

Review

Patrick O'Neill. *Polyglot Joyce: Fictions of Translation*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto P, 2005, 301 pp.

The Nobel Prize writer Octavio Paz, well known for his insightful comments on translation, maintains that Western literature should be conceived as an integral whole in which the central protagonists are not national traditions but styles and trends. Paz claims that styles pass from one language to another so that a work, although “rooted in its own verbal soil” (160), is not isolated but exists in relation to other works composed in different languages. The writer, who thinks of translation in terms of “transmutation” and “intercrossing,” argues that “the plurality of languages, and the singularity of the works produce neither complete diversity nor disorder, but quite the opposite: a world of interrelationships made up by contradictions and harmonies, unions and digressions” (160).¹

This notion of translation as a special form of textuality, always revealing meaningful interrelationships between an original text and its diverse and plural versions, seems to have inspired Patrick O'Neill's latest book, which focuses precisely on exploring the “interesting ways in which the entire corpus of Joyce translations can be regarded as a single and coherent object of study” (3). As O'Neill explains in the introduction, his title refers to the multiplicity of “Joyces” available to readers throughout different languages and cultures. According to the scholar, all these Joyces are different and yet all the same, complementary and supplementary, thus conforming to what he envisions as a “polyglot macrotext.”

O'Neill's approach proposes to further the work done by Fritz Senn, “the foremost practitioner of Joycean translation studies,” since as O'Neill announces, where Senn's model interprets translations essentially as commentaries on the original text, “the transtextual model I am proposing reads translation as continuation and extension of the original text which expands in the process to *include* its translations” (13). *Polyglot Joyce* is thus an ambitious project which clearly succeeds in

¹ See Paz's “Translation: Literature and Letters,” in *Theories of Translation*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 152-163.

providing a thorough and up-to-date history of Joyce in translation. One of the many valuable assets of this study lies precisely in the fact that it goes beyond the already existing work on individual translations and offers instead a wide-ranging comparative analysis of different translations of Joyce's texts across time and space. O'Neill's insightful comments as he exhaustively surveys the spread of Joyce translations brim with his extraordinary linguistic sensitivity as well as his exceptional knowledge of the formal and thematic intricacies of Joyce's fiction as they emerge in translation.

The book is divided into three main sections: "Part One: Macrotextual Joyce"; "Part Two: Sameness and Difference" and "Part Three: Transtextual Joyce." The first part is extremely informative: not only does O'Neill chart the gradual development of translations of Joyce's fiction from the 1920s to the 1940s (if anything, one regrets that he does not include here a longer chronological account) and revise the different language systems which have contributed to the overall polyglot Joyce system, but furthermore, he provides very relevant comments which foster understanding of the impact of Joyce's work in international contexts. Thus, readers learn in this section, among other interesting data, that *Dubliners* has been the most translated text (no fewer than seventy-two separate times, into a total of thirty-seven different languages), whereas *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has been translated fifty-three separate times, into a total of thirty-one different languages, and *Ulysses* forty-three separate times, into a total of thirty-two different languages. As for *Finnegans Wake*, O'Neill indicates that complete translations exist only in French, German, Japanese and Dutch (with versions in Italian and Portuguese well under way) and explains that "fragmentary or abridged versions that can raise some claim to be representative of the whole exist only in Hungarian, Spanish and Russian" (35).

The book's first part also includes an extended discussion of the reception of Joyce in France where, as O'Neill explains, the author was enthusiastically admired by an influential group of unconditional supporters including the writer Valery Larbaud and the bookstore owners Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier. O'Neill, who demonstrates that Joyce participated actively in monitoring the reception of his translations after his arrival in Paris in 1920, concludes that, although the "French Joyce system" is "relatively conservative," especially in terms of the limited number of translations produced, the versions of *Ulysses* and *Portrait* crafted in the 1920s now have the status of emblematic texts because of their high and "enduring quality" (48). The singularities of the

German and Italian systems are also explored in depth in this section, which ends with a chapter in which other individual linguistic and cultural contexts (European and non-European) are examined. As O'Neill admits, this chapter is developed through a more impressionistic style, yet he manages to furnish significant glimpses of many interesting aspects specific to particular languages and texts. As, for example, when he explains that the 1945 Spanish translation of *Dubliners* reduplicates a number of peculiar choices already occurring in the 1926 French translation, thus putting into practice the notion of reading Joyce "transtextually."

