisciplinary dialogue that would reinvigorate each discipline. Her corpus spans several eras, going back to the history of the rhetoric of 'original' while also discussing its contemporary (perverse) effects based on Dickinson's, Cavafy's and Spicer's works. At different points in the book, Emmerich takes a step back to offer a neutral and open-minded vision of translation and its problematic approach in many circles. As an example, she discusses the latest edition of Emily Dickinson's poems. While some would consider it the most 'faithful' (it contains facsimiles of the bits and pieces on which she wrote, and extensively features her alternative word choices), Emmerich warns the reader not to be misled. Although it intuitively seems right, it still fosters the rhetoric of faithfulness, while also suggesting an idea of progress over time. Emmerich highlights that new editions are not better or worse, more faithful or less faithful. Or if they are, she argues, it is because they have been adapted to the tastes and expectations of the time.

As for the future of translation, Emmerich raises an interesting point when she states that the "annotated share" (remix, retweet, mashup, etc.) has become "deeply embedded in everyday popular practice" (p. 26), so much so that it might not be considered "necessary, desirable or relevant" (*ibid.*) to conceal the presence of translators anymore. This statement suggests new possibilities and new ways to approach translation, as a form of annotation of a text that has already been annotated, thus reframing 'originals' and 'translations' as interpretative iterations endlessly interwoven in a much larger web of textual practices.

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Les directeurs de cet ouvrage, Marc Lacheny, Nadine Rentel et Stephanie Schwerter, réussissent-ils le pari qu'ils se sont lancés, soit d'aboutir à une définition de l'erreur culturelle et de « briser le carcan