

**GANSEL, Mireille (2012/2017): *Translation as Transhumance*.  
(Translated from French by Ros SCHWARTZ) New York:  
Feminist Press, 128 p.**

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GANSEL, Mireille (2012/2017): *Translation as Transhumance*. (Translated from French by Ros Schwartz) New York: Feminist Press, 128 p.

Mireille Gansel's *Translation as Transhumance* is a beautifully crafted, half-memoir, half-philosophical series of essays. It is no wonder that it won a French Voices Award and an English PEN Award. Gansel has published translations of German poets such as Peter Huchel, Reiner Kunze, and Nelly Sachs (her correspondence with Paul Celan). After residing in Hanoi for seven years, she was the first to publish a volume of classical Vietnamese poetry, translated into French during the Vietnam War. Ros Schwartz, who undertook the translation of *Translation as Transhumance*, is the award-winning translator of some seventy-five works of fiction and nonfiction, including a 2010 edition of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*.<sup>1</sup>

Through 25 powerfully narrated chapters, the book presents a translation process that is intertwined with political acts involving power, nations, languages, and cultures. The short essays or chapters are presented in a sequential order according to the author's life. As the title *Translation as Transhumance* suggests, the book carefully lays out the evolution of Gansel's understanding of translation through the timeline of the author's life: the author, the daughter of Jewish Hungarian parents, grew up in Nazi Germany. Her family lost everything, including their native language. In an act of resistance to political and military oppression, she translated poets from East Berlin and Vietnam to broadcast their political positions to the rest of the world during the 1960s and 1970s; she describes the period when she lived in Vietnam during the U.S. bombings and, lastly, she reflects on her practice of translating the Jewish German-language poet, Nelly Sachs.

Her early years span ten essays, from *Listening to the Silences* to *Interior Exile*, which illustrate her experience living and understanding the poets she translated. Her years living in Vietnam are recounted in the subsequent ten essays, between *The Universal Language* and *A Second Glass of Light*, while the last chapters focus on her translating Nelly Sachs (from *In the Crystal-blue Dusk to Language of the Childhood*).

The first ten chapters belong to Gansel's early period, when her reflection on her work in translation started. She begins to notice that no word that speaks of what is human is untranslatable. In the context of exile, she learns that "taking turns" plays a role in the language of the soul. Here, she explains that, in order to understand deeply, we have to listen by taking turns in communication so that we can reach the very deep meaning intended by the author, which she describes as the

language of the soul. It is a language that, for her, has no home, a language of the salvaged. She refers to the term *doublespeak language* to explain the complex meanings to be constructed when words and silences are used to understand the poems of Imre Kertés.

Translating Brecht's poetry required her to go deep into thought, image, and music so that she could facilitate ways to see the familiar in the foreign and the foreign in the familiar, in her translation. For instance, experiencing the strange effects of the poems, and comprehending the poet's writing are part of her learning experience as a translator. When learning to understand, she sees herself as an apprentice to the work of the poem in terms of working diligently to immerse and to be part of the works so that she was no longer foreign, thus achieving her fullest understanding of the poems.

In addition, she explores this immersion in a metaphoric *apprenticeship* as the effort to understand the text, to practice, to learn, and to listen.

Translation became a tool of that apprenticeship. Translation, like practicing scales, learning to listen, that never-ending fine-tuning of nuance. Translation became the clay from which I would fashion my own interior language. (p. 20)

Gansel learns a great lesson about the meaning of translation through her observation of the interpreter Helena Weigel's voice by setting the text at a distance, to be heard and understood and not to be appropriated.

In the "Interior Exile," she immerses herself into Kunze's work, personality, and culture, which leads her to access his interior language. In this section, she considers translation to be a connector, from one end to another, when there is no bridge. She also considers translation to be a risk-taking and continual re-examination effort so that she could experience the language of poetry and share it through translation.

