

French Culture and Society, The Essentials
Edited by Michael Kelly

Oxford University Press/Arnold Publishers, 2001

Représenter un pays pendant un siècle en trois cents pages relève du défi. Or la grande qualité de *French Culture and Society* est sa diversité : tout lecteur francophile aura ici un aperçu précis de la France envisagée dans sa complexité. En effet Michael Kelly, secondé de trente six co-auteurs, prend soin de considérer les domaines culturels les plus vastes et d'inclure les traits sérieux et plus légers qui dessinent la France. L'ordre alphabétique permet de lire à la suite « milice » et « minitel », « Le Louvre » et « love », tout fait social ou culturel ayant son intérêt...

L'ouvrage envisage trois types de lectures : présenté sous la forme d'un dictionnaire, il classe dès le début les articles suivant trois grands axes, historique, socio-politique et culturel, et multiplie les entrées transversales pour le lecteur qui voudrait s'arrêter sur un thème ; enfin les références bibliographiques à la fin de chaque point sont précieuses pour qui souhaite approfondir ses recherches. Les articles peuvent être brefs, purement informatifs, (souvent biographiques), ou bien plus développés, prenant alors un tour analytique et encyclopédique.

Les sujets abordés sont fort variés. Nombreuses sont les entrées consacrées aux écrivains et aux artistes. Les biographies sont alors concises et renvoient à un article plus développé sur le contexte qui le ressitue : un concept (« déconstruction »), une mouvance culturelle (« le nouveau roman », « la négritude », « la bande dessinée »). Les plus grands musées et théâtres (à l'exception de l'Opéra) trouvent leur place. De même, les figures politiques, ministres ou journalistes, ont leur entrée et prennent part aux articles historiques sur les gouvernements (« Third », « Fourth », « Fifth Republics »), les partis politiques (« Socialist », « Communist », « Gaullist »...) et les événements majeurs (« Popular Front », « May '68 », « Algerian war »). Mais le domaine intellectuel n'éclipse pas le paysage populaire. L'article « mythe » est ainsi remarquable pour les liens qu'il tisse entre le débat idéologique et psychanalytique, et ses applications dans le monde actuel. Le phénomène linguistique oral du « franglais » trouve aussi bien sa place que le débat philosophique sur le « structuralisme » qui marque les années soixante. Par

ailleurs, les points étudiés dépassent les frontières de l'Hexagone pour analyser les relations de la France avec d'autres pays: les anciennes colonies, en particulier l'Algérie et ses liens complexes; l'Europe avec la Grande-Bretagne qui n'est pas que la « perfide Albion ». Le débat est élargi à la francophonie et à la place de la France dans le monde.

L'ouvrage prend aussi en compte les changements récents : l'actualité se joint à l'Histoire. Ainsi trouvera-t-on un article sur les « sans-papiers » distinct de celui sur l'immigration – le terme est propre à la dernière décennie du vingtième siècle. José Bové, antimondialiste réactionnaire et iconoclaste qui investit la scène française régulièrement depuis cinq ans, côtoie Poujade qui avait mis à mal la République dans les années cinquante.

Le contenu même des articles est équilibré : le débat houleux ces dernières années sur la « parité » ressort bien dans ce paragraphe où sont résumés à part égale les partis pris opposés. « Happiness » ne se contente pas d'adopter le point de vue social des petites annonces et de la publicité, mais considère l'Histoire et la Politique, de l'Occupation à mai 68, de l'Etat aux sans-papiers. Il peut être aussi rapproché de l'article « Jouissance » qui ouvre alors le champ à la littérature et à ses engagements.

Grâce aux efforts des auteurs pour ouvrir le plus d'horizons possibles, « French Culture and Society » semble d'un accès facile et peut s'adresser à un public très large. Il sera surtout recommandé aux étudiants en français « undergraduate », d'autant plus que l'édition paperback est tout à fait abordable (elle coûte £14.99, contre £45 en hardback). Ce livre serait très précieux pour soutenir l'étude de textes contemporains et d'articles de journaux ; les allusions et références elliptiques toujours nombreuses peuvent décontenancer un lecteur qui n'est pas – encore – averti.

Alice d'Andigné

UFR de littérature française et comparée

Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, France

alicedandigne@hotmail.com

Translation Commentary: the Art Revisited.
A Study of French Texts.
Penelope M. Sewell

Dublin: Philomel. 2002, 299p. 1 898685 51 7.

Producing a published version of a successful teaching programme is a task that can be easily underestimated. Addressing a relatively small group of students 'live' is by no means the same as putting the material between covers for a wider audience. To be sure Penny Sewell's *Translation Commentary: the Art Revisited* does not set out to present a text book version of her course (unit or module) on the theory and practice of translation which is part of the MA programme in French Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. Yet given the undoubtedly unusual and indeed original nature of the volume, one may well ask whether the target readerships identified are in fact well served by its contents.

Part of the originality of the book lies in the presentation of multiple examples of translation commentaries in Section V which fill the bulk (around 70 to 75%) of the pages. Alternative English translations of five French, some literary, some journalistic are commented on by a group of six MA students. A sixth and final worked example is the subject of a single commentary, written by the author herself.

This core section is preceded by an *apologia* for the translation commentary exercise followed by brief introductions to the aims, format and theoretical foundations of the art.

