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Robinson, Douglas. *Who Translates? Translator Subjectivities Beyond Reason*. State University of New York Press: Albany, NY, 2001, 208 pp.

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Rationalists who come across Douglas Robinson's, *Who Translates?*

*Translator Subjectivities Beyond Reason* hoping to discover the reasoning behind translation will find themselves disappointed. The subtitle itself foreshadows the perspective Robinson follows: the "anti-rationalization" of translation. Robinson, a Professor of English at the University of Mississippi, has written numerous books on the subject of translation such as

*Becoming a Translator: An Accelerated Course, Translation and Taboo* and *The Translator's Turn*, making *Who Translates? translator subjectivities beyond reason* a book that demonstrates his ongoing commitment to this topic. With his "postrationalist" views, Robinson puts aside the traditional idea of creating a new translation while maintaining a rational distance from the original text. Instead, Robinson suggests that translation is a process that allows the original author to literally speak through the translator. This "spirit-channeling" is the translator's way of "submission" to the original author's thoughts. The translator must be aware of the "ideology" of society as a compendium of transmitted ideas and at the same time understand the nature of what he calls "cryptonymy," the translation of a deceased person's work by acting as a medium, "breaking into" their "crypt."

In order to fully explain his "postrational" thoughts, Robinson divides his book into six chapters and three main sections. A well-organized introduction precedes these six chapters, which summarizes each of the three sections: "The Spirit-channeling Model," "Ideology," and "Transient Assemblies." Then, if the reader is still confused by all of

Robinson's terminology, the author provides a three-page final section of his book entitled, "Conclusion: Beyond Reason," which reiterates his major arguments, including the idea that "studies of the translation market-place all show that rationalist assumptions about translation are outdated, discredited, and unrealistic." For the reader interested in any specific keyword and/or an author mentioned, *Who Translates? translator subjectivities beyond reason* is equipped with a "Works Cited" section as well as an "Index."

In Part I, Robinson explains his term "spirit-channeling" as his thesis for the rest of the book. He supports this idea with historical evidence such as works from Plato and the Bible. Robinson argues that just as Socrates was a "prophet," Moses was the "first Hebrew spirit-channeler." In both cases "they wrote not as their human selves, but as the channels of God's spirit." With this metaphor in mind, the translator functions as a kind of conduit. Therefore, Robinson believes that the "only way to produce an accurate (equivalent, professional, ethical) translation is to renounce all personal subjectivity and let the source author or text speak through you; because translation is

total surrender to the spirit of the source text.”

In the largest section of Robinson's book, Part II, the author uses the translations of Sigmund Freud's *Wolf Man* to “explore the ideological regulation” that a translator follows. In terms of Freud and Martin Heidegger, Robinson believes that the translator is a “cryptanalyst,” one who analyzes the hidden meanings that the deceased “take with them,” a process that must be performed in order to undertake a true translation of an original author. For example, in the case of Heidegger, the translator needs to ask what the author leaves out so that his “ghost can say at least some of the things he never allowed his living human self to say while still alive.” This idea of a ghost or spirit is mentioned again with regard to the translation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Robinson quotes the piece's translator, Matti Rossi, when he says he had “Shakespeare's permission” to change parts of the play. Robinson admits that, as “implausible as it may sound, if Shakespeare really does still exist in some lucid and articulate spiritual form four centuries after his death and is capable of communicating to Rossi or other translators...well, we will just have to accept it.”

Robinson is informing his readers throughout his book that this may be a worthwhile approach to the translation of non-living authors, who in some way continue to remain “alive” through their texts.

Part III, “Transient Assemblies,” is the most direct and clearly stated section of Robinson's book. He explains the “pandemonium” that Daniel Dennett describes as the “place of all the demons.” The “place” is one's stream of consciousness, the origin of translations. The “demons” exist as “spirits/powers/gods” and cause things such as “Freudian slips” when the origin of the word and/or idea is unknown. Robinson is suggesting that these “demons get through inevitably” and cause humans to make mistakes. These errors also occur in translation and, as Robinson points out, the “process of demon-shifting” is made easier as translation becomes more habitual.

Robinson's well-organized and carefully-constructed book is very understandable. Yet to the rationalist without an open mind to any type of paranormal techniques of translation, this book may seem a bit farfetched. The author finds the “first-level rationalist theories of the self and society embarrassingly naïve, outdated, unrealistic, [and]

simpleminded.” Robinson does warn his “rational (?) readers” on the cover of this book by means of the subtitle “beyond reason,” which may not convince all readers. Robinson leaves room for speculation on the last page of his book:

Even if these specific theoretical formulations [spirits, demons, ghosts, etc.] prove to be illusory, however, I am arguing that something like them, something equally scattered or diversified, has far more power over translation than rationalist models can ever allow.

If the reader does not believe in spirits, ghosts, demons and/or any

type of channeling, Robinson suggests that all translations are “submissions” of words. Ultimately, for the author, “we do not control our world.” Even so, Robinson understands that many people will struggle while reading his ideas against rationalism. Overall, for those readers with an open mind and a willingness to see a different point of view, *Who Translates? translator subjectivities beyond reason?* by Douglas Robinson provides a great foundation that rejects the traditional “ideological norms” of translation as an entirely rational process.

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