

Heterotopias in the Translation of Neo-Victorian Novels

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Abstract: This paper analyzes Michel Foucault's "heterotopia" and "neo-Victorian novels" in the field of translation. This paper first discusses the feasibility of treating translation as heterotopia and points out the otherness between the target text and the original text in time and space. The next part explores the embodiment of heterotopian elements in the translation of neo-Victorian novels, intending to explore the order of translation as heterotopia. First, it promotes attention to marginal issues from the perspective of the target language culture; secondly, the act unconsciously pushes society forward and is a representation of the realisation of the concept of a wonderful life. Finally, this paper concludes by exploring findings from the neo-Victorian novels' translational heterotopia hiatus, exposing the power relations of translational heterotopia by parsing the past and future of the neo-Victorian novels.

Keywords: Neo-Victorian novels, Translation, Heterotopia, Michel Foucault

1. Introduction

Throughout the research on the translation of neo-Victorian novels in China, domestic scholars have not yet systematically sorted out and analysed the translation research results of neo-Victorian novels in China. At the same time, the tentacles of neo-Victorianism have been extended to various domains, such as "identity politics, narrative ethics, ecocriticism, the heritage industry, postcolonial studies, memory studies, trauma studies, architecture, and even politics" ^[1] (Kohlke, 2022, p.2), etc. This deficiency of research results has caused great inconvenience to us when we are engaged in literary studies and translation studies of neo-Victorian novels. Translation is closely associated with literature, and as an anomalous mirror image of literary works, translations reflect the ideology of literary works, while at the same time possessing their independence. So, when translation stands alongside the flourishing study of literary theory, does translation always have to live under the lush green shade of literature? Translation undoubtedly shares the same predicament as the neo-Victorian novel at this point, "haunted by its status as a mere trace or simulacra of elusive lived and embodied history" ^[2] (Kohlke, 2013, p.5).

The introduction of literary theory in translation studies, the flight of translation to the horizon of its own theory with the wings of literary theory or theories of other fields, or even detachment from everything, causing all reveries by itself, and letting the tides of translation theory surge, any of the above ways should be an indispensable part of the theatre of translation theory. Foucault considers heterotopia as the "exception" in utopia, which is completely dissimilar to all the places they reflect and discuss, and are the authentic places in utopia. Therefore, the author intends to incorporate the translation of neo-Victorian novels with Foucault's theory of heterotopia and present some reflections on what translation is. Is translation a replica? Is it a trapped beast trapped in the clichés of bygone controversies? Or is it a numb puppet in the war of discourse power?

2. Translation Is Heterotopia

While Foucault considers the mirror to be a utopia because it is a place without a place, he also recognises that seeing oneself in the mirror is a heterotopia to the extent that such a mirror has a counterproductive effect. Translation is a heterotopia, if a work stands in its place, all its translations are like a mirror, but not an ordinary mirror, this mirror is to distort the original text into a different pattern. According to Heidi Sohn, "heterotopias are not so much spaces or places, as they are structures, systems or arrangements" ^[3] (Heynen, 2008, p.315). Because heterotopian places in literature are fictional concerning the real world, translation copies and rewrites the fictional content and virtual

places of literature, so that the content of translation sustains the existence of several heterotopias, and the translation itself, in the manner of inheritance, becomes a heterotopia with a literal entity.

The translator creates heterotopias that are interconnected with the original text, but which can be varied, can be wild, malevolent, creative, deviant, and possess qualities that are otherworldly in time and space. The words themselves are fragmentary, and translation recontextualises everything; its objective is neither to devastate the original text nor to reconstruct an entirely novel terrain. The work of translation is impelled by the desire to take complete texts apart, put them back together again in the hands of the translator, and then pieces of the soul of the words are dispersed into the world of readers from other cultures.

2.1. About Time

“Therefore, an object created in one time that tries to pass as coming from another inevitably bears a double trace: one from the period it is trying to pass as, and one of its own period. (André, 2020, p.34)”^[4] The temporal alternative is reflected in the fact that translation is a creation in future time, but not an altered creation, where obsolete language is a necessity, and time in translation does not move with the times. Translators from the future engage in constant scrutiny of the past, and critical deconstruction takes shape in the pull of time. Einstein’s theory of relativity postulates that different objects feel the passage of time at different rates, and here there is the celebrated corollary that one can go back in time if one travels fast enough. According to one expression, time is just an illusion set up by human beings, or according to another, the past, present and future are happening simultaneously, perhaps explaining the fact that the difference in time between the translation and the original text is perceived to be so ambiguous as to misinterpret the story that the translation and the original text do not take place at the same time, and that the similarity between the translation and the original text creates “the illusion of simultaneity”^[4] (André, 2020, p.37). However, this has no longer been the case, and as a “gift of time”^[5] (Derrida, 1994, p.41), translation has long been disconnected from the original in time.

