


Book Review

Richard Pleijel and Malin Podlevskikh Carlström, eds. *Paratexts in Translation. Nordic Perspectives*

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Paratexts in Translation. Nordic Perspectives is volume 135 in the book series *TRANSÜD. Arbeiten zur Theorie und Praxis des Übersetzens und Dolmetschens* (Works on Theory and Practice of Translating and Interpreting), initially published by Peter Lang and (since volume six) by Frank & Timme in Berlin. The works in the series have mostly appeared in German, but also in Spanish, French, and English, as in this volume. Described as presenting “treatises that build bridges between languages and cultures” (*TRANSÜD*), previous volumes in the series have covered topics ranging from film translation and theater surtitling to translation culture and translation competence, as well as field-specific works dedicated to translation and interpreting in healthcare, law, and other areas. The current volume is a good thematic fit to this range of topics, complementing the scope of coverage by the series.

Paratexts in Translation is dedicated to translation aspects relating to the concept of the paratext, which has been in vogue in translation studies over the last two decades (7). The term *paratext* was applied by the late French literary theorist Gérard Genette (1930–2018) to refer to “those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs and publishers’ jacket copy are part of a book’s private and public history” (Genette 1997, i). Since then, the definition of the paratext has been both expanded to include reviews and literary criticism as well as refined into the subdivisions of peritexts (i.e., material in same volume as the text, such as prefaces and footnotes), epitexts (i.e., elements outside the book, such as interviews with the author), metatexts (i.e., critical commentary), and extratexts (i.e., texts that can influence how a translation is produced or received). The recognition

and acceptance of these additional distinctions vary from one researcher to another (9, 13). As the editors point out, the study of paratexts is a growing field: the first full volume on the topic was published in 2018 (Kathryn Batchelor's *Translation and Paratexts*), and we can expect more studies on paratexts to appear as researchers increasingly engage with the subject (9).

This volume consists of five articles. The first contribution, by Elin Svahn, "The Making of a Non-Retranslation through Paratexts. *Bonjour Tristesse* in Eight Swedish Editions 1955-2012" (21-55), examines paratexts in relation to Françoise Sagan's best-known novel, *Bonjour tristesse*. The second article, by Richard Pleijel, "At the Threshold of the Sacred. Paratextual Retranslation and Institutional Mediation through Footnotes in a Roman Catholic Edition of the New Testament" (57-92), is dedicated to footnotes in the 2020 edition of *Katolsk studiebibel* (Catholic Study Bible). Marcus Axelsson's article "Translating Feminism. Paratexts in the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish Translations of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)" (93-121) examines the relevance of the title work in different cultural contexts viewed through the lens of paratexts. The fourth contribution, by Malin Podlevskikh Carlström, "Translation Visibility and Translation Criticism in the Swedish Reception of Post-Soviet Russian Literature. Literary Reviews as Epitexts" (123-164), uses paratexts to explain how translations are perceived in a literary system. The volume concludes with an article by Jana Rüegg, "Marketing 'Frenchness'. The Paratextual Trajectory of Patrick Modiano's Swedish Book Covers" (165-193), examining book covers as paratexts and the motifs that they use to convey "Frenchness".

The volume's subtitle, *Nordic Perspectives*, reflects not only the subject matter in the contributions but also the researchers themselves. All five contributors are relatively young scholars (born between 1979 and 1990) with Swedish backgrounds (with degrees from or teaching at Stockholm University, the University of Uppsala, and the University of Gothenburg). Marcus Axelsson is also a lecturer at Østfold University College in Norway and Malin Podlevskikh Carlström is a fellow at the University of Turku in Finland, adding an expanded Nordic dimension to the contributors to the volume.

Elin Svahn's contribution takes as its starting point the fact that Françoise Sagan's 1954 novel *Bonjour tristesse* first appeared in a Swedish translation in 1955 and was reissued in eight editions up to 2012. Because the same translation was used each time, Svahn refers to this as a "non-retranslation," and she uses this as a basis to examine how the novel has been canonized in the Swedish literary system—that is, how the 1955 translation by Lily Vallquist (1897-1986) was repeatedly "packaged" for Swedish readers. The effect is a diachronic dissection of the novel's canonization. Strikingly

(and unusually from a cross-linguistic perspective), the novel's title was changed in Swedish to *Ett moln på min himmel* (literally, 'A Cloud in My Sky'), and it was not until the fourth edition, in 1983, that the Swedish edition of the novel was published with its untranslated French title. This is in marked contrast to other language editions of the novel, which have either simply used the French title (e.g., in English, Italian, Dutch, Serbo-Croatian, etc.) or translated it literally (e.g., Bulgarian *Добър ден, мъга*, Greek *Καλημέρα θλίψη*, Polish *Witaj, smutku*, etc.). As Svahn points out, the effect of this is a loss of intertextuality (in the original work, the opening epigraph sheds light on the title; 28) as well as canonization of the innovative title in Swedish. Svahn examines epitexts (e.g., reviews of the novel) and peritexts (e.g., the back cover blurb), observing that the description of Sagan as the author has evolved over time (from a girl to a woman to a cultural concept), and also that subsequent paratexts heavily rely on previous ones, recycling elements from them.

