

Jean Boase-Beier. (2015) *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust: Translation, Style and the Reader*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 192 pp.

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In this clear-sighted and innovative work, Jean Boase-Beier presents a compelling account of translated Holocaust poetry that foregrounds the act of translating as a constitutive force in how readers respond to and understand these often challenging texts. Poetics serve as a valuable point of departure for thinking critically and creatively about reading for and in translation. The underlying premise is that the emotional and cognitive effects experienced by the reader of the translated poem are contingent on two factors: first, the manner in which the translator has engaged with the poetics of the original poem, and secondly, the extent to which the translation reader is aware of the fundamental translatedness of the poetics with which they, in turn, are engaging. An important and unique strength of the book resides in its applied approach, with Boase-Beier drawing insightfully on her own experience of translating Holocaust poets, including Paul Celan, to arrive at an informed, practical overview of the task of the translator. In addition to considering the implications of translation decisions on a poetic level, the author also brings important questions about the choice of Holocaust poems for translation and their paratextual presentation into analytical view. These pragmatic contributions are further grounded in the framework of cognitive stylistics and linked to larger debates in Holocaust Studies, with the result that the book provides a sound integrated model of theory and praxis.

Chapter One introduces the reader to the key concepts and theories that form the backbone of the book. This is a challenge in a number of respects; not only do the critical complexities of Holocaust poetry and cognitive stylistics need to be conveyed concisely, but the introduction must also accommodate a broad readership who are coming to the work with varied levels of interest in and background knowledge of both its subject matter and overarching framework. On the whole, the author meets this challenge successfully, not least by integrating various summary boxes which provide a helpful overview of events leading up to the Holocaust, as well as an outline of Holocaust poetry that has or has not been translated, and by providing lucid and detailed illustrations of how and why a cognitive approach to poetics can be revelatory in terms of “explaining and describing the interaction between author, text and reader” (17). Indeed, one of the fundamental assertions

of this chapter, and the work as a whole, is that poetry invites an enduring emotional response from its reader by virtue of its aesthetic form. The argument runs that post-Holocaust poetics in particular place a heavy cognitive load on the reader, a burden which then elicits a level of affective engagement sufficiently potent to shape how the reader thinks about, feels about and remembers the experiences of the poet. Since poetics are at the centre of this communicative process, then the translation of those poetics must also play a crucial role in shaping the response of the translation reader. At this point the author also openly and convincingly lays out her own understanding of the task of the translator of post-Holocaust poetry, namely to recognize the often difficult devices such as silence and ambiguity that mark the texture of the poem, to research the background context which gave rise to the use of such poetics, and to reconstruct those poetics in a cognitively exacting way so as to activate the empathy of the reader and encourage them to revisit and rethink the text.

Chapter Two brings to light the “importance of reading translations as translations” (52) in order to raise awareness of the interpretative presence of the translator in the minds of the Holocaust poetry reader. Here, the author proposes a mode of comparative reading across retranslations of a given poem as a means of obtaining “interesting insights into the process of translation, and the choices made by different translators” (53). This mode of reading is an inclusive one since the very presence of multiple versions is deemed sufficient to alert general readers (i.e., those with no access to the original language) to the fact that each translator will bring their own personal response and decision-making practices to bear on the form of the translated poem, and that each new mediation will have implications for how that poem communicates. The interpretative input of the translator is framed in positive terms as a matter of enhancement, the logic being that the translation reader engages with dual, or blended, cognitive stimuli, as encoded in the stylistic choices of both poet and translator, and will consequently become more affectively immersed in the poem, not to mention more inclined to look further into its use of language and/or background context. But Boase-Beier also points out that such enhancement hinges on the trust that holds between reader and translator, placing an onus on the latter to ensure that the poetics of the translated poem do not elicit an “inappropriate response” (63) in the former. The author then introduces the notion of analytical reading, that is, a more perceptive mode of comparative reading that aims to unfold the relationship between stylistic choices and potential cognitive effects. Again, general readers are not excepted from this process, as the author demonstrates how they might differentiate between the stylistic choices (e.g., the use of repetition, assonance, connotation) of individual (re) translators, and then consider those actual choices in relation to others that could have been realized. Nevertheless, it is the analytical reading of the scholar with

access to the original that is presented as most instructional. Not only is this reader more finely attuned to the actual and potential choices of the translator, but they are also in a position to incorporate the choices that the original poet did (and did not) make into their comparative purview, thereby shedding more light on the stylistic workings of the source text and identifying its most pivotal lines.

Chapter Three shifts its attention to the matter of reading Holocaust poetry for translation. This act is framed as a discrete mode of comparative reading, both in the sense that it “leads to a deeper analysis of the style of the original poem” (91) and in the sense that it differs from the modes previously discussed in its forward projection to an imagined and then to an actualized translation. The translator’s analytical approach begins with a survey of any existing translations in order to better grasp the multiple readings that are latent in the original. This process is to be carried out alongside careful consideration of how the personal circumstances of the poet, their ideologies and influences, might have brought about the stylistic choices that then give form to the source text. Reading for translation further entails deliberate reflection on how the target text will engage the reader. Following Celan’s understanding of poetry as an indefinite communicative event, Boase-Beier maintains that the translator should not foreclose the potential inherent in the original poetics to open out into the multiple meanings, ambiguities and contradictions that so frequently characterize post-Holocaust poetry. As was stressed in the previous chapter, however, the interpretative possibilities afforded to the translation reader should befit the affective texture of the original poem; if the stylistic choices of the poet intimate grief, guilt or trauma, the stylistic choices of the translator should duly activate an empathic response in the reader whereby they can sense that original grief, guilt or trauma. And in facilitating such emotional engagement, the translator is also viewed as prompting the reader to become more cognitively immersed in the poem by thinking through the significance of poetic features such as gaps, intertextual echoes, repeated imagery and sounds, etymological patterns, foregrounding and lexical uncertainty. Boase-Beier provides detailed examples from both imagined and actual translations to cogently demonstrate how a translator who carries out his/her task sensitively and prudently can (and should) move the translation reader towards a greater understanding of post-Holocaust poetry, including how it is generated and shaped by trauma and how it is implicated in debates around the subversive and restorative power of language.

