

Johannes D. Kaminski, eds., *Erotic Literature in Adaptation and Translation*, Cambridge: Legenda, 2018. pp. x + 206. \$99. ISBN: 978-1-781885-21-5 (hardback).

Min-Hua Wu*

It is alleged that Joachim Du Bellay (ca. 1522-1560) in his patriotic appeal to the defense and enrichment of the French language through translation and imitation first raised the concept of “*Traduttore, traditore*” (“Translator, traitor”) in the Italian language, an adage that finds further concerting echo in the poet-critic’s own mother tongue: “*Traduire, c’est trahir*” (“To translate is to betray”). No matter which Drydenian translation strategy—metaphrase, paraphrase, or imitation—a translator intends to adopt and appropriate, he or she is to confine him- or herself to the compass of numbers and the slavery of rhyme. “’Tis much like dancing on ropes with fettered legs: a man may shun a fall by using caution; but the gracefulness of motion is not to be expected” (172), as Dryden (1631-1700) so wittily put it in his “Preface” to *Ovid’s Epistles* (1680). Facilitated by a two-day workshop at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at the University of Cambridge (9), the research project engaged by Johannes D. Kaminski takes final solid shape in the current volume that undertakes to academize translational studies of our time in the arms *de volupté* of erotic literatures in the hope of transcending the Bellayan epistemic confines apropos contemporary traductology. *Voilà* “*Erotica, thou art translated*” across both languages and media.

Built on the concept of “cultural turn” of translation studies, the articles in this volume are divided into three different categories: Text to Text, Text to Image, and Text to Film. Section I (Text to Text), composed of six articles, addresses translational issues between different linguistic systems while investigating aesthetic representation across language borders. In the first chapter, entitled “Translation, Ethics and Obscenity,” Tom Wynn reassesses the translational ethics of the celebrated obscene classic, *The 120 Days of Sodom* (*Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, 1785) that he rendered into English in collaboration with Will McMorran, a rendition that ethically and

* Min-Hua Wu, Assistant Professor, National Chengchi University, Taiwan (kevinwu@nccu.edu.tw).

willingly follows the original French manuscript, deliberately preserving both Sadean stylistic clumsiness and idiosyncrasy almost *au pied de la lettre* in a timely manner. In chapter 2, “The European Market for Pornography: Some French Texts in German Translation Around 1900,” Johannes Frimmel reexamines late nineteenth-century pornographic literature in Europe from its original production, through strategic market circulation, to its terminal consumption across national borders in different language contexts on the European continent. The entrepreneurs Auguste Brancart of Belgium and the Parisian Robert managed to advantageously develop the business of pornography between national boundaries in the Europe of around 1900. As such, they provided middle-class customers of the time with a clandestine “pornotopia” (7) wherein class, age and custom are suddenly dissolved by the *jouissance* of Eros (7). In chapter 3, “Eroticized Materiality and Postcolonial Agency in Pierre Guyotat’s Algerian Works,” Dean Brink engages with *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers* (*Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats*, 1967) and *Éden, Éden, Éden* (1970), wherein Guyotat’s depictions of capitalist imperialism and postcolonial heritage of modern France is translated into flamboyant sexual imagery with a display of illusions in which phantasmagoric representations tend to blur all sorts of trite and beaten boundaries. In chapter 4, “Let’s Talk about Sex: How to Find Words for What you Cannot Speak of,” Stephanie Heimgartner delves into the English-German translation of two novels: A. L. Kennedy’s *Original Bliss* (1997) and Nicholson Baker’s *House of Holes* (2011). The denotative dimension of the former finds itself inclined to get lost in translation whereas the sexual organs of the latter are turned and tuned into highly idiomatic expressions in the target language. In chapter 5, “Seduced by Preconditions: The Eroticism of Power, Money and Love in Goethe, Sacher-Masoch and E. L. James,” Carina Gröner fathoms in *Sorrows of Young Werther* (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774/87), *Katharina II* (1891), and the *Fifty Shades* trilogy (2011-2012) how gift-giving may serve as a unique channel of communication between the giver and the receiver, a cultural device that not only translates discourse into sentiment but smuggles sentiment into discourse as well. In chapter 6, “Audio-Erotics,” Johannes Kaminski attempts to lay bare the literary representations of erotic sounds and their concomitant problematic while translating across the border of language and culture in three different erotic texts: Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Weisters Lehrjahre*, 1795/76) and *Roman Elegies*

(*Römische Elegien*, 1795), together with Li Yu's *Carnal Prayer Mat* (1657), a renowned vernacular classic of Chinese erotic literature.