The second part of the book, which covers her years spent in Vietnam, consists of ten chapters focusing on her project to publish an anthology of Vietnamese literature in French. In this section, she seeks to find the voices of Vietnamese poets. She found in the library, on the top floor of the Musée de l'Homme, a rich collection of Vietnamese works, some of which were accompanied by French colonial period translations. This marks her efforts to find an answer to her question, "But where was I to find the voices of today's Vietnamese poets?" (p. 40) and to start her journey translating Vietnamese literature.

Just like in the chapters of the first section, this section also speaks about silence. The word

*silence* seems to evoke a remarkably deep meaning in Gansel's experience. It is as if in the chaotically loud surroundings of densely populated areas of Vietnam, and with the roaring threats of an American invasion, she found ease in silence. The silence allows her to listen intently and understand beyond words, between the lines – “a call that is both so distant and so close, so familiar and so foreign” (p. 62). She describes translation as enabling meanings to travel between shores and to reach distant places without neglecting the necessity of each shore, where each language and culture is firmly anchored.

In the last part of this section, her immersion in her translation work materialized through hours of listening to recordings of Vietnamese music and poetry, absorbing the rhythms and cadence of words and voices, discovering an entire register of expressions, accents, and constructions. For her, translation and poetry are not confined to mere language but “liberation from exoticism, appropriation as well as the cultural and spiritual annexation characteristic of the translations produced under colonialization” (p. 49).

The last section of the book, which consists of five chapters, is devoted to her reflection on translating Nelly Sachs, a German-born poet and playwright who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966 for her lyrical and dramatic writing about Jewish people. Although it was the first time she translated a body of work without being able to meet the poet (deceased), Gansel claimed to be able to “meet” the poet as if the poet's words were speaking to her. Here, she states that with all her immersion into the all-consuming task of this translation project, she is willing to risk syntactical and semantic elements to express the urgency and intensity of those languages – source and target languages. She explains that to interpret, as a way to translate, enables the reader to listen to what is “beyond” the poem as well as to what is written in the poem itself. She closes the chapters with the most important lesson, that translation is about understanding the stranger which lies within her, “...the stranger was not the other, it was me. I was the one who had everything to learn, everything to understand, from the other” (p. 103).

This is a beautifully written memoir, but unfortunately, it does not have a translator's foreword or introduction. It would be interesting to know the translator's point of view and processes when translating this book. Does Ros Swartz share Gansel's perspectives of immersion and going beyond the lines in approaching translation? Did she reach out to Gansel to understand her work? The success of the English version of the book is due in part to the Ros Schwartz's role as the translator and it would be helpful to have a preface.

In conclusion, Gansel's translation work is a long-term commitment project as she devoted her life, at various stages, to experiencing the language and the culture of the authors and to working thoroughly to get to know the poets. For her, immersion is key to her understanding of the poems. Not only does she juggle words and rhymes, but she also listens to the silences between the lines, the contexts in which the poets live. Thanks to her moving across borders to understand cultures and contexts, she implies that her translation works are not about word-for-word and grammatical faithfulness. As she speaks about understanding and listening between the lines and the language of the soul, she emphasizes the importance of the meaning of the original text while considering the cultures of the two languages. She aims to transfer the meaning and spirit of the poems so that readers can also experience them.

With silence, we understand better as we listen to others and experience the foreign. It is up to us to decide and make an effort to understand the other. In other words, the practical implication of Gansel's translation approach for translators is that translators need to focus on the listening and comprehension stage, the work that must occur before the actual translating takes place.<sup>1</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. *Words Without Borders* (Last update: 13 November 2017): Ros Schwartz. Visited on 3 May 2019, <<https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/contributor/ros-schwartz>>.

POIRIER, Éric and GALLEGU-HERNÁNDEZ, Daniel, eds. (2018): *Business and Institutional Translation: New Insights and Reflections*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 240 p.

The dynamic field of business and institutional translation has not been given as much attention by academics in translation studies compared to its technical, medical or literary counterparts. However, there is a recent trend in publications and events that focuses on this specialization. In line with this interest, this book has two specific aims as the editors specify in their introduction: to enhance efforts to recognize the importance of the field and to keep academics and practitioners abreast of innovations and reflections in this respect.