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Critical Translation Studies, by Douglas Robinson, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, 210pp. £95.00. ISBN 978-1-138-22983-9

Douglas Robinson has been busy. This is his second book this year, and the second to deal with the work of Naoki Sakai (Robinson, 2007). Robinson's move to Hong Kong in 2010 has led to a period of productivity and to a consideration of scholars working on translation from outside of translation studies, particularly Sakai, but also Lydia Liu and Jon Solomon.

Robinson draws from these three scholars' work in his new *Critical Translation Studies*, which posits, as Robinson writes 'a school of thought about translation that doesn't exist' (ix), that of Critical Translation Studies. This 'school' is constructed around dismantling and problematizing notions of translation, with Liu (1995 and 2004, as well as the collection Liu 1999) working predominantly on China and Sakai on Japan in moments when national language and national identity were in the process of forming. This historical background is important to understanding their approaches. Sakai sees the creation of what he calls the regime of translation (Sakai, 1997, p. 17), a historical constructed understanding of translation, linked to national languages and what he calls homolingual address, where the speaker assumes a homogenous audience of other speakers of that language (Sakai, 1997, p. 8).

Robinson begins by saying that these scholars are seldom read within translation studies (ix), yet both Liu and Sakai will be keynote speakers at the IATIS conference in Hong Kong in 2018 so they are being recognised by translation scholars. But it's also true that they are somewhat peripheral to the concerns of many people working on translation: however, where Robinson's interest in their work lies is the way in which they problematize (though notions like 'homolingual address') some of the very principles on which translation studies is founded (x). Robinson's goal with this book is to provide bridges between translation studies and critical translation studies (xi), which he does by offer three series of critical theses and five chapters. The critical theses focus mainly on Sakai and Solomon's work, though move toward discussion of Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's work in the conclusion. The chapters focus ostensibly on the work of Lydia Liu, but each has a separate focus: Liu on Marx, Translation Quality Assessment, Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, and Laozi and Mencius. This breadth is both exhilarating and frustrating – while it's interesting and stimulating to follow the discussion, I feel Robinson's approach works best when used a secondary source, in other words, when I've read the primary sources he's referring to and can judge his argument.

The series of three critical theses focus first on Sakai's discussion of translation in *Translation and Subjectivity* (1997), before moving on to Sakai and Solomon's introduction to a special of *Traces* that they edited together (Sakai and Solomon 2006) and finally looking at Solomon's contribution to special issue of *translation* on the politics of translation, edited by Sandro Mezzadra and Sakai (Solomon 2014). The theses take the form of key arguments in each of these pieces that Robinson expands upon and critiques. This approach is fairly successful at bringing out the key issues in the work of Sakai and Solomon (both separately and together) and I certainly felt I had a better understanding of notions of 'cofiguration' and 'regime of translation' than I had before after reading these. However, for a reader that wasn't already familiar with Sakai's work, I felt that more that this approach might less successful as it offered a series of interesting critical ideas that were not always easy to connect together and sometimes somewhat distanced from their original context.

The chapters offered an in-depth reading of specific topics that develop from Liu's work. The first chapter's reading of Liu reading Marx gets into detailed discussion of Liu's sources and what Marx wrote and how it had been translated. This is an interesting and effective use of translation as a critical tool and demonstrates, at the same time, a number of issues in Liu's ideas that she doesn't address when in her own practice as a theorist. Robinson moves from Liu's understanding of equivalence as historically formed by translation (an idea that is worth more attention in translation studies) to a concern with the depersonalised nature of how that shaping takes place, which he discusses through his icotic theory (which is an extension of his earlier somatic theory; both focus on the social and affective elements of thought and practice). In later chapters, he explores this impersonal development in Benjamin, Heidegger, Laozi and Mencius, linking it back to Liu's work at key points. As such, the book is sometimes more of a series of reflections that stem from Liu's work rather than an introduction to it (as might be suggested by the title). Each of these readings is fascinating and innovative, but their link to the overall thesis of the book is not always clear. I felt that *Critical Translation Studies* was closer to Robinson's *What is Translation?* (1997), which is a series of mediations on then recent books, than a more argument driven monography in this sense.

Chapter 2, 'The double-bind of Translation Quality Assessment', is the strangest chapter in the book. I'm still not sure what to make of it (and I think this might be Robinson's point). It consists of a number of theses about TQA that contradict each other, offering no specific way of understanding it – is it subjective or objective? Should it be both? The chapter plays on the contradictions between all the positions one could take with regard to TQA, putting them in play and performing the double bind. This is great mental gymnastics, but I wasn't too sure what to take away from it (other than the situation of the double bind itself).

The conclusion turns to the work of Berardi, who was a militant in the Italian Autonomia movement in the 1970s and who works mainly on the affective elements of late capitalism. The encounter between academic theorist and activist is quite interesting to watch and Robinson himself comments on the differences between activism and academia (159). I don't find Berardi's work theoretically rigorous and neither does Robinson. But then, I don't think Berardi is trying to be rigorous like an academic – he's writing as an activist and using theoretical ideas for more practical ends, a sort of 'low theory' as Jack Halberstam (2011) might put it. There are some obvious problems to his statements, especially when talking about learning language, as Robinson points out (199n2). But at the same much of what he has to say about the affective structure of late capitalism and creative work is interesting. Robinson uses the translation of a Finnish poem into English as the test bed for thinking about how notions of semiocapitalism work, which is fun to read and offers some interesting results, leading Robinson to return to questions of estrangement.

Robinson's real conclusion is that there are ways that translation studies could and should be interacting with the work of Liu and Sakai, even though they tend not to cite much work from what we think of as translation studies. I agree with this and think there's a lot of fertile ideas that Robinson explores in this book and in his *Exorcising Translation* (2017) that demonstrate the ways in which Critical Translation Studies can inform other translation scholarship. This is an important finding of this book and one that makes it a useful contribution to the discipline. However, there remains a need for a more introductory text for these ideas that makes them more accessible to translation scholars who might not have the same background in comparative literature and philosophy that Liu and Sakai have. I also wanted to see more discussion of the wider scholars that

might be associated with Critical Translation Studies, such as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, or even scholars such as Rey Chow and Emily Apter, who have been writing interesting work about translation but not engaging with (mainstream) translation studies. This would give us a wider understanding of the sorts of critical work translation scholarship can do.

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