TTR
Traduction, terminologie, rédaction

Douglas Robinson. *Transgender, Translation, Translingual Address*. London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2019, 248 p.

Ben De Witte

de près ou de loin, du monde langagier : et pourquoi pas, pour commencer, celles des clients et des employeurs !

Références

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In the Preface to his latest book, Douglas Robinson admonishes the reader that *Transgender, Translation, Translingual Address* "is not a book about transgenderism" but "about dialogical engagements between and among communities" and, not least of all, "about translationality/translinguality across sex/gender divides" (p. x). Two ideas undergirding the reasoning behind these statements merit close attention, as they go to the heart of this study. First, and despite the author's conviction that most people to varying degrees of awareness actually experience gender identity on a nonbinary continuum ("in the sense of being in the middle, […] being on (or off) some kind of gender spectrum," p. xxvii), Robinson affirms that he is a cisman who will not speak for transgender men and women. His point with this study is to insist on the inherent limitations of any perspective on transgender in a range of contexts that are under investigation. The book's theoretical underpinnings draw on Michel Callon and Bruno Latour's understanding of translation as an act of manipulation in which one or several actors wield an "authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force" (1981, p. 279, in Robinson, p. xvii). This is where the second idea (regarding "dialogical engagements between and among communities") comes in: in four chapters and a conclusion, the book forges a series of dialogical encounters between sometimes remarkably divergent—or even opposing—perspectives, relying on the premise that "[i]n the very act of *crossing-over between*

this side and that side of whatever boundary one cares to posit, those dialogues are trans(versal): translingual, at least, and arguably transgender" (p. xxix; italics in the original). This statement reveals a flexible use of the prefix *trans* as a convenient figure for traversing fixed boundaries (be they conceived as linguistic, or in terms of gender) that is also apparent in Robinson's concern with what he calls "*[t]ranslingual address*. This is a term for *transitional intersubjectivity*, the hermeneutical movement of a *subject-in-transit*" (p. xi; italics in original). Citing Naoki Sakai's notion of heterolingual address as a model for ethical engagement with translation in the context of inter- and intracultural communication (see Sakai, 1997), Robinson's aim with this study is thus to manage a transformative dialogue between translation studies and transgender studies that encourages an "ability to shift attitudinally, perspectively" (p. xi) across academic disciplines, language communities and subject positions.

As even this succinct description of the book's key terms suggests, Robinson offers a resolutely theoretical (rather than practical) investigation into mostly metaphorical terrain shared by transgender and translation. Robinson thereby capitalizes on the semantic valences of *trans* to denote a dynamic crossing-over between languages (*trans* in translation), between gender identities (*trans* in transgender), and between cis- and trans communities caught in the challenges of (*trans*lingual) communication. This expansive approach allows for a wide-ranging scope and a host of topics that are joined for analysis with an interdisciplinary array of theories and concepts. While occasionally dense and serpentine in its manner of exposition, the book's central premise remains clear: transgender and translation are at heart a problem of address (a form of "speaking for others" in Callon and Latour's sense), which for Robinson greatly matters beyond whether one identifies as cis or trans; rather, his aim is to query all claims of belonging "on *another* side of that boundary or barrier" (p. xvi; italics in original). Or as the author has it, the book "is an experiential participation in communal acrossness" (p. x).

Robinson follows up on the highly condensed ideas expounded in the book's Preface in four chapters that set out to construct a translingual address between and across various languages, communities, and epistemological frameworks. Chapter One, "Why Should Cisnormative Translation Scholars Care About Translation and Transgender?," situates the book in a genealogy of scholarly works that have previously dealt with the intersection between translation and issues

in gender, queerness and transgender. This chapter also illustrates the stakes of "speaking for others" with an extended comparison of two English translations of *takatapui*, a Maori term for nonbinary gender. Chapter Two, "The Semiosphere Must Be Fed at Least Two Languages," draws on Juri Lotman's model of cultural semiotics to contrast two strikingly different conceptual approaches to transgender: the positivistic logic of feminist analytic philosopher Christine Overall and an LGBT novel by Finnish writer Otto Lehtinen. Preferring the novel's attention to the complex phenomenology of lived experience over the crystalline binary reasoning of analytic philosophy, this chapter clears the way for the dense theoretical explorations of Chapter Three, "New Worlds (The Emergence of the Unexpected): Gender as Dissipative System." Here Robinson draws on concepts from chaos theory, as developed by physicist Ilya Prigogine, to suggest an analogous interpretation of gender and translation as always potentially "symmetry-breaking events" (p. 87) that have a capacity for destabilizing our unreflective bias toward what Robinson calls "icotic" (p. xxiii)—that is, plausible or predictable—interpretation. The author further applies Prigogine's ideas to Mikhail Bakhtin's linguistic theory of heteroglossia, promptly declaring that language too creates states of "transglossia" (p. 92). The chapter ends by analyzing the linguistic registers of transgender representation in a selection of Finnish and Anglophone literary texts. Chapter Four, "Becoming-Trans: The Rhizomatic of Gender," turns to the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to reveal emergent nonbinary modes of being and knowing in selected transgender and genderqueer writing. This conceptual thread is continued in the book's final statement, "Concludingly: (Peri)Performative Becoming-Queer," which briefly revises queer theory's early investment in J.L. Austin's speech act theory in light of the book's conceptual armature.

