



Umberto Eco

**Experiences in Translation**

Alastair McEwen, tr. Toronto University of Toronto Press. 2001. 135 pages. ISBN 0-8020-3533-7

UMBERTO ECO SPEAKS in these pages as a translator, as a writer who has been translated into other languages, and as a scholar who thinks about the craft and theory of translation. The book is based on a series of lectures that were delivered in 1998 under the aegis of the Department of Italian Studies at the University of Toronto.

Eco's approach to literary translation is reflected in the titles he has given to the two parts of his book: "Translating and Being Translated" and "Translation and Interpretation." In the first part, Eco thinks about all the familiar concerns and problems that any practicing translator must confront: equivalence, source versus target text, translating from culture to culture, "foreignizing" and "domesticating," and what gets lost in translation, to name only a few. It is in this first section that Eco's thinking about translation flourishes and excites the mind of the reader. Whatever specific aspect of translation he wishes to illuminate, he places his insights into the concreteness of the situations within the individual text. His theoretical considerations are based on the practice of translation and therefore become immediately accessible to the reader.

Some basic insights appear early in the book. If translation studies are concerned with the transferral of a text from a source language into a target language, "then translation scholars should have

had, at least once in their life, both the experience of translating and that of being translated." Those who have been involved in the art and craft of translation are definitely in a better position to formulate theoretical reflections on the subject. Moreover, Eco adds, "Equivalence in meaning cannot be taken as a satisfactory criterion for a correct translation." There are no complete synonyms. Not even simple words like *father* can find an exact synonym: "*Father* is not a synonym for *daddy*, *daddy* is not a synonym for *papa*, and *père* is not a synonym for *padre*." It is perfectly clear to Eco that a successful translation cannot be anchored in the notion of word equivalences.

The translator does not translate a text on the basis of the dictionary, but rather "on the basis of the whole history of two literatures. Therefore translating is not only connected with linguistic competence, but with intertextual, psychological, and narrative competence." Thus, the translator is forced at all times to go beyond linguistic competence to the cultural spectrum. Consequently, translations do not constitute "a comparison between two languages but the interpretation of two texts in two different languages." In order for a translation to come to life, "a good translation must generate the same effect aimed at by the original." Yet all translations are preceded by the interpretive perspective that the translator brings to the text, which means that the translator as interpreter must become visible in the translation. The discussion of equivalence shows the refined thinking that Eco brings to the analysis of all the other practical aspects of translation presented in the section "Translating and Being Translated."

Part 2 of Eco's book is less attractive to the practicing translator. Its starting point is a discussion of Jakobson's essay on the linguistic aspects of translation in which he establishes the three types of translation: intralinguistic, interlinguistic, and intersemiotic. Naturally, the translator is most concerned with interlinguistic translation — i.e., the transferral of a text from one language into another. Eco does not add anything new to the discussion of these three types of translation. He does, however, emerge as a theoretician deeply grounded in semiotics. As long as he stays within the parameters of verbal texts, his arguments are convincing, and he continues to link his theoretical insights to his experiences as a translator, critic, and writer. One particularly attractive trait is Eco's ability to show how certain words, images, or expres-

sions travel through the linguistic environments of several languages. This reconfirms the notion that each language is a way of interpreting the world.

I find the first part of Eco's translational thinking the most valuable for the practicing translator. In the second, he develops theoretical structures that move on a more abstract level. However, all of his explanations and examples reconfirm his major conviction that the goal of all translations is "to produce in a different language the same effect as the source discourse, and poetic discourse is said to aim at producing an aesthetic effect."

A final note on *this* translation: since I did not have access to the original source-language text, I can only say that the English version by Alastair McEwen reads very well. I did not find any passages where I thought it was difficult to follow the ideas and the visualization of the thought progressions.

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João Barrento

**Umbrais o pequeno livro dos prefácios**

Lisbon. Cotovia. 2000. 290 pages. ISBN 972-8423-80-2

THE FIRST PARAGRAPH of "Thresholds: The Little Book of Prefaces" explains how "integrated into the text or autonomous of it, the history of the preface becomes blurred with that of the book itself. Indeed the many names of a preface mirror its many foolish forms and functions: preface, prologue, introduction, presentation, preamble, prelude, foreword, note, preliminary discourse or comment, proem, opening, incipit," to name only a few. Without counting "Pela porta dos afectos" (Through the Door of What We Hold Dear), which introduces the thirty-seven prefaces comprising João Barrento's most recent book, there are as many sophisticated presentations on a wide range of different subjects written by a brilliant minimalist.

These finely drawn miniatures, or full-fledged essays, are heterogenous and may defy close classification. They include a text for a catalogue of drawings for an exhibition by the Portuguese artist Ilda David, an introduction to Rilke by the Portuguese poet Ana Hatherley, as well as a foreword to Herlinde Koebel's *Jüdische Porträts: Photographien und Interviews* (Jewish Portraits: Photographs and Interviews). One piece even features an interview by and an enigmatic black-and-white photograph of the late Sir

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