
It is appropriate that a book about translation should be published as part of Duckworth’s new *Classical Inter/Faces* series, which aims to show ‘how classical ideas have helped to shape the modern world’. Lorna Hardwick of the Open University directs a research project on the reception of Greek literature and art in twentieth century culture, and is well chosen to survey this growing field of research interest.

The first chapter, entitled ‘The Battles of Translation’, offers a useful introduction to the competing approaches to the work of translation from Latin and Greek into English and something of the historical significance of such translations for the development of the vernacular literature. Although Hardwick begins with Gavin Douglas’ 1513 translation of the *Aeneid*, her main focus is on developments over the last forty years where she identifies three main trends (12). These are, first, the emergence of a comprehensive body of standard, if not ‘canonical’ translations of the main classical authors; secondly, the growth in the availability of translations of less well-known authors; and thirdly, the blurring of the distinction between ‘different kinds of translations, versions, adaptations and more distant relatives’. This third development seems questionable, since most informed readers are usually able to tell the difference between a translation and a new creative work that alludes to or rewrites a traditional story or text; but it serves Hardwick’s purpose in the book to fuse these categories since most of her interest is in these ‘refigurations’, to use her preferred term, rather than in what most people would consider to be actual translations. While informative, the chapter is too short to do justice to the complexity of the issues involved in translation and is further limited by the fact that it is only concerned with translations into one language, namely English.

In her second chapter, Hardwick sets out to re-evaluate the range and quality of translations of classical literature produced in nineteenth century Britain. Here is a fertile field for analysis and interpretation. Unfortunately she allows her account to be put out of balance by what seems to be a secondary agenda in the book, which is to highlight the literary achievements of women. The hugely influential debate between

84
Matthew Arnold and F.W. Newman, on the most appropriate form of English verse for the translation of Homer, is dealt with in a single paragraph (29); on the other hand, most of the chapter (eleven pages out of nineteen) is occupied by a discussion of women translators and poets, ranging from the famous to the largely unknown (Elizabeth Barrett, Anna Swanwick, Augusta Webster, Amy Levy). There is, of course, nothing wrong with recovering the history of nineteenth century women’s literature and these authors are worth writing about. But is this the context in which to do it? It results in a historically distorted characterisation of the practitioners and governing controversies of nineteenth century translators and imitators of Greek and Latin poetry.

From this point on the book ceases to be about translations (in the accepted sense of the word), turning instead to modern poetry and drama that re-casts classical genres or borrows elements of Greek myth. The third chapter looks at the Helen in Egypt of Hilda Doolittle (who identifies herself as HD), some poetry of the First World War, and the reworkings of scenes from the Iliad by Christopher Logue. German literature receives some attention in ch.4 where Hardwick explores the use made of classical material for political purposes, especially by Heiner Müller in the German Democratic Republic. At the end of the chapter she reports on the reception of recent productions of Greek drama in South Africa. Irish theatre is the main topic of ch.5 (with especial attention to plays by Friel and Heaney). After an obligatory consideration of the Homeric echoes in Derek Walcott’s Omeros in the sixth chapter, Hardwick turns in ch.7 to the ways recent ‘writers have experimented in using genres different from that of the original’ (113). Her main examples are stage versions of the Odyssey by Walcott and Oswald and Tony Harrison’s verse film, Prometheus. Instead of a Conclusion, there is a short final chapter called ‘Coda’ which adds information about very recent UK material from 1999, especially stage productions of Ted Hughes’ Tales from Ovid and his Oresteia.

Readers will enjoy this book more if they do not take from the title an expectation that it is really about translation and if they understand that the author does not intend to deal with her topic other than impressionistically. The treatment of the subject is narrowly circumscribed in its temporal, geographical and linguistic ambit. Most attention is devoted to the second half of the twentieth century, with one chapter
casting a backward glance at the nineteenth. Hardwick is not much interested in exploring the significance of the great landmarks of earlier centuries like Dryden’s *Aeneid* or Pope’s *Iliad*. She is curiously uneven in her coverage of even modern English speaking cultures. British, Irish, South African and Caribbean literatures are well represented, but whether American, Canadian, Australian or New Zealand writers might also employ classical motifs or models is a question that goes unasked. And apart from ch.4 with its critique of Müller’s works in German, the book refers only to texts in the English language, a major drawback given the rich history of, and contemporary interest in, ‘refiguring’ classical paradigms in Italian, Spanish and French theatre and literature. Even in her treatment of ancient texts Hardwick seems to downplay Latin poetry in that most of the translations and versions she discusses are from Greek literature and myth. Greater recognition might justifiably have been given to, for instance, the cultural significance of translations of Horace’s odes or Martial’s epigrams or Ovid’s love poetry, or the impact on early English tragedy of the Elizabethan translations of Seneca’s plays, or the place of the imitation of Juvenal in eighteenth century English satire.

Notwithstanding the various types of texts to which the word is commonly applied, it stretches the definition of ‘translation’ too far to try, as Hardwick does in this book, to encompass within the scope of that single term works which merely use a myth or *topos*, often in barely identifiable form and transplanted to a late-twentieth century context. There are important differences between a translation of the *Antigone*, a modern play or poem or film that borrows some features from the *Antigone*, and the visual realisation of the translated text of *Antigone* in a specific theatrical situation. Hardwick seems to want to collapse these distinctions; but in doing so she risks destroying ‘translation’ as a meaningful descriptive and critical classification. Intertextuality is one thing, translation another.

No doubt it is a good thing for the future of classical literature that so many modern writers seek to draw upon the power of its modes and motifs. There is, however, room for criticism, and it is mildly worrying that Hardwick’s presentation of contemporary literature and theatre is so uniformly deferential. Some of the works referred to seem less than sophisticated in their understanding of the classical texts they appropriate.
Walcott, for instance, seems only superficially conversant with the Homeric poems he exploits in order to embellish his own poem. He admitted in an interview in 1991 that he had never actually managed to read the Iliad or the Odyssey through to the end (98); and his use of a kind of terza rima as the verse form for Omeros may easily be read as indicating generic confusion instead of profound paradox. Perhaps the most unsatisfactory aspect of this book is that Hardwick seems to have little respect for translation as such. In elevating work that 'refigures' Homer such as Logue's War Music or Walcott's Omeros, she implicitly devalues genuine translations like those of Lattimore, Fitzgerald or Fagles. Yet these, partly but not wholly through the education system, are read far more widely and influence many more people. These are part of the literary experience of countless students and other individuals; and to produce such translations is a task of a high intellectual order and enormous cultural value. That value is not acknowledged by Hardwick, except inadvertently: whenever, in order to illustrate the new meaning a modern writer seeks to impose on the ancient source, she needs to show the reader what the original Homeric text actually says, she quotes it in the Lattimore translation (e.g. 50-51, 54, 101).

As a series of stimulating essays on some of the ways some modern societies have appropriated and reconstrued some elements of classical literature, this book is recommended. Be warned, though, that it is very far from being a full review of the cultural function of translations of Greek and Roman literature at the present day, let alone in the past. It will be better appreciated by scholars in fields like Comparative Literature or Theatre and Drama Studies than by classicists.

Marcus Wilson
University of Auckland