Section II (Text to Image), comprising three articles, examines erotic texts fleshed out with carnal illustrations that not only duplicate the content, but also complement the lexical portrayal and substitute the textual narrative. In chapter 7, "Erotica in Erotica: Adaptation and Somatic Translation in Late Imperial Chinese Erotic Culture," Jie Guo analyzes the erotica-in-erotica convention in Chinese literature, an established generic tradition that foregrounds "the importance of sight in achieving sexual pleasure" (7), while also inviting the reader to identify with the viewer of the erotic illusions in the novels circulating in the Ming-Qing period in China or Japan. In chapter 8, "National Erotics, Gender, and the Representation of Sexuality in Heian Japan (794-1185)," Joshua Mostow investigates the construction of a national erotics in Japan during the Heian period (794-1192). Although both *The Tale of Genji* (ca. 1021) and *The Pillow Book* (1002) reveal that the Heian culture avoids outright verbal representation of sexual behavior in literary creation, *The Lotus Sutra Painted on Fans* (1154) displays a set of culturally coded erotic illustrations. In chapter 9, "Tragic Eroticism: or, the Silent Awakening of Meta-Pornography," Julia Boog-Kaminski and Kathrin Emeis tackles with the philosophical erotic works of Georges Bataille, *Madame Edwarda* (1941) and *Tears of Eros (Larmes d'Éros)*, 1961). The former explores the limits of language, experimenting with the employment of punctuation in a Barthesian readerly text, whereas the latter audaciously allows images to saturate scholarly discourse where Eros and Thanatos are bound to encounter with each other.

Section III (Text to Film), consisting of three articles, explores the border-crossing between literary texts and cinematic representations, an adventure that adapts texts into films with special audio-visual effects for the new audience in a new time. In chapter 10, "Sensational Pain: Filming the Eroticized Trauma Narrative," Katie Jones compares D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981) and Elfriede Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher (Die Klavierspielerin)*, 1983), and contrasts Michael Haneke's successful film production (2001) and the halted cinematic adaptation of Thomas's ready template. While Haneke's filmic representation reorients Jelinek's original narrative at the expense of socio-political elements, *The White Hotel* with its peculiar promiscuous style remains daunting to readjust in cinematic adaptation. In chapter 11, "From Literary Contact to Cinematic Intimacy: Patrice Chéreau Meets Hanif Kureishi," Juliette

Feyel compares and contrasts Hanif Kureishi' novella *Intimacy* (1998) with Patrice Chéreau's film adaptation. Both novelist and movie director invite their readers and viewers to "reflect on what eroticism reveals: the struggle in which intimate relationships are entangled out of fear of intimacy. Without hiding behind long speeches, such intimacy manifests itself in sex, where the lovers expose themselves to the other's gaze" (182). In the twelfth chapter, entitled "Adapting *Jing Ping Mei*, Serializing Sex: Hong Kong's Pornographic Serial Melodrama," Jianqing Chen looks into how the Chinese pornographic novel *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (ca. 1620) serves as an ideal source and cinematic template for the porn directors of Hong Kong in the 1970s. Ever since its publication in the seventeenth century, the novel has engendered most juicy and racy illustrations, which provide film directors of the 1970s with established erotic scenes and visual patterns as they are so vividly and graphically depicted in the novel chapters. Thus, the cinematography of the time tends to take opportune advantage, dwelling on serialized representations of established respective individual sex scenes rather than plotting the narrative to build up suspense for a final orgasmic denouement (9).

As an academic collection of critical essays, the articles in *Erotic Literature in Adaptation and Translation* feature frequent exemplary and illustrative bilingual, if not trilingual, corresponding presentations along with discursive analyses and arguments. If one resorts to the translational theorization of Eugene Nida on the concept of equivalence in bilingual rendition—be it formal or dynamic—he or she is bound to find that the volume abounds in critical bilingual correspondences that attempt to display either formal or dynamic equality between the source and target languages in question. Sometimes, the translators' philosophisings on the art of literary translation go to such extremes that they investigate not just the aesthetic dimension of verbal translation, but also explore the ethical perspective involved in the bilingual rendition of a canonical work of erotica. For instance, in translating *The 120 Days of Sodom* from French into English, Tom Wynn and Will McMorran strive not to attenuate "the brutality of its content" (21), for the translators are not "border guards to a realm of literature comprising solely what Wayne Booth calls 'the good stuff,'" nor are they "shock absorbers in the way that some nineteenth- and early-twentieth century translation (or rather bowdlerisers) of classical erotica were" (21). Not only do the translators privilege ethical fidelity in its totality in translation, but they also take efforts to achieve aesthetic fidelity,

a dialectic fidelity that wisely shuttles between Venetian foreignization and domestication strategies in order to attain optimal clarity and readability for the reader of our time. The following bilingual translational correspondence carried out by Wynn and McMorran serves as a fitting example that demonstrates the elevated criterion of literary rendition largely observed by the authors of the articles collected in this volume.

