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COMPTES RENDUS

Helen Vassallo. *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies: Intersectional Activism in Translation and Publishing.* New York and London, Routledge, 2023, 160 p.

In *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies: Intersectional Activism in Translation and Publishing*, Helen Vassallo outlines a feminist agent-based approach to translation studies, which shifts the focus of the analysis from the translated text to its translator and the other agents involved in the chain of publication. She builds on Andrew Chesterman's (2009) identification of a new subdiscipline that he calls translator studies, and she focuses mainly on five publishers who act as advocates for the representation of cultures challenging the allegedly universal Eurocentric view of the world. The firms that are the object of the case studies are five small independent British publishing houses, whose publishers are trying to dismantle familiar narratives and consumer expectations in their own way. Their mission statements and comments about their activity are presented through the interviews Vassallo conducted with some of the publishers and translators involved.

The purpose of the book is to demonstrate how every agent can and has to be held accountable in the promotion of intersectional social justice activism, while unveiling the biases underlying the chain of publication of translated literature. The author believes that lasting change can start anywhere; for example, it can be fostered by small publishing houses that set the example through their committed activism. Sociological feminism is strictly intertwined with a translation studies approach, as confirmed by the companions chosen for the analysis: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and Sarah Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). Vassallo explains that the former stands for actively rethinking the inherent preconceptions that societies have of women's roles in them, which here champions equality for women in translation. The most prevalent idea is that translated literature should give voice to what Ngozi Adichie (2014, p. 46) refers to as the "full humanity of women" (Vassallo, 2023, p. 10), thereby encouraging an international and intersectional feminism which is further developed by Sara Ahmed. "Challenging the universal" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 29) becomes the main

rallying cry of *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies*, with recourse to action, representation, responsibility, risk, and hospitality. The book is divided into five chapters, each convincingly linking one of these concepts to one of the five publishing houses investigated, although they are also often interconnected.

The first chapter is centred on action. And Other Stories is a publishing house founded by Stefan Tobler in 2010 with the aim of promoting works that might otherwise not be published in English as not conventionally appealing to the general public. It was the only UK-based publishing house that accepted Kamila Shamsie's 2015 call for action to make 2018 the "Year of Publishing Women," thereby disclosing the substantial gender gap in publishing and giving women writers more visibility. Moreover, as And Other Stories encourages especially translated literature, adherence to this initiative acted on the double marginality of women both in writing and in translation. Vassallo hypothesizes that the provocation regarding 2018 was mostly discarded for three possible reasons: the risk-averse nature of publishing, complacency, and expectation bias (adding "identification" in the fifth chapter). Risk becomes particularly relevant in a post-pandemic world, she explains, since humans tend to avoid it even more now, looking for reassurance in the familiar and in the "normal." However, translated literature questions and subverts these notions, as the case studies demonstrate. And Other Stories offers an alternative narrative to a male-dominated industry, taking a public stance as a feminist publisher. Even though the long-term effects of this decision cannot yet be assessed, the positive response to the "Year of Publishing Women" has already resulted in more books written by women being proposed to the publishing house, the lack of which was one of the problems Tobler identified for women in translation (the other being that books written by men are still considered more "important"). That is why he suggests a "structural change" (p. 34) and promotes it through action.

The second chapter investigates the concept of representation. Founded in 2016 by Carolina Orloff and Samuel McDowell in order to present new works from Latin America to the English-speaking world, Charco Press tries to counteract the misconception that Latin American literature is fully represented by a few established writers mostly in the magic realism genre, and focuses instead on what is currently being written and discussed. The activism of the publishers is both literary and social, as it helps foster new perceptions of

Latin America in an Anglophone context, the publishers referring to their work as a “bridge’ between cultures” (p. 49), a translation studies metaphor that Vassallo adapts to the publishers of translations themselves. The bridge implies the representation of an unapologetically different “other,” which is welcomed on its own terms, even when identification is impossible. Charco Press is also guided by intrinsically feminist ideas, even though it is not overtly promoting gender equality as much as the other publishing houses seem to be. The outcome is that there is no gender gap between the publication of works by women and men; on the contrary, there is an even higher percentage of texts written by women. More importantly, Charco Press publishers find common ground with feminist translator studies in providing a full image of women in literature. To this end, they do not reduce the issue to simplistic stereotypes of women writing about “female” topics, contrasting as such the expectation bias of what women should supposedly write about.

The issue addressed in the third chapter is responsibility. Comma Press is the oldest publishing house in this study. Ra Page, its founder, recognizes the necessity of having a diverse representation of writers in terms of both gender and culture, including texts from Africa and the Middle East. Page aims to present the unfamiliar through a focus on theme and genre rather than on what he calls the “cult-of-author” (p. 73). To increase the visibility of unknown writers, he includes their work in short story anthologies, inserting texts that challenge the “proven formula” (p. 79) of publishing; they are selected based on criteria of equality and diversity. As to feminist translator studies, since Comma Press is focused on social activist themes, Vassallo explains that its approach favours an intersectional inclusion of women of different classes, races, and cultures, whose place next to men in the anthologies is normalized and not limited to consumer expectations of allegedly “female” topics. The publishing house also sets an example for its mode of operation, which empowers (both established and emerging) translators to pitch for innovative works, and is “pioneering in its use of this rich resource, drawing not only on English-language translators but also on source language translators who know the culture and the context, and using editors to refine the finished work and make it more linguistically authentic where necessary” (p. 77). Comma Press illustrates how publishers and translators can work together to promote translated literature outside

the mainstream, actively positioning themselves in what Page explains in terms of a “cultural war” (p. 83) against familiar narratives.