Though this summary is by no means exhaustive in listing all the book's references to concepts from transgender and queer studies, translation studies, sociology, literary theory, linguistics and various philosophical traditions, it should give a reasonable sense of the eclectic range of theories, terms and neologisms that Robinson brings to the table to articulate a capacious view on translation. In this regard, the book calls to mind a number of recent studies that purposefully aim to expand the intellectual purchase of translation

studies on today's world.[4] While Robinson regularly turns to examples from his own practice as a translator (for instance in his compelling discussion of the specific challenges involving the translation of Finnish verb tenses that inform the "transdiegetic" voice in narration (p. 57) in Lehtinen's novel), the term *translation* in this book appears to be mostly synonymous with the much broader and abstract concept of translingual address. Perhaps this makes Robinson's book a timely example of "an Outward Turn" in translation studies, as recently observed in Susan Bassnett and David Johnston's plea for a "practice of translation, broadly conceived as the outworking of translational processes, [that] operates in terrains well beyond the textual" (2019, p. 186). Bassnett and Johnston argue that such a practice might involve, among other things, pointed attention for "the key human processes of becoming and being, of change and cognition" (*ibid.*).

Bassnett and Johnston's call for an emphasis in translation research on processes of "becoming and being" and "change and cognition" seems also instructive for grasping Robinson's project, not least in his elastic use of *trans* as both a heuristic aid and an ontological statement. This is an enabling approach in that it enhances the book's scope for reflection on points of connection between translation and transgender. However, this manner of argumentation sometimes risks that Robinson's terms of analysis appear to be collapsed into each other, resulting in a loss of specificity. The book's content and style occasionally require the reader to jump through hoops, but its strength and originality may ultimately also lie in this self-conscious manner of presentation, starting with Robinson's decision to consistently use *only* gender-neutral pronouns (ze/zir, instead of he/him and she/her) throughout. The book as such arguably enacts what it aims for: a translingual address that invites translation scholars to consider a range of linguistic, epistemological and social issues from the vantage point of transgender, and vice versa. This also suggests a constructive answer to Robinson's lingering uncertainty about the study's ideal audience: "what group am I writing [this book] for? Queer people? Trans people? Translators and translation scholars? I don't really know" (p. 200). Implicit in this disclaimer is a gesture towards a variety of

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4. Michael Cronin's recent book on eco-translation, which Robinson approvingly cites for the manner in which Cronin projects a new "ecology of attention that discusses questions of values, ends and sustainability" (2017, pp. 24-25, in Robinson, p. 9), is another case in point.

interest groups that will be engaged with this book's active search for a suitable mode of address to traverse uncharted territories between translation studies and transgender studies.

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Rachel Weissbrod and Ayelet Kohn. *Translating the Visual. A Multimodal Perspective.* Londres et New York, Routledge, 2019, 223 p.

S'inscrivant dans le champ de la traduction littéraire, Rachel Weissbrod et Ayelet Kohn prennent acte de la nouvelle circulation des œuvres, non seulement d'un pays à l'autre et d'une langue à l'autre, mais d'un média à l'autre. Les productions culturelles contemporaines sont en effet de plus en plus protéiformes, associant musique, vidéo et danse (*This ain't Europe*) ou encore texte, illustration et peinture (*Ezekiel's World*), mais un recueil de poèmes peut aussi successivement se transformer en album pour enfants, être mis en musique et monté sur scène (*The Sixteenth Sheep*). Dans la lignée des précédentes recherches menées par Weissbrod (2004), l'ouvrage *Translating the Visual. A Multimodal Perspective* s'intéresse à de multiples formes de transferts et fait délibérément le choix d'écarter la traduction interlinguistique pour se concentrer uniquement sur l'intrasémiotique. Un choix radical, en ce qu'il élargit le concept de traduction (et de traducteur) à l'extrême, jusqu'en des contrées nouvelles, dont Weissbrod et Kohn proposent un intéressant défrichage.