Sans doute beaucoup des écarts que tu vas voir peints te déplairont, on le sait, mais il s'en trouvera quelqu'uns qui t'enchanteront au point de te coûter du foutre, et voilà tout ce qui nous faut, si nous n'avions pas tout dit, tout analysé, comment voudrais-tu que nous eussions pu deviner ce qui te convient, c'est à toi à les prendre et à laisser le reste, un autre en fera autant, et petit à petit, tout aura trouvé sa place. C'est ici l'histoire d'un magnifique repas où 600 plats divers s'offrent à ton appétit, les manges-tu tous, non sans doute. (17; emphasis added)

No doubt many of the various excesses you shall see depicted shall displease you, we know, but there shall be others that inflame you to the point of spilling your come, and that it is all we require—if we had not said everything, analyzed everything, how do you think we could have guessed what appeals to you? It is for you to take what you want and leave the rest—someone else shall do the same and, little by little, everything shall have found its rightful place. This is the story of a magnificent feast where 600 different dishes are offered for your delectation—do you eat them all? Of course not. (17)

If we read the passages cited above between the lines across the two languages, we may find that an overall fidelity resides in the verbal rendition over which a dialectic of fidelity presides between the source and target languages. Such an overall and holistic textual faithfulness fares on occasion beyond lexical and syntactical corresponding parity as well as equality. As far as vocabulary is concerned, the English word “inflame” seems to add more fire than the French “*enchanter*” that appeals to the hearing; the word “delectation” in the target language somewhat loses the focus on the instinctive desires necessary to keep

up organic life (*Merriam Webster*)—be they alimentary or sexual—as embodied in the French word “*appétit*” (Rey 170-71). In other words, “appetite” and “*appétit*” do not actually form a pair of spurious *faux amis* in the Anglo-French etymological heritage; likewise, the French word “*repas*” refers in most circumstances to signify nothing but a “meal” itself in the English language, and the translation of the word here into “feast” shows an idiosyncratic flexibility of verbal option by the translators, an option that might please Hemingway, for it surely recalls his Parisian *fête mobile*, a *fête* lingering in the psyche of the big-game hunter that is known to be as moveable as a person’s shadows (Hemingway ch.11, 236). As for the syntactical dimension in the French-English translation, the original French passage cited above employs no interrogation mark whereas the English translation in the target language twice resorts to punctuating the sentence with a question mark. In a like manner, the original French passage employs no dash at all in its syntactical punctuation whereas a total of three dashes are conjured up in the English rendition to bring about some sort of “optimal fidelity” (Wu 1), a fidelity, though neither absolute nor outright, that tactically strives for textual correspondence and the target reader’s overall reading ambience and impression, similar to what Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) called “general effect” in “The Translator’s Tribunal” (254).

Even though expert and expedient bilingual translation, as engaged and investigated above, has set the keynote for the discursive analyses and arguments throughout the entire volume, the collection cannot exempt itself from occasional negligence. Evidently, the authors and editor of the book have taken great efforts to dot the i’s and cross the t’s all the way through the whole gamut of discursive analyses. But as the proverb goes, even Homer sometimes nods. The voluminously racy and “erratic” volume may therefore benefit from having those nodding moments laid bare, if its editor and authors would like to amend a few slight, if not slightest, errors or peccadillos in the near future. First of all, there are missing sentences in certain quoted exemplary bilingual correspondent translations that serve to reinforce the author’s argument. For example, the sentence “*J’ai épuisé toute les jouissances*” (38) in the French passage, which may be translated into “I exhausted all the sexual pleasures” in the English language, finds *bizarrement* no translation at all in the corresponding English passage. By the same token, Chinese-English renditions in the volume are not always thorough. For instance, 一手據枕，極力而提之，

