

Aslanyan, Anna. 2021. DANCING ON ROPES: TRANSLATORS AND THE BALANCE OF HISTORY. London: Profile Books.

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Against the backdrop of burgeoning interest in the history of translators and interpreters, Anna Aslanyan's *Dancing on Ropes: Translators and the Balance of History* is a welcome addition to the literature on the topic. Aimed primarily at a generalist audience, this engaging and well-researched work provides a highly readable panorama of the history, evolution, and present status of translation and interpreting practitioners, informed by the author's own experience and professional practice as a literary translator and court interpreter of English, Russian, and Italian.

At 263 pages in length, the book opens with an introduction delineating the scope of the book, placing particular attention on the role and agency of translators and interpreters. Chapter 1 starts in the depths of the Cold War, centring on the difficulties the interpreters faced by Nikita Khrushchev's misuse of a colloquial Russian phrase. The second chapter explores the intricacies of translating jokes in interpreting settings, citing real examples from the author's interview with Ivan Melkumjan, an Italian-Russian high-level interpreter. Chapter 3 turns to mid-19th century Persia, using the fates of different British and Russian emissaries to highlight the importance of observing cultural differences when translating and interpreting.

The fourth chapter examines the key role of terminology in technical translation, focusing on the example of how the possibilities of artificial life on the planet Mars were stimulated by the 19th-century translation of the Italian *canali* as 'channels'. Chapter 5 delves into the importance of dictionaries, taking the Elizabethan John Florio's 16th century work as a point of departure. In Chapter 6, the role of dragomans in the Ottoman Empire is the focus, highlighting their role not only as translators and interpreters, but also as diplomats, brokers, and potentates.

A royal trial is the material for Chapter 7, focusing on the role of the anonymous Italian interpreters in the 19th century adultery proceedings against Queen Caroline, wife of the British king George IV. The eighth chapter turns to World War Two, focusing on those interpreters who worked for the Axis forces; Chapter 9 provides anecdotal stories from the Nuremberg Trials which followed immediately afterwards, and which are commonly held to be the first occasion that simultaneous interpretation was widely used.

Chapter 10 returns to the Ottoman Empire, and profiles the last two dragomans who served in the empire's dying days at the beginning of the

20th century: the British diplomat Andrew Ryan and the Swedish orientalist Johannes Kolmodin. The vogue for all things 'Oriental' in the 19th century is the subject of the eleventh chapter, which highlights the importance of accuracy and fidelity to the translator's craft. In chapter 12, the link between writing and translation is represented through a portrait of the relationship between Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges and his English translator.

The patron saint of translators, St Jerome, is the focus of Chapter 13, which then explores the trajectory of Bible translation over the centuries. Chapter 14 examines the role of translation amid the modern-day proliferation of news journalism, observing the growth of 'transediting' by 'journalators', as well as the importance of ensuring that these translations are both timely and accurate. Developing the notion of trust and accuracy further, the fifteenth chapter of the book highlights the competence that a translator is supposed to embody, as illustrated through the prism of a series of unfortunate events involving brigands in 19th century Greece.

The role of interpreters in conflict zones and times of unrest is examined in Chapter 16, which uses the experiences of English and Russian linguists caught up in the Boxer Rebellion in China at the turn of the 20th century. In Chapter 17, a number of cautionary tales involving the modern-day usage of unqualified court and community interpreters are presented, drawing attention to the importance of hiring properly trained professionals. With its focus on the rise of machine translation, the last chapter of the book provides a succinct and thought-provoking summary of the past, present, and potential future impact of this development on translators and interpreters. Finally, several pages of notes are appended which list the resources consulted, together with a comprehensive index.

As observed in the wide variety of contexts, eras, and perspectives presented in its pages, *Dancing on Ropes: Translators and the Balance of History* is a skilfully compiled synthesis of relevant information from a range of sources, including interviews with translators and interpreters specialising in various domains. An interesting and informative work, it is highly recommended to both practitioners and researchers alike.