Chapter Four concludes the book with suggestions as to how translators and publishers “could become more ambitious” (125) in educating the reader as to the translated nature of the Holocaust poetry in their hands or on their screen, as well as to the significance of translation as a formative act. Boase-Beier outlines eight procedures in support of this ambition, several of which hinge on the exploitation of paratextual apparatus. In broad terms, the name of the translator can be

displayed prominently on the cover and introductory material can be incorporated into the work in order to render the act of translation that underpins the text all the more conspicuous. The paratext may also be used to direct the reader's attention towards a more subtle consideration of the poem in its multilingual context via brief, yet informative translator's notes on linguistic and stylistic issues, while the presentation of the work in a bilingual edition should further encourage comparative reading. Additionally, the unobtrusive inclusion of succinct background historical and cultural information will better contextualize the translated poem for the reader and facilitate a more insightful level of engagement with its poetics. Editorial paratext is also invoked as a means of accentuating translation through promotional material and events, and, moving into the realm of the extratext, poetry criticism is shown to offer more opportunities for featuring the translator as mediator. Boase-Beier further proposes that the scope of translated Holocaust poetry ought to be more ambitious so as to recover the voices of lesser known poets, often writing in minor languages, and to embrace the poetry of Holocaust victims who figure less in the public consciousness. The final suggestion stems from Boase-Beier's observation that there is little dialogue between translation practice and theory when it comes to translated Holocaust poetry; greater awareness on the part of the translator of different theoretical approaches to their task might point the way to alternative translation strategies, and the study of Holocaust poetry in translation is capable of generating new theoretical discussion around issues such as how history and memory are written and received. These suggestions are all pertinent to any instance of translated Holocaust poetry, but Boase-Beier is nevertheless heedful of the fact that the poetics of each Holocaust poem have been borne of a very specific context and, accordingly, stresses the responsibility of the translator to consider those antecedents on an individual basis. In so doing, the translator can then safeguard what Benjamin would term the 'afterlife' of these singular texts, namely their renewal and endurance through time. Lastly, the author stresses that translated Holocaust poetry should expand the cognitive horizons of the reader on a number of levels, giving rise to an enhanced understanding of forms of remembrance, a heightened capacity for empathy, in parallel with a more developed and fruitful encounter with the potentialities and limitations of language, poetics and communication.

It is worth stressing that several of the assumptions on which the work rests are ripe for further empirical investigation and debate. To begin, the inference that the empathic engagement of the reader is directly proportional to the cognitive load imposed by poetics seems to dovetail rather too neatly with the author's hierarchical positioning of post-Holocaust poetry as the most cognitively challenging genre of Holocaust writing. In order to paint a more realistic and complex picture, the question of individual differences might be more fully addressed; not

all readers will have the same capacity for empathy or will come to the text in the same spirit of engagement depending on where, when and how the poem is read (at home, in the classroom, on the train, hurriedly, intently, etc.). Likewise, the author is perhaps too ready to isolate post-Holocaust poetry from other narrative forms which also confront the events of the Holocaust in demanding, ambiguous and unresolved ways. In this respect, the self-contained scope of the work forecloses potentially illuminating dialogue with related Translation Studies research into the interlingual and intercultural dynamics of (non-)fictional Holocaust writing. The book also appears to consistently frame the translator and the reader in somewhat utopian terms as committed, attentive and diligent participants in the communication process, leading thus to certain blind spots. In particular, what might an 'inappropriate' response or translation loss look like in concrete terms? Might the retranslation of Holocaust poetry not also feasibly be understood as a deliberate act of economic, ideological or hermeneutic rivalry, instead of a neutral realization of multiple interpretations? And at what point might difficult poetics impede (as opposed to invite) engagement? A question mark might additionally be placed over the extent to which Boase-Beier's claim that a reader's empathy "is not dependent on immediacy" (154) is compatible with the emphasis placed in chapter one on "the 'mirroring' element" (27) of this affective process. In other words, the author initially proposes that empathy is activated through an unmediated and direct recognition of the emotion of the other, but then goes on to afford the translator a substantial degree of appropriation and interpretation, without considering how this refraction (and not straightforward reflection) could interfere with the translation reader's vision of the original poet.

Such issues in no way detract from the overall merit of Boase-Beier's work, but reveal instead rich seams for continued research. The book is bound to become a theoretical touchstone for all those who are interested in the confluence between translation and the transmission of Holocaust memory, while it also offers readers a coherent template for the cognitive stylistic analysis of translated poetics in general. However, what is most striking and enriching about this work is Boase-Beier's unhesitatingly instructive tone regarding what is crucial, or necessary, or important for the translator of post-Holocaust poetry. This practical perspective on textual and paratextual choices will undoubtedly serve to expand the translator's toolkit and, simultaneously, promote critical thinking about the responsibility of the translator as a conduit for empathy and remembrance.

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