2.2. About Space

Some heterotopias contain systems of opening and closing, and even if some heterotopias do not require such permission to enter, they also hide odd exclusions. In the information reception process of reading, the reader’s entry into the space constructed by the translator will reflect approval and disapproval of the text; this sorting process may seem to be reader-oriented, but in fact, it is a kind of bidirectional choice in which the heterotopia of the translation simultaneously chooses to open itself to the access of the reader. When the readers of the translation are incompatible with the idiosyncrasies of the translated text, they reject each other, and this hidden two-way rejection is one of the forms of strange exclusion that, although the translator ever expresses, the translation is silent, and so the translation is misinterpreted as submissive, a chosen one.

There is also an often-overlooked but very significant issue: readers usually disregard the fact that they are in a space constructed by the translator, and instead consider themselves to have entered the real exotic world of García Márquez’s magical realism. The reader of the translated text seeks to enter the space of the original text, but he or she is only living in the space of the translated text, and the translation brings about this illusion of space, at which point a spectator should wake up the mesmerised readers who have been drawn into it, reminding them that this is not the author’s space. Being in another space, the translation also resembles the original text, and if it does not, then it is out of touch with the rules of the world; is this illusion of space a performance of trickery brought about by the bounded translation? Translation should never be subservient; after all, translators who are active and committed to cultural transmission effectively help the original avoid the mundanity and mediocrity that come with closure.

Having transcended the barriers set up by time and space, the meaning of translation is sublimated, because translation means entering the realm of manipulation of another language, and all translations take over the original space with another ideology.

3. The Incarnation of Heterotopian Elements in Translations of Neo-Victorian Fiction

Foucault refers to a site that creates an association with all other sites but is the opposite (inverted or mirrored) as heterotopia. In language, heterotopia shatters or confuses the common noun and is a

symbol of out-of-order. Heterotopia is “the folding and extension of space in a work”, and in neo-Victorian novels, heterotopia initiates “the positioning and construction of multiple spaces” with reference to the social realities of the times ^[6] (Zhang, 2023, p.33). There are many heterotopian symbols in neo-Victorian novels, which are a collection of heterotopias. Transcending the boundaries of literature and stepping into the field of translation, different spaces and peculiar places construct mysterious and complex connotations based on parallelism with the original text in the translation of neo-Victorian novels. The translated time-space that symbolises the future can never be separated from the original time-space that symbolises the past, and no matter how much it is torn and distorted, translation always leads us to focus on the individual and the heterogeneous and hybrid cultural field in which he or she is placed amid temporal and spatial ruptures and overlaps, and which projects various factors of culture and power. The visualisation of heterotopian elements in neo-Victorian novels makes “neo-Victorianism becomes less a temporal understanding of the present’s relationship to the past and more a spatial one” ^[7] (Ho, 2012, p.116).

3.1. Attention to Marginal Issues

In *Fingersmith*, when Maud, the female protagonist, sees her future bedroom for the first time, and the maid leaves with the lamp, the thought in her mind is that she is already in darkness, which is not only the physically rendered colours of the unfamiliar room, but also refers to the shadows cast by the oppression that will abound in her forthcoming life, including the worse ravages of her body and mind as a result of her defiance of her uncle.

“I am plunged in an awful darkness. (Waters, 2002, p.208)” ^[8]

Regarding this text, no matter which language is opened for it, it will be shrouded in “darkness”, and Naida has suggested that “every sentence can be analyzed and found out the underlying meaning which did not depend on the words but existed forever” ^[9] (Yan, C., & Huang, 2014, p.489), so I would like to abandon superficial appearances in due course and focus on the reflections that the translation of this text provides for readers of diverse cultures. Chinese readers may think of the early women, led by Qiu Jin, as providing “the female-bodied social matrix” for “an emergent Chinese feminist imagination” ^[10] (Yan, 2006, p.5). British readers might recall Margaret Taylor stating that “there is no difference between a man dedicating a story to a woman and a woman writing her own story” ^[11] (Flotow, 1997, p.69). Japanese readers see Chizuko Ueno’s argument about patriarchy and capitalism. German readers may be reminded of Engels’ assertion that “the first prerequisite for the emancipation of women is the reintegration of all women into public endeavour” ^[12] (Engels, 2018, p.80).

