

Introduction: travel writing, translation and world literature

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Introduction: Travel Writing, Translation and World Literature

By Susan Pickford & Alison E. Martin

Abstract & Keywords

Keywords:

1. Introduction

In 1791, the two-volume *New Universal Traveller, or A Collection of late Voyages and Travels through Europe, Asia, Africa, America and the South-Sea Islands* appeared with the Edinburgh publishers Mudie. Compiled by the Scottish author Robert Heron, this nine-hundred-page collection brought together an extensive range of travelogues, including English translations of the Swedish traveller Anders Sparrmann's description of his voyage to the Cape of Good Hope and towards the Antarctic Circle in the 1770s, the Danish explorer Carsten Niebuhr's narrative of his voyage to the Middle East and North Africa from 1772 and the French ornithologist François Le Vaillant's account of his African travels in the 1780s. Heron's appeal to universality was by no means unusual. As early as 1735, Patrick Barclay had edited *The Universal Traveller; or, a Complete Account of the Most Remarkable Voyages and Travels of Eminent Men of Our Own, and Other Nations, to the Present Time*, to be superseded by Thomas Salmon's *The Universal Traveller; or, A Compleat Description of the Several Nations of the World* in 1752 and Jonathan Carver's *The New Universal Traveller. Containing a Full and Distinct Account of all the Empires, Kingdoms, and States, in the Known World* in 1779.

But what distinguished Heron's collection from many of its predecessors was its considerable use of translation to extend the range of travel literature that could be presented to an Anglophone readership. He was not alone in recognising the international relevance of the accounts brought together in the *New Universal Traveller*. Le Vaillant's *Voyage de M. Le Vaillant dans l'Intérieur de l'Afrique par Le Cap de Bonne Espérance, dans les années 1783, 84 & 85* [*Travels of Mr Le Vaillant in the Interior of Africa via the Cape of Good Hope in the Years 1783, 1784 and 1785*] (Paris, 1790), went on to be translated into German for a Berlin publisher (1790-6) and for the Austrian market (Vienna, 1792), as well as into Dutch (Leiden, 1791-8) and Italian (1816). Sparrmann's *Resa till Goda Hopps-Udden, Södra Pol-Kretsen och omkring jordklotet, samt til Hottentott- och Caffér-landen, åren 1772-76* [*A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, towards the Antarctic Polar Circle, round the World and to the Country of the Hottentots and the Caffres from the Years 1772-1776*] (Stockholm, 1783) likewise successfully percolated through to diverse European readerships: in the five years following its initial publication, it appeared in a German edition (Berlin, 1784) with an introduction by that most energetic of editors and translators, Georg Forster, and in French (Paris, 1787) as the work of the prodigious literary translator Pierre-Prime-Félicien Le Tourneur. Carsten Niebuhr's travels through Arabia, originally published in German as the *Beschreibung von Arabien* (Copenhagen, 1772), appeared in French editions published in Paris (1779), in Utrecht and Amsterdam (1776-80) and in Switzerland (1780), while English versions appeared in Edinburgh and in Dublin in 1792 and in a second edition in Perth (1799).

Researchers of World Literature have argued that travel accounts offer one of few types of literature to be considered truly global, in that they necessarily embody the industrial progress, intellectual cosmopolitanism and economic expansion that have shaped the modern era. Indeed,

Mariano Suskind has suggested that travelogues have an essential role to play in ‘new world literary discourses, new bodies of text covering a broader and more diverse literary world’ (Suskind 2012: 345). If Heron’s collection can therefore be understood to represent the beginnings of what we now term ‘globalisation’, then translation had a seminal role to play in informing a wider public about the changing world in which they lived. As Charles Withers has stressed, the Enlightenment can be understood not only as a philosophical, political and cultural movement but also as a geographical phenomenon, given that it radically rethought questions of territory and community, identity and place, the cosmopolitan and the regional: the Enlightenment was therefore local, as much as it was national and international (Withers 2007: 5, 7). In understanding the Enlightenment as a dynamic, mobile, entity, Withers stresses the importance of following up all kinds of different ‘traffic’ taking place in late eighteenth-century Europe, from people and ideas to artefacts, including, of course, books (Withers 2007: 21, 43). Texts moved very concretely around Europe; they were imported and exported despite all sorts of restrictions and tolls, with translation aiding the onward movement of books into new regions, spaces and communities. Benedict Anderson’s influential argument that nation states grew up around ‘national print-languages’ (Anderson 2006: 48) has led to a tendency, at least in the Anglophone academy, to map languages onto nations as fully overlapping research units, though as Jeffrey Freedman neatly puts it, ‘books have not been as respectful of national borders as the historians who study them’ (Freedman 2012: 1).

