

GÜRÇAĞLAR, ŞEHNAZ TAHİR (2008): *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 331 p.

Sherry Simon

Volume 55, numéro 2, juin 2010

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/044249ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/044249ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (imprimé)

1492-1421 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Simon, S. (2010). Compte rendu de [GÜRÇAĞLAR, ŞEHNAZ TAHİR (2008): *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 331 p.] *Meta*, 55(2), 412–413. <https://doi.org/10.7202/044249ar>

Nous avons vu ici la sphère francophone mais d'autres lecteurs, sans qu'il soit besoin de changer de continent, songeront aux sphères lusophone ou hispanophone et tous penseront à la question de la norme. Il y a dans les présentes contributions matière à nourrir copieusement leur réflexion.

PHILIPPE THOIRON

Université Lumière Lyon 2, Lyon, France

RÉFÉRENCE

DE VILLERS, Marie-Éva (2003): *Multidictionnaire de la langue française*. 4^e éd. Montréal: Québec-Amérique.

GÜRÇAĞLAR, ŞEHNAZ TAHİR (2008): *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 331 p.

Rarely has translation played as important an official political role as it did during the early years of the Turkish Republic. In this important book, Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar provides a detailed study of both the politics and the poetics of translation beginning in 1923 – when the Republic was proclaimed under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, through the founding of the *Translation Bureau* in 1940 until its dissolution in 1966. The role that translation played in the shaping of culture in the new republic was considerable – not only in terms of book production and consumption but also in the discourse around the *Renaissance* of Turkish literature through translation.

The story of the early heroic efforts to promote literacy and national consciousness through literature – and through a whole set of other reforms (language and alphabet) and institutions (the setting up of *Village Institutes* and *People's Houses*) is a fascinating one. Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar is a rigorous and imaginative researcher, and she brings this compelling story to life. We learn that although one thinker thought that a five-year period would be sufficient to introduce Western script, and another ventured three years, by the time the actual law was passed Atatürk had decided that three months would suffice for people to learn the new script. The law was enacted on November 3, 1928, and the first book in Latin script published on January 1, 1929. From then on, the change was dramatic and definitive. It is also important to recall that at the time of the debates, a mere 10% of the population was literate and so such authoritarian decisions were indeed feasible.

The first part of the study provides a particularly clear overview of the relation between language, nationalism, westernization, and Atatürk's reforms. Gürçağlar sheds important light on the

ways in which Turkish nationalist attitudes towards language were both similar to and different from those held, for instance, by Benedict Anderson. Intrinsic to the Turkish idea of humanism was the idea that adopting influences from the West was a way for Turkey to become *more itself*. This paradox of translation (also clearly enunciated in the ideas of Mme de Staël, for instance) is adopted in opposition to a narrower idea of national self-sufficiency. Insight is given into the various debates and differing opinions from the 1850s onwards.

Gürçağlar covers both external and internal aspects of translation activity. The larger context includes the process of planning culture in Turkey, as well as the changes introduced in 1946 when a multiparty system was introduced and culture was *de-planned*. She examines in detail the discourse on translation, including the important debates that were waged in the journal of the *Translation Bureau*. Important chapters are devoted to the market for translated literature as well as the whole category of popular literature and literature for *the people*. The heart of the book consists of several in-depth case studies involving on the one hand two important writers and translators of popular literature, Selami Münir Yurdatap and Kemal Tahir, as well as a chapter devoted to translations of *Gulliver's Travels*. The descriptive analysis of these works demonstrates that the translations, as works published in the field of children's and popular literature, did not conform to the norms upheld in the field of canonical literature. Gürçağlar definitively proves that the official activities of the *Translation Bureau* and its spokespeople by no means controlled the norms of translation across the board, and that the activities and norms of translation were diverse.

Gürçağlar's methodology is very explicit. Adopting the framework of Descriptive Translation Studies, she uses the core vocabulary to great effect. This allows her to proceed systematically through the very large task she has undertaken. At the same time, Gürçağlar argues for adjustments to the theory, in particular – following Daniel Simeoni – in arguing for increased attention to the subjectivity and agency of the translator. The analysis of the work of Tahir, in particular, testifies to such a need.