The fourth chapter is focused on “risk.” The mission statement of Fitzcarraldo Editions, founded in 2014 by Jacques Testard, is “to publish ambitious writing, to take risks where bigger presses might not, and to publish in an old-school way, staying small so as never to have to publish a book for commercial reasons” (p. 97). Striving to discover “future classics” (*ibid.*), Fitzcarraldo’s catalogue has the same percentage of English and translated works, counteracting the prevailing Anglocentrism in the United Kingdom publishing world, even though its active resistance against Eurocentrism has only just started with the first translations of Arabic literature. However, gender equality is already well-established in the press, which proposes works written by as many women as men. Testard has built a “network of trusted translators” (p. 101), which is evidence of the significance of the agents involved in the chain of publication, as translators suggest risky and heterogeneous works that have to be accepted before being promoted by publishers. Thanks to the prizes it has received, Fitzcarraldo Editions demonstrates that power and privilege can be used to systematically empower and give visibility to less represented groups and cultures.

The last chapter proposes the notion of “hospitality.” Tilted Axis Press, founded in 2015 by Deborah Smith, seeks to decolonize translation, tilting the axis of translated literature towards what has been marginalized by the Eurocentric inclinations of British presses in terms of both culture and gender. Its approach is centred on collaboration, engaging “deliberately and politically with problems of exclusion within the industry” (p. 123) through reliance on networks of translators and other agents who enforce the concept of allyship towards less-represented authors. Furthermore, Smith acknowledges the imbalance and inequality of promotion and literary prizes in the industry: the former is strictly related to funding and the scarce support that authors may receive in their country of origin, which makes it even more challenging to discover and translate them, whereas the latter perpetuates Eurocentrism by promoting works that are “already saleable in some other way” (p. 127). Tilted Axis Press offers a new model of hospitality for which Vassallo advocates in the redefinition of translated literature, the new model replacing the metaphor of bridges and even the notion of empathy, which implies a vertical relationship of one culture trying to understand the other. By

contrast, hospitality implies equality and can be interpreted as an ever-open two-way door that allows the host to welcome and be changed by unfiltered encounters with the guest. Vassallo's understanding can be likened to Paul Ricœur's (2006) notion of "linguistic hospitality," "where the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one's own welcoming house" (Ricœur, 2006, p. 10).

As it entails human interaction, hospitality is the most fitting concept for the humanization of translation studies proposed by Helen Vassallo. Nonetheless, the framework she presents in *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies: Intersectional Activism in Translation and Publishing* is not to be understood as a substitute for feminist translation studies and activism as recently defined by the *Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender* (von Flotow and Kamal, 2020) and *Translation and Activism* (Gould and Tahmasebian, 2020). Translator studies and translation studies should be companions; indeed, the concept of the "translator-activist as a voice-giver" is already present in Gould and Tahmasebian (2020, pp. 2-3). In *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies*, Vassallo successfully foregrounds the agents involved in the chain of publication, from those who pitch a text to those who publicize it, particularly focusing on the publishers who founded the small independent presses that have started counterbalancing sexism and Anglo- and Eurocentrism in the United Kingdom through translated literature. Vassallo adopts an explicit intersectional approach to feminism (Demos and Segal, 2009; Ahmed, 2017), specifying from the very beginning that "women' should be understood to encompass non-binary women, queer women, and non-cis women" (p. 6) and should include women from every race and culture, without assuming that an individual experience can be universal. And Other Stories, Charco Press, Comma Press, Fitzcarraldo Editions, and Tilted Axis Press are all striving to balance the representation of women, recognizing that it is still necessarily a "work in progress" and there are many ways in which each of them can actively champion diversity in order to obtain a permanent change in the British publishing industry. Giving more visibility to translators, not only in their actual practice (Venuti, 1995) but also in their role as promoters of culture is of primary importance here. These publishers have built networks of trusted translators who can pitch works out of the mainstream to them: according to Vassallo, this is how structural change can be fostered, since we "cannot be

enriched by cultural exchange if that exchange is impoverished by representing only its most universal, dominant, or ‘default’ voices, reproducing the kinds of colonial and empirical violence that have always been the dangerous underbelly of globalisation” (p. 148). In conclusion, Vassallo’s call-to-action is addressed to academia and to the publishing industry in order to enable her to make progress on her own work on feminist translator studies and to continue challenging the existing preconceptions and biases that are still embedded in the alleged existence of a universal or “default” culture or gender.

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Tiphaine Samoyault. *Traduction et violence*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, collection « Fiction & Cie », 2020, 206 p.

La force et l’originalité de ce livre d’environ 200 pages (constitué en réalité de l’agencement de plusieurs articles autour d’une problématique commune) tiennent avant tout à ce qu’il prend le contrepied de toute une doxa traductologique selon laquelle l’univers de la traduction aurait été, depuis toujours, caractérisé par l’irénisme.