The bedroom plays the role of a heterotopia of crisis in this section of the text. Maud’s bedroom is supposed to be a luxurious manor room, but because of the suffering it carries, such as the servant who punishes Maud for her defiance by locking her in an igloo, and the interlocking plots created by the gentleman who ostensibly intends to marry her, the bedroom, which symbolises sanctuary, becomes a flawed version of reality, whereas in the novel the opposite camp to the bedroom is the lunatic asylum, which is the paradise for the protagonist’s innocence and joy.

“I am a plain-faced child but, in that childless world, pass for a beauty. I have a sweet singing voice and an eye for letters. (Waters, 2002, p.198)” ^[8]

The neo-Victorian novel’s habit of breaking with explicit and stable cultures and ideologies provides opportunities for non-normative populations to display exploitation, and the translation of these crisis heterotopias is projected into the consciousness of the reader, who, in another culture, “while hospitable to difference, also facilitate spectacles of perceived or declared Otherness” ^[1] (Kohlke, 2022, p.6), as this perception will cause another culture to gaze upon the qualities of the neo-Victorian novels, “we situate ourselves in the world via our simultaneous perceived continuity with and asserted difference from (or break with) the past” ^[13] (Kohlke, Ho&Suwa, 2022, p.2). The product of this gaze is hybridity, for two languages are separated by a gauzy curtain, and the writing of the language in which the translation takes place opens a portal to its own cultural past, and the reader is no longer just a ghost living in the history of other cultures.

For A.S. Byatt, “one very powerful impulse towards the writing of historical novels has been the political desire to write the histories of the marginalised, the forgotten, the unrecorded” ^[14] (Byatt, 2000, p.11). The neo-Victorian novel itself has the quality of “linking the past and the present”, and the translation of this genre facilitates “the exploration of current social issues in the context of past Victorian culture” from the perspective of the historical context of the translation language ^[15] (Tang, 2017, p.183), especially its focus on marginal issues.

3.2. *Unconscious Promotion of the Society*

In Foucault's thought, heterotopia is "the force of alienation from a given social and cultural order, the stimulation of which naturally has a 'liberating' effect" ^[16] (Yang, 2023, p.17). In terms of spiritual power, translators act as narrators who convey the personal traumatic emotions of the text. Different translations will adopt different modes of expression and styles of writing, but they will coincidentally shift the blame to the repressed family, political context and social economy, and offenders will be redefined and dealt with in a lenient manner or exempted from the offence.

Quoting from *Fingersmith*, the following part is about the intense internal struggle Sue displays about cheating on Maud, the girl she likes.

"I think of how they will be—without Richard, without money, without London, without liberty. Without Sue.

And so you see it is love—not scorn, not malice; only love—that makes me harm her, in the end. (Waters, 2002, p.313)" ^[8]

This is an opportunity to step out of the circle of faithful translation because whether it is "I think about what I will look like in the future" or "I think about what those times will be like", both translators are saying "I think about the times in the future", and this meaning is unequivocal enough to touch the heart of every reader. No literature has the guarantee that it is unique with no precedent before it, which means consequently literature is a creation, and so is translation. Is there a clear demarcation line between "faithfulness" and "unfaithfulness"? Or should more than what percentage be called "unfaithfulness"? If I read a work I disapprove of in a bookstore, I will definitely put down the book in my hand in no time. If I can see the characters in the book imagining the "time to come" in an alternative way, I would like to see my own words, which are the only way to bridge the readers' minds with the author's. Only then can the reader truly be brought from the space of the other around the original work into the space of the author.

People outside of the foreign language community pay little attention to the translator when they read; people are presented with a work and assume they are reading the magnificent original, and the translator is often ignored. One of the problems in translation theory that desperately needs to be solved is that people do "not consider the enjoyment of literary creativity worth the extra time and effort" ^[17] (Robinson, 2023, p.167) in the creation of translations, even though they will translate for enjoyment or passion. Therefore, by promoting translation as a creation of one's own and giving the translator the liberty of free play, the status of translation will be elevated. But there is no need to concern that this liberty is boundless, as long as this is the realm of translation, where the translation is a heterotopia of the original text, close to, but never integrated, and the heterotopia that "represents the realisation of the notion of the good life" ^[18] (Hetherington, 1997, p.ix) will also "unconsciously move society forward" ^[19] (Saldanha, 2008, p.2093).