提的陰中淫氣連綿如數，鯁行泥淖中相似 (189) in the Chinese passage finds no corresponding translation at all in the preceding English textual presentation. As far as long quotations are concerned, the layout of some passages appear to be quite dubious in their formal arrangement, especially when corresponding formal textual equivalence shall be logically taken into strict consideration to reinforce the argument. Examples of this kind can be found on pages 115-16, 128, and 189, where there exists a disparity between a typical prose-style layout and a normally stereotypical arrangement for conventional poetic stanzas. Some slightly inadequate renditions in the block-quoted models of bilingual translation are not mentioned nor measured by the respective authors. For example, Li Yu's original Chinese sentences, which read 原在喉嚨裡面聽得，在口舌之間，就有些聽不出了 (99), are rendered into "the sound comes from their throats rather than their mouths and is barely audible" (99). In fact, the Chinese exact translation of "audible" would be 聽得見, rather than 聽得出. As such, the Flaubertian *mot juste* for the English translation of Li Yu's original characters 聽不出 may range from "barely distinct," to "barely articulate," and to "barely intelligible," amongst others, rather than "barely audible," as they firmly stand in the original quote. In a like manner, the English translated sentences, "Enjoy! Enjoy again! Enjoys always! That's the true existence" (38) seem somewhat insufficient to assume *le poids erotique* and to render the specific linguistic resonance erotically aroused in the original French phrases: "*Jouir! jouir encore! Toujours jouir! voilà la vraie existence*" (38)! Last but not least, perhaps due to incomplete compatibility between the software of different linguistic systems, while the volume strives to dot the English i's and cross the English t's, it tends to simply leave the French i's and the French t's alone all by themselves from time to time. For instance, "*J'ai vidé la coupe jusqu'à la dernière goutte*" (38) shall certainly be thus accented: "*J'ai vidé la coupe jusqu'à la dernière goutte,*" and "*une nuit de délices à la belle Impératrice*" (37) shall follow such a suit and be so tailored: "*une nuit de délices à la belle Impératrice.*" The typo of an extra space is obvious to be spotted right after the contracted French article "le" in the sentence "*Hélas, murmura-t-il, considérant l'insensibilité de son membre viril*" (37). In addition, in the English quoted sentence, "But then after fifty or more thrusts, nothing more was heard from her-until, after a hundred, she began crying *aiya*" (98), the confusion between a dash and a hyphen in exact and accurate academic punctuation—be it authorial or editorial—needs further

revising to bring formal justice to the syntax in question. Finally, as all words in the titles in the European languages are formally italicized to differ from the author's discursive lexicons, so all characters in the titles in the Chinese language should be likewise indicated, by, for instance, being put within a pair of double arrows; or, their discursive status as title characters could be considered neither adequately nor effectively rendered for the reader of the target language as far as academic formality is concerned.

Nods, be they Homeric or un-Homeric, in the final analysis call for either further editorial attention or future authorial devotion. In spite of the fact that the publishing industry has been flooded with erotic literatures since the old times and that translation studies has newly witnessed a felicitous avalanche in the academic publication of our time, erotic literatures and translation studies have by far remained two sufficiently wide and wild parallels in contemporary academia. *Erotic Literature in Adaption and Translation* edited by Johannes D. Kaminski hence boasts a brave and brilliant contribution, a contribution that not only makes such two distant parallels meet in one single volume but also conjures up a happiest convergence of the estranging twain—erotic literature in the West and its counterpart in the farthest East, by the medium of both multilingual translation and, above all, universal humanity, wherein reigns Eros, the Greek god of erotic love.

Works Cited

- Arnold, Matthew. "The Translator's Tribunal." *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, 2nd ed., edited by Douglas Robinson, Routledge, 2002, pp. 250-55.
- Delectation. *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*, electronic version. Merriam-Webster's, 2003. CD-ROM.
- Dryden, John. "The Three Types of Translation and Steering Betwixt Two Extremes." *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, 2nd ed., edited by Douglas Robinson, Routledge, 2002, pp. 171-75.
- Hemingway, Earnest. *A Moveable Feast*. 3rd ed., edited with an introduction by Seán Hemingway, Scribner, 2009.
- Kaminski, Johannes D., editor. *Erotic Literature in Adaptation and Translation*, Legenda, 2018.
- . Introduction. *Erotic Literature in Adaptation and Translation*, edited by Johannes D. Kaminski, Legenda, 2018, pp. 1-12.
- Rey, Alain et al. *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française en trois volumes*. Le Robert, 2000, pp. 170-71.
- Robinson, Douglas, editor. *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2002.
- Wu Min-Hua. "Dai Wang-Shu's Chinese Translation of Paul Verlaine Revisited: On the Pursuit of Optimal Fidelity in Literary Rendition." *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2018, pp. 21-37. *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* (Routledge / Taylor & Francis Group), doi: 10.1080/23306343.2018.1427328.