One illustration of how fully European networks of translating, publishing and book distribution could be in the mid- to late eighteenth century, extending from the periphery to the centre and out again, comes from Olof Torén’s *En Ostindise Resa til Surat, China* [*An East Indian Journey to Surat, China*], published alongside Pehr Osbeck’s *Dagbok öfwer en Ostindisk resa åren 1750, 1751, 1752* [*Diary of a Journey to the East Indies in the Years 1750, 1751, 1752*] in Stockholm in 1757. Torén’s narrative was published in a German translation by Johann Gottlieb Georgi in Rostock in 1765 and in English in London in 1771 by a native German speaker, Johann Reinhold Forster. The French translation was initially published in Milan, where the translator Dominique Blackford – coincidentally also a native German speaker, though given his surname presumably of British ancestry – also published works on Russian literature and the recent revolts in the American colonies (Venturi 1961: 221). Blackford’s translation was then reprinted by the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel in Switzerland, which exported copies of the *Voyage de Mons. Olof Torée* right across Europe, from Lisbon to Warsaw (Burrows and Curran 2013).

While the increasing use of vernaculars might seem to imply that texts’ sphere of operation suddenly narrowed, then, in reality the loss of the universal language of Latin did little to impede the diffusion of texts in Enlightenment Europe. Translation, an essential vehicle for diffusion, fostered what Fania Oz-Salzberger has termed a ‘multilingual modernity’ at a time when the potential community of readers was increasing as society saw a shift from a ‘Republic of Letters’ to a ‘Democracy of Letters’, and new printing technologies encouraged the radical expansion of the book market (Oz-Salzberger 2004: 389).

The circulation of books, through translation, to ever wider audiences meant that European reputations could be forged in ways hitherto impossible, enabling explorers such as James Cook and Joseph Banks, Georg Forster and Alexander von Humboldt, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville and Jean-François de Lapérouse to become household names in educated circles. Certainly, as Oz-Salzberger observes, while translation made a seminal contribution to the shaping of the modern world by constructing, enriching and challenging established notions of identity, it also demonstrated how swiftly language – particularly scientific idiom – was evolving and what kinds of complexities this brought to the art of translation. Thus while Peter Carravetta has noted that travel can be seen ‘as a underlying modality of human existence itself’ and world literature in essence as ‘an experience of migration’ (Carravetta 2012: 269), it is not only the travellers whom he lists – explorers, missionaries, evacuees and spies, to name but a few – that are so important in highlighting the interactions between languages and peoples. Central to the processes of transposition that allow different worlds to come together is translation.

This Special Issue differs from previous work we have done on translation and travel writing (Martin and Pickford 2012) to the extent that it places a far greater emphasis on understanding, from the perspective of the history of publishing, how translations of travelogues came into being, which individuals were central to the creation of these texts in another language and how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts have fared in the current publishing climate. This collection sets out to explore three particular aspects which shape such transpositions – the dynamics of the book market, the power differentials between languages, and the agents who are key figures in the mobilisation and circulation of texts – , and aims to assess as much the technical

and textual difficulties of putting non-fictional travel writing into a different language, as the practicalities of writing, editing and publishing travel accounts to meet the demands of a contemporary readership.

