

Rhizomizing the Translation Zone: Xiaolu Guo's Translingual Practice in *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*

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In a world marked by increasing linguistic and cultural mobility, translation has gone way beyond the idea of mechanical/cultural transmission of meaning and saturated our everyday life. The translation zone, proposed by Emily Apter, is meant to debunk the myth of monolingual complacency as a norm and to highlight translation as a significant medium of subject re-formation. Although her theoretical framework is path-breaking, Apter seems to insist on the “intersubjective limits” (6) that resist translation and neglect the centrality of migration in the contemporary intercultural world. In this paper, I argue that, in an era of globalization when polylingual practices are gaining momentum and migrant communities finding new ways of redefining multi-lingualism/-culturalism (Inghilleri 18-31), the translation zone should be reconceptualized as a rhizomatic zone, where both translation and mis-/non-translation constitute an adventitious mode of transformation that highlights porosity and processuality. Aligning with Michael Cronin's conclusion that “translation is at the centre of [...] the highly contested social, cultural, political and economic phenomen[on] on the planet, migration” (46), I examine how translational/migratory literature, which “straddle[s] two languages, at once foregrounding, performing, and problematizing the act of translation” (Hassan 754), reflects a perpetual state of in-translation and encompasses the process of flight and movement. Specific examples are drawn from *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* by the Chinese-British author Xiaolu Guo, a novel that features a narrative characterized by malapropism, mis-hearings, mis-interpretations, and interlanguage. Incorporating translation as a constitutive element into her story, Guo highlights the interplay between linguistic creativity and (un-)translatability, complicates the process of cultural transfer, and underlines the centrality of migration and porosity which Apter fails to attribute to her framework. The novel, therefore, mimics a rhizomatic translation zone, where migration, identity, and linguistic heterogeneity are enmeshed.

Works Cited

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