Readers have the privilege of appreciating a unique work done by different translators in accordance with their own preferences, which will also provide translators with more scope and motivation for creativity. By this means, translation can also play the role of a crisis utopia, providing creators with the opportunity to escape to seek refuge and respite.

4. Translation Heterotopia Playground

The combination of translation and heterotopian theory demonstrates an openness that inspires the recontextualisation of space and history. "The juxtaposition of the unusual creates a challenge to all settled representations; it challenges order and its sense of fixity and certainty" ^[18] (Hetherington, 1997, p.50), and the author, the translator, the reader of the original text, the reader of the translation, the original text and the translation together constitute the heterotopian space of translation, which is thus endowed with the potential for rebellion in heterotopian space. The author, the translator, the reader of the original text, the reader of the translation, the original text and the translation are always associated, but there are gaps between them. These gaps are potentially significant since they alone exist in order to "offer the spatial conditions of openness, lack of control and inclusiveness" ^[3] (Heynen, 2008, p.317), where these elements interact arbitrarily until memory, imagination, and power are given concrete form.

In the heterotopia of translation, the neo-Victorian novel is configured as an interrelated power structure that no longer gauges itself in terms of literature, but interprets itself in terms of cultural

memory. Throughout the translation process, the target-language readers are the final recipients, and in addition to the cultural centrality of the translated readers' cultural mission to make diachronic readings of exotic texts, the neo-Victorian element centred on the original text is the other key assembly ground of this heterotopian playground of translation. If the target-language readers symbolise the future, these Victorian elements are emblematic of the past, reminding us of our active reading of the past and our constant hermeneutical reassessment; prevalent symbols of the Victorian era serve an imperative role in the cultural imagination of the past, such as medievalism, Gothic monstrosity, social unrest and colonialism, and translations of these 'entities fulfil heterotopian compensatory and phantasmagorical function, inviting us to question the order of the times and the truth of history. In addition to the reimagining of the past, by virtue of the function of "subversive resistance, self-liberation, and societal reform" that heterotopias have always carried, it is possible to discern "our presumed superior liberal respect for equality and commitment to inclusivity compared to the Victorians' hierarchical worldview" ^[1] (Kohlke, 2022, p.14).

"It's an odd affair tragedy and romance and symbolism rampant all over it, a kind of dreamworld full of strange beasts and hidden meanings and a really weird sexuality or sensuality. The feminists are crazy about it. They say it expresses women's impotent desire. (Byatt, 2009, p.37)" ^[20]

Foucault's theory claims that the subject cannot exist outside of power relations. Byatt's novel reveals "the Victorian search for human subjectivity, the desire and confusion to reveal the nature of the world" ^[21] (Tang & Li, 2017, p.118). Through the exploration of human subjectivity in neo-Victorian novels, the first layer of power relations belonging between the original text and the source-language readers are outlined; through the exploration of human subjectivity in translations of neo-Victorian novels, the second layer of power relations belonging between the translation and the target-language readers are outlined. As traces of the past are revealed in these works, heterotopias provide emancipatory instances of urging translations to form irreplaceable identities and subvert conventional morphologies.

5. Conclusions

As translation becomes a heterotopian arena, our relationship with the past will be rethought. In the translation of neo-Victorian novels, the issue of the relationship with the past is concretised, and we ponder primarily on the relationship of the present and the future to the nineteenth century. The voices of the past are often drowned under the wheels of history, while the present and the future, although successful in transcending the ideological boundaries of the past, may also contribute to the dissemination of old thoughts through a lack of innovation. In the nineteenth century, "the translation of Chinese drama has received less attention, partly due to the fact that the number of translations from Chinese works into other languages is certainly small" ^[22] (Roberto A. Valdeón & Youbin, 2020, p.647), so a flourishing of translations as an invaluable means of cultural export would attract a wide range of readers. While some regard heterotopias as "instruments of normalization", others consider them as "possible sites of resistance" ^[3] (Heynen, 2008, p.317). This double logic can only survive if there is openness to reflection on translation theory, and "we keep the many images, reflections and counter-discourses offered by heterotopias open to constant reinterpretations, inclusions and uncertainties" ^[3] (Heynen, 2008, p.319).

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