2. Translation and the Book Market

As Lawrence Venuti has emphasised, the metaphors of ‘importing’ or ‘transferring’ do not suffice to understand translation patterns, since translation is essentially a localising practice that responds to quite specific contingencies in the target culture (Venuti 2013: 193). Johan Heilbron (2008) has similarly stressed the importance of analysing translations within changing transnational relations in line with developments in book history – an approach demonstrated notably by Freedman’s *Books without Borders in Enlightenment Europe* (2012) – so that we can move away from individual, self-contained national histories of publishing towards an understanding of book trades as border-crossing entities. As Freedman observes, publishers did not only publish in the language of the country or region in which they operated. Many forms of ‘cohabitation’ can be found in the European book trade of the eighteenth century, not only imported works in Latin and French standing side-by-side on booksellers’ shelves in the German-speaking regions, but also booksellers in London publishing French and English books or importing French books from Dutch publishers (Freedman 2012: 2). The publication in Heron’s compilation of Carsten Niebuhr’s German-language *Beschreibung von Arabien* which was first brought out in Copenhagen in 1772 with the Danish publisher Nicolaus Møller was therefore not unusual, nor indeed the advertisement on the front cover that the work could also be purchased in Leipzig from B. C. Breitkopf and Son.

The emergence of series or ‘libraries’ of travel accounts which British publishers brought out in the nineteenth century – not least John Murray III’s “Home and Colonial Library” – also fuelled a regular demand for travel literature, which was in part filled by translating texts from a variety of other different languages, predominantly French and German. In the highly competitive market sector that travel literature already represented by the end of the eighteenth century, competing translations and re-translations were also not unusual as publishers sought to capitalise on the success of previous editions. Alexander von Humboldt’s account of his travel to the Americas between 1799 and 1804 was, for example, translated once by Helen Maria Williams for Longman and Co. (1814-29) and then again by Thomasina Ross for Henry Bohn’s publishing house (1852-53), and as competition hotted up for other works by Humboldt in English, Bohn and Longman entered into an all-out publishing war in the late 1840s and 1850s, which threw into greater relief just how important issues of price, overall length and the use of illustrations were in heightening the saleability of travel literature. Price was, of course, an important factor: the steep rise on the British market in the publication of cheaper volumes from the 1820s onwards encouraged the production of books to be read while travelling – so-called ‘railway books’ and ‘yellowbacks’ – sometime selling at as little as 1 shilling a copy (Raven 2007: 329). It also induced publishers to think about producing a wider variety of titles in a greater price range than before (Weedon 2003: 89), which would have enabled editions to be produced with and without annotation and illustration, in handy octavo or grander folio, abridged or complete, so that an edition of the major travel accounts was available to suit almost any purse.

3. Periphery and Centre

While the international circulation of travel writing within Europe of necessity depended upon the preoccupations of translators, editors and publishers, the power differentials between languages was another factor in determining which travelogues acquired mobility and which did not. Pascale Casanova has observed that linguistic areas are ‘the embodiment of political domination’ (Casanova 2004: 116), and the power and literary prestige of a language is often closely allied to how ambitious countries were in colonial expansion. As Johan Heilbron reminds us, in a discussion of book translations in France and the Netherlands, dominant languages and core language groups tend to have low translation ratios – i.e. they have relatively few translations in their text corpus – while less dominant and more peripheral language groups draw on greater numbers of translations to satisfy the needs of their reading public (Heilbron 2008, 188). The global standing of a literature depends, then, on how many individuals are prepared to take on the task of learning the language for the purposes of reading, and perhaps also translating it into their mother tongue (Cronin 2008: 267). The core versus periphery model is helpful in explaining the uneven flows of translations operating between language groups, as well as the different levels of prestige accorded to translations within these different language groups.