The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960 is a rich source of information and analysis. Joining the studies of translation in Ottoman Turkey initiated by Saliha Paker, it lays solid groundwork for further studies of the translation landscape in modern Turkey. It provides one of the best overviews, to date, of the place of translation within the radical modernization process of the new republic, and it demonstrates the remarkable appeal of Turkey as an atypical historical example of a Renaissance through translation. Or, to be

more precise, it demonstrates the way in which all *Renaissances*, western and non-western, have to be reexamined in their sometimes contradictory appeal to classical sources as an instrument of modernization.

SHERRY SIMON
Concordia University, Montréal, Canada

HAYES, JULIE CANDLER (2009): *Translation, Subjectivity and Culture in France and England, 1600-1800*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 321 p.

No need to be a specialist of the Early Modern or Classical period in France and England to appreciate or profit from this study. By reading the writings of translators during this two-century span – on both sides of the Channel – Hayes unearths and analyzes a huge body of literature on translation and shows how the theme of translation is itself an *intersection* of crucial questions in the history of ideas.

This is a remarkably ambitious study, the fruit of long years of rigorous and patient research. The material which is explored is vast – two centuries of writing on translation in both France and England. A basic corpus of some 450-500 works include translators' prefaces but also polemical writings, treatises, pedagogical manuals and other documents from the end of the sixteenth century through the 1790s. The book broadly follows the evolution of writing exclusively concerned with classical references to the emergence of the modern idea of *literature*. Hayes engages with the texts as historical documents, products of the intellectual debates of the day, but does not shy away from engaging with them on contemporary terrain. And indeed the study is animated by the ideas of Lévinas, Nancy and Derrida, thinkers who invoke the philosophical dimensions of otherness – the modes of *unsettling*, of *withness*, of exposure, that are raised by translation.

The first two chapters offer a broad survey of seventeenth-century translators' reflections in France and Britain – first focusing on d'Ablancourt and the Jansenist translators at Port-Royal, and the more political reflections in Britain chiefly raised by those who had been in exile in France during the Civil War. Separate chapters are devoted to John Dryden and to Anne Dacier, in the context of the many figures who gravitated around or were influenced by them. Rather than concentrating on the theme of national identity, Hayes focuses rather on the ways in which attention to language grew through issues of translation in chapters on women translators and on the translation of modern languages.

What needs to be emphasized is the thorough but light-handed treatment which Hayes gives to her vast corpus of materials. Following on Glyn Norton's important study of translation in Renaissance France (1984), and the now classic work of Luce Guillemet for the xvith century in France (1988) Hayes reveals the complexities of a discourse which has been either dismissed as ethnocentric (Venuti) or reduced to formulaic cliché (Cary). Two themes are especially important. The first is the relation to the past. We habitually credit the nineteenth century with the dawning of historical consciousness, says Hayes, but the modalities of that discourse are already present in the xviiith. Questioning of the classics and of their place in the modern world form the basis of an ongoing discussion that cannot be reduced to a single position, and indeed Hayes shows that discourse on translation plays a part in the expansion of a space for debate and critique that becomes the Enlightenment. The second and perhaps most important theme is that of the materiality of language. A recurring thread of analysis points to the "emotive, expressive, nonvehicular dimension of language, a form of linguistic embodiment of eloquence, transubstantiation, genie [...]" (p. 250) during this entire period. Because translation deconstructs and reconstructs the world, it highlights the artificiality of language, and discussion of translation contributes to the many polemics around word order, usage, clarity and language difference that animated this long period. Because the intent of the book is to analyze discourse on translation rather than the translations themselves, there is no sustained engagement with works such as Roger Zuber's landmark *Les Belles infidèles et la formation du goût classique* (1995). And so what is revealed is rather the *fact* of sustained engagement with the theme of translation rather than any single characterization of the translations themselves.

This is a book of first-rate scholarship, embracing a period broad enough to show major patterns of change and yet careful in its readings of individual texts. Thoughtful and perceptive, gracefully written, it sets high standards for historical translation studies. The elegance of the content is announced by its marvelously evocative jacket cover, the *Still Life with Books, Mirrors and Lenses* by Ephraim Rubenstein, which – with the doubling of its jumble of text and prisms – is one of the most effective images of translation I have seen.

SHERRY SIMON
Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

REFERENCE

- ZUBER, Roger (1995): *Les Belles infidèles et la formation du goût classique*. Bibliothèque de l'Évolution de l'Humanité. Paris: Albin Michel.