Richard Pleijel's article examines the case of a Catholic paratextual reworking of a Bible translation. The translation *Bibel 2000* (published in 1999/2001) was the product of a state-sponsored committee established in 1972 aiming to redress dissatisfaction with the 1917 official Swedish translation of the Bible; as such, it was intended to be a strictly linguistic and non-confessional translation to serve the cultural needs of the Swedish population regardless of religious belief. When the Catholic Church requested permission to revise the translation in line with Catholic doctrine, this was denied, but permission was granted to add additional footnotes to the unchanged translation. These footnotes mostly relate to the 1992 catechism, church councils, and papal encyclicals, with an emphasis on Catholic doctrine such as the Immaculate Conception. The resulting *Katolsk studiebibel* (Catholic Study Bible, 2020) "mediates a distinctly Catholic understanding of the New Testament" (57) and is in essence a "paratextual retranslation" of an unaltered original text. Pleijel points out that influencing the confessional perspective of Biblical translations is not unique; examples range from paratextual downplaying of theological disputes in the 1611 King James Version to paratextual emphasis on Calvinist doctrine in the 1637 Dutch translation (*Statenvertaling*) and promotion of dispensationalism in the 1909 *Scofield Reference Bible*.

Marcus Axelsson's study shows how paratexts (in the case at hand, peritexts in particular) intersect with gender studies by comparing the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish translations of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In all three cases, the motivation for translating the work seems to have been prophylactic, so that the feminine "mystique" (i.e., the myth that women are fulfilled by their roles as housewives and mothers) would not become a reality in Scandinavia (93). This is set against a contrast between post-Second World War American culture, in which the women's movement

regressed, and Scandinavian culture of the same time, when women were making strides forward through greater workplace involvement, welfare state developments such as childcare institutions, and social equality as a core value. Axelsson's discussion is contextualized in historical and intercultural examples; he points out how Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was undermined by the footnotes in its German translation, but endorsed and even radicalized by its French footnotes. The three Scandinavian translations of *The Feminine Mystique* differ in their paratexts. The translated Danish title is innovative (*Farvel Kvindesag?* 'Farewell, Women's Cause?'), whereas the Norwegian and Swedish titles are more or less semantically equivalent to the English; the Danish text lacks cover art and a synopsis, and the Swedish text lacks a foreword. The role of forewords is especially important because they prepare readers for approaching a text. The lengthy Danish foreword (by the translator Kika Mølgaard, 1930-1995) presents personal opinions, endorses the text's message, and carries a warning tone, whereas the Norwegian foreword (by the sociologist Sverre Lysgaard, 1923-1994) is more scholarly and tones down the argument, but also echoes the Danish warning. Overall, Axelsson's analysis illustrates how paratexts can amplify, undermine, or even negate a text.

Malin Podlevskikh Carlström's contribution is a data-driven corpus-based study focusing on translation criticism. Her corpus consisted of 430 literary reviews (i.e., epitexts) of Swedish translations of eighty-two post-Soviet novels published between 1994 and 2020 with the aim of determining whether and how a review indicates that a text is a translation, and what value judgments the reviews expressed. The data and statistics are presented in several tables and graphs. It is noted that translation criticism is relatively weakly developed, especially because translation quality is difficult to assess and because the social status of translation is relatively low, leading to invisibility of both the translator and translation in general among readers. Nonetheless, translation criticism plays an important role because "the critic functions as a gatekeeper, whose . . . reviews may encourage or discourage readers to read a novel" (130). Attention is drawn to the fact that what passes for translation criticism is generally vague and unsupported platitudes, or clichés such as "translated fluently" or "reads as the original" without any examples to support such an assessment. Podlevskikh Carlström presents detailed hierarchies of visibility and criticism, finding that 89% of reviews mention the translator by name (a legal requirement in Sweden) and that 26% contain some form of translation criticism. Negative criticism is relatively rare, but it can also be cutting (e.g., "caveman-level Swedish" or "a torment to read"; 137). Among several conclusions, the takeaways are that highbrow literature and highbrow authors are more visible in translation criticism, and that politics come into play because the Swedish media have a longstanding tendency of favoring Russian opposition or dissident authors.