Itamar Evan-Zohar’s elaboration of a ‘polysystems’ approach to translation has likewise been

helpful in understanding the centrifugal and centripetal forces which govern which texts become central and which more marginal, although as Evan-Zohar reminds us, within a polysystem, we should not just think in terms of *one* centre and *one* periphery, but several that interact, or interfere with each other (Evan-Zohar 1990: 14). The core versus periphery model is helpful in explaining the uneven flows of translations operating between language groups, as well as the different levels of prestige accorded to translations within these different language groups. By translating foreign works into French, for example, they became endowed with the authority of the French language, a form of ‘cultural consecration’, as Freedman has termed it, which necessarily brought those works to the attention of a European public (Freedman 2012: 3). In this Special Issue we focus on major languages such as French and German, as well as languages that are considered to be more peripheral within a European context such as Dutch, Portuguese, Catalan and Polish, to offer insights into how translations were produced and circulated in secondary centres of the Enlightenment and Romantic print trade. We thus complement narratives of a Paris- or London-centred Enlightenment by showing how these more minor hubs of production also played a central – and hitherto largely overlooked – role in the onward transmission of knowledge in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

4. Agency in Translation

While the translation of a particular travel account may well be motivated by the need to fill a gap in the existing corpus of travel literature in the target language, the interest of an individual editor or translator in a particular travel author’s work or a certain part of the globe often also prompts the account to be put into a different language. Just as the translation of non-fictional writing was overlooked for many years, as scholars of Translation Studies focused almost solely on fictional forms, so the role of the translator as facilitator in the international transmission of knowledge has only recently attracted critical attention. Michael Cronin rightly notes that ‘the invisibility of the translator [...] and the failure to foreground the material presence of translation through identification and attribution generates an illusion of understanding and immediacy’ (Cronin 2000: 103), an illusion upheld by publishers and readers in the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, even if some translators actively sought public recognition for their work through extensive, intrusive footnoting or lengthy translator’s prefaces. In discussing the relative significance of a particular traveller’s account on the international stage, Oz-Salzberger reminds us that it is less important who the most translated authors were, and more important which authors were most effective in translation (Oz-Salzberger 2006: 399). While the effectiveness of a given work in reaching a wide audience can be measured according to the number of editions and reprints (both legitimate and pirate) that were produced, it is the agents involved in the publication process – translators, editors, publishers – who are the figures that can ensure that a work is translated, presented and marketed well.

Robert Darnton’s notion of the ‘communications circuit’ (Darnton 1982: 67), which traces the life history of a book, running ‘from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader’ – and we should insert ‘the translator’ here – has been highly influential in bringing these agents to the fore. More recent work in Translation Studies that has been influenced by Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological thinking – particularly John Milton and Paul Bandia’s *Agents of Translation* (2009) – has invited us to explore more fully translation as a social practice. By examining the impact of norms and institutional influences on translators, the power relationships operating in translation and the value accorded to different types of knowledge in the target culture, we can restore a certain localism and specificity to the activity of translation, which has hitherto been lacking. By reflecting on the social environment and habitus of the agents in the translation process, the articles in this special issue all in different ways reconstruct the individual dimensions of the translation process.

5. Modernisation and Mobilisation

This Special Issue examines not only how translations were received in the decades immediately following their initial publication, but also explores how late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century travel accounts have fared in modern translation. While interest in publishing new editions and translations of Enlightenment and Romantic travel accounts has continued to increase in the past few years, numerous difficulties are bound up with presenting older texts such as these to a modern audience. As Damrosch has noted in reflecting on how earlier and therefore more distant works of world literature can best be made accessible to the contemporary reader, editors have tended to oscillate ‘between extremes of assimilation and discontinuity’ (Damrosch 2003: 133). For as he goes on to argue, either these older works reflect a consciousness similar very much to ours,

or they are completely alien, ‘curiosities whose foreignness finally tells us nothing and can only reinforce our sense of separate identity’ (Damrosch 2003: 133). Yet as Damrosch suggests, there is also a middle way – an elliptical approach – that allows for both standpoints to be held in view: ‘We never truly cease to be ourselves as we read, and our present concerns and modes of reading will always provide one focus of our understanding, but the literature of other times and eras presents us with another focus as well, and we read in the field of force generated between these two foci’ (Damrosch 2003: 133).

