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Science Fiction Studies

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BOOKS IN REVIEW

A Sociological Study of Postwar SF in France.

Jean-Marc Gouanvic. *Sociologie de la traduction: la science-fiction américaine dans l'espace culturel français des années 1950.* Arras, France: Artois Presses Université, 1999. 190pp. 120FF pbk.

Published in an academic book series called "Traductologie" ("translatology"), Jean-Marc Gouanvic's *Sociologie de la traduction* features a twofold focus on translation theory and its textual application. Theoretically, this book argues for—and points to itself as an example of—viewing the act of translation as an ideology-driven socio-semiotic practice. It makes use of the work of noted French sociologist and semiotician Pierre Bourdieu, whose methodology is briefly outlined in the Introduction. It then offers a case-study analysis of an important turning-point in the history of modern French science fiction: the huge influx of translated Anglo-American sf into France's "cultural space" during the years following World War II. The author is a well-known French-Canadian sf scholar and editor whose credits include the Québécois sf journal *imagine...*, a host of francophone sf anthologies, a book on twentieth-century French sf (reviewed in *SFS* #69, 23:2 [July 1996]: 276-84), and several articles on the history of sf in Québec.

The first three chapters of *Sociologie de la traduction* discuss the historical backdrop of this translation invasion: the emergence of science fiction as a uniquely American "socio-institutional model" during the 1920s and, in contrast to the favorable French reception of the translations of H.G. Wells's scientific romances, the largely unsuccessful efforts by some French sf writers and editors to "implant" translated English-language genre sf in France during the 1930s.

The next five chapters—which together constitute the exegetical heart of the book—then examine the dramatic turnaround that occurred in the 1950s: i.e., how certain French advocates of the genre such as Boris Vian, Raymond Queneau, and Michel Pilotin managed, through their own translating and editorial practices, to create an institutional niche in France for this "new" genre; how the French publishing

industry accommodated sf's growing popularity with a variety of book series and magazines devoted specifically to it; and, finally, how the translations themselves were purposefully "adapted" in content and style in order to facilitate acceptance by the French reading public of the time.

Two (very) selective critical bibliographies—one containing works of sociology, the other studies of science fiction—and several appendices listing French sf collections, translators, and translated titles complete the book's documentary apparatus. An index of proper names is also included.

I cannot judge the overall merit of *Sociologie de la traduction* as a sociological treatise. But it is unquestionably the best analysis that I have encountered about how translated English-language science fiction came to dominate the sf marketplace in France during the 1950s. There are several assertions in the book with which I strongly disagree (e.g., Gernsback as the primary popularizer of Jules Verne in the United States); but I found most of the author's arguments both convincing and well documented. One word of warning, however: scholars who are allergic to heavy doses of academic jargon should avoid this book at all costs. Recommended for graduate libraries and/or specialized collections.—**ABE**