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Translation and the Language of Modernism: Gender, Politics,  
Language (review)

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“relocate and reinforce characterization, rather than replace it” (201), adding depth to our understanding.

What really fascinates Tatlow about *Kunju* opera versions of Shakespeare is that they translate Shakespeare’s attention to detail of character into equally subtle gestures (210–212). Tatlow hopes eventually to “connect specific gestural moments to an interpretive strategy, thus binding the particular to a theorizable intention.” He envisions a postmodern intercultural theater that explores and “situate[s] a cultural unconscious,” extending our horizons past the Western culture to which we are accustomed (31–35).

The point of Tatlow’s volume is ultimately utopian and indicative rather than analytic. By showing how to paint pictures of intercultural research, Tatlow expects communication among world cultures to increase through what he calls the “dialectics of acculturation” (230–231). He hopes that productions in cultural and linguistic translation will reach our unconscious minds and encourage us to “relocate ourselves as readers of texts and interpreters of culture” (189). His fascinating vignettes point to areas for future research in which theories need to be evolved for understanding intercultural sensibility and cultural contact.

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Steven Yao, *Translation and the Language of Modernism:*  
*Gender, Politics, and Language*

New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2002, xii, 291 pp.

Steven Yao’s book is a landmark study of translation as a mode of literary production in Anglo-American Modernism. Students of the modernist period have often regarded translations done by Ezra Pound, H. D., W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and others as merely preludes to those authors’ own original works. But Yao’s book clearly demonstrates that the practice of translation, rather than secondary to the so-called original creation, was central to both the ideological concerns and the literary achievements of Modernism.

Yao sets out the objectives of his study as follows: “(1) to trace the changing terms for the practice of translation as a mode of literary production during the period of Anglo-American Modernism; (2) to demonstrate the ways various Modernist writers employed translation not simply as a transparent procedure for reproducing the exact semantic or even pragmatic meaning of foreign texts but instead as a complex strategy by which to engage in different discursive arenas rang-

ing from gender to politics to language; and (3) to show how these efforts in turn led to innovations in poetic and novelistic form associated with Modernism as a literary movement in English” (234).

In pursuit of those goals, Yao divides the book, as the subtitle indicates, into three parts: gender, politics, and language. He studies Pound’s negotiations between gender and poetry in *Cathay* and *Homage to Sextus Propertius*. Here the reader gets a new look at Pound, who is often dismissed as a misogynist, and sees how the poet first learned his lessons in gender and eroticism through the practice of translation. In the H. D. chapter, Yao details H. D.’s deployment of translation as both a practical technique in the creation of literary texts and a conceptual foundation for the engendering of her female poetic subjectivity. Yao’s study of Yeats has enormous implications for the entangled relations between literary translation and national politics. Here the author’s discussion complicates hitherto colonial and postcolonial discussions and avoids a priori conclusions. Yao’s return to Pound in the subsequent chapter reveals a new dimension to Pound as a translator. Here the reader is struck by the image of Pound sitting in a cage at the U.S. Army Detention Training Center near Pisa, composing the Pisan Cantos on one side of his makeshift notebook and doing translations from Confucian texts on the other. “These opisthographic manuscript pages,” Yao writes, “give starkly vivid testimony to the central importance of translation as a mode of literary production” (153).

The last two chapters of the book deal with James Joyce, Louis Zukofsky, and Robert Lowell. In the case of Joyce, Yao makes an extraordinarily important connection between Modernism and translation, emphasizing “the extent to which the conceptual foundation for [Joyce’s] deeply nuanced and highly elastic sense of translation itself finds its roots in the Modernist effort to rethink both the grounds and methods of translation as a literary mode” (194). While Yao’s study of Lowell testifies to the vitality of the legacies of modernist translation and his examination of Zukofsky is enriched by the use of archival materials, this chapter, nonetheless, fails to demonstrate the extent to which translation shapes and reshapes both writers’ conceptions of poetry, a demonstration that Yao has been able to rehearse remarkably well up to this point. Overall, the book is a must-read for anyone interested in the intersections of translation studies and Modernism, or in the issues of gender, language, or transnationalism.

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