Today’s translators of Enlightenment and Romantic travel accounts are therefore working in precisely this ‘field of force’ as they seek to make the text in question readable and also marketable by a modern publisher, dependent upon profiting from the undertaking. Alexander von Humboldt’s account of his travels to Cuba, the *Essai politique sur l’Île de Cuba* (1826), which was first published in English in 1856 in a politically highly distorting translation by John Sidney Thrasher, and has now been retranslated and furnished with a rich critical apparatus (Ette and Kutzinski 2010), is a valuable example of how modern reworkings can serve to correct century-old misapprehensions. It also demonstrates, though, that if the international circulation of texts within the author’s own lifetime was not necessarily smooth, translating them both linguistically and culturally for a modern audience is potentially even more difficult. While modern (re)translations can offer new levels of reliability towards the source text since they stand at one remove to the political preoccupations of the author’s time, they too are working to some form of political, cultural or aesthetic agenda that seeks to illuminate a new facet of the author’s work they are putting on the market. As Damrosch rightly remarks, ‘[t]he past itself may never change, but our vision of it does’ (Damrosch 2003, 133). New translations therefore make an important contribution to the way in which the ‘afterlife’ of an author’s oeuvre is constantly changing.

6. Structure and Content

This special edition therefore offers a collection of articles that place emphasis not only on the politics of translation and the techniques applied, but also the agendas pursued by individual translators as they transferred accounts of travel from one culture and language to another. The broad geographical scope of our special issue enables contributors to explore the vibrant, and sometimes vexed, movement of texts between culturally more powerful languages and arguably less central ones. While many of the issues we examine are closely bound up with processes of transfer related to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contexts in which the travel narratives were produced, in the second half of this Special Issue we focus on modern translations of travelogues or archival material about travel produced between 1750 and 1850, thus offering different perspectives on issues of transfer and translation. It enables our contributors to explore the difficulties encountered by current translators in making such words accessible and readable to a twentieth- and twenty-first-century audience and therefore gives this collection an additional contemporary relevance.

The issue opens with Carol Tully’s discussion of how the account by Christian Gottlieb Goede (1774-1812) of his travels to the British Isles at the start of the nineteenth century was reworked by its British translator in line with a strongly political agenda. The editorial omissions and abridgements turn principally upon the removal of sections that were anti-British in sentiment and therefore less appetising material for Goede’s – and his translator’s – new target audience. Maria Zulmira Castanheira’s article likewise focuses on aspects of textual manipulation to examine how Joseph-Barthélemy-François Carrère’s travelogue on Portugal, the *Tableau de Lisbonne en 1796* [*A Picture of Lisbon, in 1796*] (1797) was abridged and altered in its English translation in ways which reveal its translator’s domesticating strategy, bringing the descriptions of Portugal into line with the rather negative opinion of that country circulating in Britain at the time. In her article on the Dutch translation and reception of the French memoirs and travels of Mauritius Augustus Benyowsky, Alison E. Martin explores the power differentials between these two languages and the position which Benyowsky’s translator adopted, as much as the role of the publishing house for which he worked in the transmission of European ideas in the Dutch Republic.

The second half of this Special Issue is dedicated to contemporary translations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts. It opens with António Lopes’ article on the challenges posed by the translation of private correspondence written between two British men in the textiles trade in the period between 1812 and 1818, one of whom was living in Lisbon. As Lopes demonstrates, these letters pose a number of challenges to the modern-day Portuguese translator on a variety of different levels, not least of style and register – which raise important questions about the significance for the translator of changes in the nature of the readership and whether he should

remain faithful to the now dated idiom of the English original or seek a more contemporary vocabulary in the Portuguese rendering. Joanna Dybiec-Gajer's article approaches from a rather different angle how subsequent translations of the same text reframe the original: she draws on paratextual material to assess the different 'afterlives' that Jan Potocki's *Voyage en Turquie et en Égypte* [*Journey to Turkey and Egypt*] (1789) enjoyed in Polish translation from the Enlightenment and Romantic periods through to the most recent mid-twentieth-century editions. This Special Issue closes with Susan Pickford's case study of two recent editions of Henry Swinburne's eighteenth-century *Travels through Spain* (1779) in French and Catalan, understanding the translation not so much as a text, but as a material object, shaped by specific publishing and editorial norms.

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