Jana Rüegg's article investigates how Swedish publishers exploit the notion of "Frenchness" when selecting cover illustrations for translations of works by the Nobel Prize winner Patrick Modiano (born 1945). These illustrations are publisher's peritexts, and they serve an advertising or marketing function. Moreover, publishers rarely retain the original cover art when publishing a translated work because the book cover must appeal to the target culture by meeting its dominant expectancy norms. As Rüegg observes, works in different genres are marketed in different ways, and most readers can guess the genre that a book belongs to based on its cover illustration. Thus, in the case at hand, publishers seek to exploit connotations of high prestige that readers expect. Since his first novel was published in Swedish translation in 1970, Modiano has seen thirty of his works issued in Swedish by various publishers. The author examines these to determine what aspects of Frenchness and high prestige are highlighted. In the dichotomy between cosmopolitanization (i.e., playing down the special features of the source culture) and vernacularization (i.e., playing up these features; cf. Edfeldt et al. 2022, 3), Swedish publishers opt for the latter. Rüegg concludes that Frenchness is evoked through a range of techniques, from obvious images of Paris (such as the Eiffel Tower or a Métro sign), to less obvious symbolism (e.g., a French bistro or a Parisian-looking city), to rather abstract choices: foggy scenes and monochrome photos. In turn, buyers are conditioned to expect such cover illustrations, fostering their perseverance.

Although the focus on paratexts may seem narrow at times, the topic raises broad issues, especially for translation. Foremost among these is that a translation itself can be considered a paratext rather than a subsidiary work, as pointed out in the introduction to the collection (11). The ambiguous extent of authorial intention in relation to a text is also worth considering (13). The individual works in this volume do provide plenty of food for thought.

Svahn's observation that the Swedish translation of *Bonjour tristesse* has remained unchanged for seven decades recalls the fact that even original texts gradually become stale and out of synch with the times—for example, racial concerns expressed when reading the works of Mark Twain today (cf. Tharp and Sloane 2014) or even leading to bowdlerization of the title of a Joseph Conrad novel (cf. Conrad 2009). Staleness is even more of a concern with translations; for example, Clifford Landers suggests that the half-life of a translation is thirty to forty years, and that a translation increasingly loses "its vitality, its freshness, and its ability to communicate," necessitating periodic retranslations (Landers 2001, 10–11). Svahn's comment about canonization of titles also makes one reconsider canonized titles translated into English from Slovenian; for example, France Prešeren's *The Baptism on the Savica* (Slovenian: *Krst pri Savici*) takes

place at Savica Falls, not on Savica Creek, and Ivan Cankar's *The Bailiff Yerney and His Rights* (Slovenian: *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica*) calls to mind a court official rather than a farmhand.

Pleijel's article highlights the powerful role of annotation (as marginalia, footnotes, or endnotes). Although the example examined does not elevate annotation to a level equal to the text itself (à la Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* or David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*), footnotes can have a formidable effect on the reception of a text, be it an original or a translation. This is well exemplified by various editions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*—specifically, Mercutio's reference to sodomy in Act 2, Scene 1. If the line is not simply omitted or bowdlerized, annotations of the play run the gamut from deliberate distraction (e.g., a misleading note comparing *medlar* to *meddler*; Shakespeare [1597] 2000, 71) to explicit emphasis of the sexual content (e.g., Shakespeare [1597] 2010, 147). A translator of the play would face a range of choices in whether—and how—to annotate the play in another language.

Axelsson's study calls to mind the enormous number of “why read?” forewords and essays that one encounters: *Why Read Marx Today? Why Read Proust in 2023? Why Read Kafka? Why Read Aristotle Today?* Like the paratexts accompanying *The Feminine Mystique*, these epitexts address the relevance of works decades, centuries, or even millennia old and justify their availability in translation. Carlström's observations on the attention that highbrow literature attracts in translation criticism invites the obvious question of why other literature in translation—such as children's literature or trivial literature—is any less deserving of critical attention. Furthermore, this highlights the split between literary and technical literature: nobody applauds elegant translations of texts on geomorphological processes or dermatological conditions—but perhaps we should.

Finally, Rüegg's article shows that one can, in fact, judge a book by its cover, and that this special peritext, which is generally beyond the purview of an author or translator, can have a decisive impact on the success of a book. Here, one cannot help but recall the lurid cover illustrations featured by science fiction works to boost their sales (see, e.g., Stableford 2006, 33; Dedman 2016, 133). This paratextual peccadillo of literary culture calls to mind Terry Pratchett's quip (“I do note with interest that old women in my books become young women on the covers”) and was famously lampooned by Kurt Vonnegut and his recurring character of Kilgore Trout, a failed science fiction writer whose works sell only by virtue of being sandwiched between the covers of pornographic books.

For readers encountering paratexts for the first time, as well as those already familiar with the concept, *Paratexts in Translation* is a welcome, accessible, and diverse

collection of research on this topic. Within the discipline of translation and beyond, it will inspire further investigations of this interesting and multifaceted phenomenon.

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