Section I defines the target readership. Firstly, they are not specialists in translation theory, save perhaps when, as is no doubt often the case, they wear alternative hats as translation teachers; secondly, students of (applied) translation studies and thirdly, professional translators and lastly, and perhaps more problematically, a wider more general readership, 'the many who have practised translating from French into English at some point in [their lives]'. Section II deals with the major aims of the work: 1) to raise awareness of translation policy; 2) to promote ability to reflect upon procedures which are often taken for granted; 3) to draw attention to the relationship between surface words and the underlying meaning; 4) to raise the profile of cultural knowledge required by translators; 5) to focus attention on patterns of differences between French and English using the techniques of comparative stylistics; 6) to promote awareness of notions of textuality, such as cohesion and coherence; 7) intertextuality, i.e. to begin to do justice to a 'gigantic network of cross-

references, echoes and illusions; finally, to encourage reading of a theoretical nature to underpin the commentaries. Section III discusses different types of translation commentary based on the author's experience on BA and MA courses. The worked examples presented in Section V, with the exception of the last, are the work of students on a taught postgraduate programme comparing two alternative renderings of literary and journalistic texts using an essay-type format.

Section IV gives a brief overview of 13 theoretical approaches of which students are made aware and which can thus inform their commentaries. The themes are as follows: 1) gain and loss; 2) Jakobson's theory of communication and the functions of language; 3) metaphor; 4) textual filters (based on Hervey and Higgins (1992); 5) models of translation; 6) frames (e.g. Fillmore (1976) and Norbert and Shrieve (1992); 7) *skopos*; 8) the importance of conventional collocations; 9) text typology and text linguistics; 10) relevance theory; 11) Grice's maxims for conversational exchange; 12) the culture of the source text; 13) contrastive stylistics.

As already mentioned, Section V contains six worked examples. There are two literary examples taken from the opening passages of short stories: firstly, Raymond Queneau's *Le Cheval Troyen* (1976) and Annie Saumont's *Sunday* (1998). Apart from the editorial of *Le Chasseur français* already referred to, the two other examples of journalism are both taken from the same issue of the Eurostar magazine published in 2000. Finally, there is an extract from Michel Tournier's *Le Vent Paraclet* (1977) entitled *Le difficile exercice de la traduction* reproduced in publicity material for a talk given by this writer at the French Institute in 1996.

Given the target readerships, objectives and theoretical background mentioned one may, perhaps more than in most cases, ask how presenting the work of student commentators at different stages in their development (the Queneau text was set at a relatively early stage when students were aware of very few theoretical approaches and the first Eurostar magazine text commentary was presented with a much more detailed brief) and sometimes produced under examination conditions with relatively few comments from the assessors might be of interest. For professional translators, the author claims to have received markedly positive feedback for an exercise that is not directly productive for the practising professional, since most of those consulted deemed it useful to reflect on how they approached their task. Students of translation studies will not find model answers, since no attempt is made to conceal the limitations, imperfections and in a number of cases

incompleteness of the work presented. Not that the commentaries viewed as sets of scripts, for instance for monitoring purposes lack merit, for there is indisputably some excellent work, but I do confess to some misgivings about the formal publication of work of varying quality as opposed to the informal sharing of good practice, say with a subsequent cohort of students. Moreover, as Section IV only describes the theories mentioned in brief outline, the book does not provide an overview of sufficient depth on any aspect to avoid first-hand reading of the major theoretical works if any of the approaches is to be sensibly applied. For student on shorter semester-based modules, it may prove frustrating to hear of theories which there is no time to explain or apply, although some teachers (and students) may find this wide-ranging *tour d'horizon* a helpful introduction before they focus on a selected sub-set of approaches as the basis of practical application. As far as the most advanced courses are concerned, the author is honest enough to acknowledge the publication of work after the formulation of her first draft, that is perhaps not fully integrated into an already well packed teaching programme. At times, one is left to wonder whether the teaching material is sufficiently adapted to the book format, e.g. the digressions on pp. 106-7, which no doubt students find fascinating when presented in class but come over as of doubtful relevance in a published text.

The book indisputably raises awareness of most of the issues raised in Section III and the majority of the theoretical approaches in Section IV, but given the nature of the corpus of commentaries presented, there can be no question of systematic presentation. Indeed the *Chasseur français* example appears to have been included to plug what might be considered an 'accidental gap'. It is perhaps regrettable that the range of texts is not greater, particularly the use of two texts from the Eurostar magazine. To be fair, both articles are readily exploitable for sparking discussions on the culture of the source text, making possible analyses of cultural multi-layering without the need for significant amounts of input. The Annie Saumont text which is set in USA also raises issues of cultural complexity such as the use of a British English narrative voice with American English direct speech may have been selected for similar reasons.

In conclusion, this is definitely a volume that I am now pleased to have to hand. The examples presented are clearly useful as inspiration for producing other exercises of a similar nature (and, if desired, with other subject matter) and the methodology used provides a framework for the increasing number of courses in translation studies that can be adapted according to the time available and the level and interests of the students. The

publishers Philomel deserve a word of congratulation for the quality of presentation in paperback format at a price affordable for students. There, however, is the rub. Caution is recommended in view of the danger that students pressed for time on semester-length modules/units may misapprehend the worked examples which, although presented with due words of warning, may nonetheless be misused. The front pages state that this is a first edition. I doubt whether I am alone wishing that there will in due time be a second edition that is closer to being a textbook on translation commentary. The book seem to do as much to highlight as it does to fill a gap.

Tim Pooley

(London Metropolitan University)