The importance of a "transtextual" reading which compares individual translations becomes precisely the focus of the book's other two parts. In the second, O'Neill stresses the concept of translation as a negotiation "between attempted sameness and necessary difference" (98), and accordingly develops an examination, mainly in *Dubliners*, of the translators' negotiations in different languages and cultures, as shown by the divergent strategies employed by individual translators to convey the same meanings. A whole chapter is devoted to discussing the translation of titles, not only of the three major novels, but also of the stories, since, according to the author, the titles function to contribute to the generation of indeterminacy, doubtless one of the most distinctive effects of Joyce's fiction. O'Neill, who appropriately remarks that the different translators' choices suggest significantly different readings, covers here many interesting cases in several languages, identifies variations within the same language and concludes that in general the translations inevitably restrict and neutralize the potential of the original.

I could not agree more with O'Neill when he observes that, ultimately, what is at stake here is "the degree to which a text is to be domesticated in its new language or allowed to retain cultural traces of its original language and culture" (100). In this respect, I specifically regret that he does not include a single reference to the work of Lawrence Venuti, one of the most challenging contemporary translation scholars, well-known for his approach to translation as "domestic inscription" and for his view of the translated text as a text affected always by domestic interests and intelligibilities. (Another significant absence is Walter Benjamin, whose "The Task of the Translator" addresses some of the major concerns at work here). In the third part of his book, O'Neill himself examines the decisions of different translators of *Dubliners* and the subsequent effects of those decisions in several Italian, French, German and Spanish versions produced at different stages. Moreover, the examples from the Spanish translations of Sánchez (1954), Muslera

(1961), Cabrera Infante (1972) and Chamorro (1993) are contrasted with their Portuguese, Galician and Catalan counterparts, a level of attention that symptomatically evidences not only the author's rigorous research, but also his own polyglot sensitivity.

In another section, O'Neill discusses in depth both the opening paragraph and the ending of *Ulysses* with the "modest aim" of accounting for the "transtextual metamorphosis" (158) of the novel. Even if, as the scholar acknowledges, the fragments chosen are not representative of such an extraordinarily complex novel, he does manage to point out central questions with regard to translation difficulties, mainly in reference to aspects introduced previously in his theoretical discussions: "the pervasive indeterminacy of his works; the densely textured structural and verbal networks that inform them; the encyclopaedic employment in them of every imaginable variety of paronomasia, witticism, rhetorical device, and word play" (71). Equally suggestive, rather than exhaustive, is the chapter "Finnegans Wakes," restricted to a transtextual reading of several versions of *FW* 3.01-3 and followed by a final chapter devoted to comparing translations of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* in which special attention is paid to García Tortosa's proposals. In this respect, the final chapter demonstrates again that O'Neill's work is not only very well documented, since he manages to incorporate examples from so many different linguistic domains, but also speaks for the author's profound understanding of the way in which linguistic registers work in the Joycean context. Thus, his comments on the translations of "don't be dabbling" as "y no salpiques" (Pozanco, 1993) "y no despatickes" (García Tortosa, 1992) is most eloquent: "García Tortosa is more overtly Wakean, suggesting something like 'don't go rushing things and splashing about' by conflating *despacharse* with a hint of *salpicar*, but also somewhat unexpectedly invoking St Patrick—associated with water by virtue of his efforts to baptize the Irish and here temporarily doubling (even dabbling) as an avatar of that other great Irishman HCE" (207).

Polyglot Joyce provides an extremely useful bibliographic background for anyone wishing to approach the study of Joyce in translation, as it includes an astounding list of precious references concerning both translations and works of criticism. Without question, this solid effort succeeds in demonstrating the relevance of Joyce for translation studies and, likewise, offers an unprecedented reading of Joyce in the light of translation theories and practices. O'Neill's book is extraordinarily meticulous and systematic, while at the same time providing an innovative framework for those wishing to read Joyce in the

multilingual context which ultimately defined the writer's personality and creative genius.

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