

translation speaks to Susan Bassnett

Susan Bassnett is a scholar of comparative literature. She served as pro-vice-chancellor at the University of Warwick for ten years and taught in its Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies, which she founded in the 1980s. She was educated in several European countries, and began her academic career in Italy, lecturing in universities around the world. Author of over twenty books, her *Translation Studies*, which first appeared in 1980, has remained in print ever since and has become an important international textbook in this field. Her *Comparative Literature* (1993) has also become internationally renowned and has been translated into several languages. In 1996 she co-edited *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* with André Lefevere, and together with Harish Trivedi she is the editor of *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (1998). *The Translator as Writer* (2006) was coedited with Peter Bush and *Translation in Global News* (2009) was written with Esperança Bielsa. Her most recent book is *Reflections on Translation* (2011) and her book on Translation in the Routledge New Critical Series will appear in 2012. In addition to her scholarly works, Bassnett is known for her poetry and journalism. Bassnett serves on *translation's* advisory board. susan.e.bassnett@gmail.com



translation editor Siri Nergaard met with translation studies pioneer Susan Bassnett in Bologna (Italy) on one of the scholar's frequent travels to the country where she studied and started her career as a scholar of comparative literature.

During this conversation Bassnett tells about her life in and around translation, speaks of the origins of her many publications (including the ground-breaking *Translation Studies*, first published in 1980 and now going into its 4th edition), and reflects on the close professional friendships from around the world that she has forged in pursuit of her transdisciplinary studies. Together, the scholar and editor explore the very nature of translation and speculate about where study of translation is heading. 'Change comes from the margins', Bassnett reminds us. Bassnett has implemented and witnessed many changes in her long, diverse, and still thriving career. Her history is in many ways the history of translation studies. The following is a transcript of the oral interview.

Early Life Experiences. First Publications

NERGAARD: Susan, in 1980, it's a long time ago now, you published your first book *Translation Studies*. Why did you write it? Why did you want to write on translation? Why did translation become so central in your writing, in your thinking, in your life?

BASSNETT: Well the answer to that, Siri, is that **from being a very small child I always had more than one language in my head** and that's from when I was a little girl, when I began to speak. I was born in England and then we moved to Denmark and so I

learned Danish and had English and Danish as a very little girl. Then we moved to Portugal and the Danish got sort of pushed back a bit and the Portuguese came in. And then I moved to Italy and in Italy I began to go to 'Scuola Media' and then I began to learn languages formally and at that point I sort of had the Danish as one layer and then the



Portuguese, then the Italian and then I added Latin and French and the other languages and I think what you learn very, very early on when you work in more than one language is that you can say and do things differently in different languages. You learn that there are things, for example that you can't talk about or that come more easily in one language or in another, you become aware. For example I know that sometimes I dream in different languages, and I know I do because I can remember phrases and I can remember things. So the point that I'm trying to make is there had always been in my head a kind of multilingual activity and when I was a young lecturer after I finished my first degree I got a job in Rome working with Agostino Lombardo. He was absolutely wonderful and he gave me some translation work and one of the very first things I did was a book by Giulio Carlo Argan (who later became mayor of Rome) on the Renaissance city. And so my very first real publication was a translation and I did a lot of translations, I did creative writing but it wasn't until I met up with André Lefevere, Itamar Even-Zohar, José Lambert—a whole group of people all interested in thinking theoretically about translation—that it ever really entered my mind that I could view this as somehow academic because my university degrees had been in English and Italian literature, mainly medieval, and so I didn't really—well I wasn't intending to be a translation specialist, translation was something I did. And then meeting this group... I think for me that was a real revelation, and we met at a conference in Norwich in 1975 and everybody was protesting about the state of comparative literature and what was seen as a very sort of overly formalist approach and we just met up and we had a few drinks together and we got together. And then there was a conference organized the following year in Leuven in Belgium and **then all of sudden I found that I was talking to people about translation and I was having to theorize my life, if you like.**

I was having to think about the languages that had been in my head and how I might in a sense map the academic studies that I had done in literature and language because I did philology as well as linguistics. How could I map that onto my life experience? And then by one of those really, I suppose, happy coincidences, in 1977, just around this time, Terence Hawkes, the great English, well I should say Welsh, Shakespearean scholar, he founded a series of books for Routledge called 'New Accents' and the idea was that this would be a whole series of books that would introduce to students

and general readers all the new thinking in literary studies. So Terry's own book was called *Structuralism and Semiotics*; there was to be something on deconstruction and something on gender studies—basically if you remember, I mean you probably don't, you're too young, but what was happening then is that there were so many new theories coming in—Derrida was writing, there were things happening all over the place and I wrote to Terry and said, 'would you be interested in a book on translation?' and he was deeply skeptical at first. And he said, you know, 'why, why translation?' though funnily enough I saw him again this summer. He's in his eighties now and we reminisced about this and he told me his version, which was that after meeting me, (we met on a station in a café) he took it to Routledge and the Routledge editor Janice Price said, 'you really want to do a book on translation? Will it work? What relevance does translation have to Deconstruction and all these other theories?' And Terry said, 'well she's convinced me and we'll give it a go.' Absolutely incredibly, it has now been through three editions. I'm writing the fourth edition now which will come out next year and that means that from 1980 it has never been out of print. It's been translated, I've forgotten, into how many languages. I think it's something like fifteen languages and it sells probably more copies now than when it came out. So that's the story. It's the story of my life and convincing Terry Hawkes and having the book in that series at that moment, see it's all about timing.



NERGAARD: It's the story of your life, but it's also the story of translation studies because it's really a milestone.

It was the first book that really tried to say what is translation studies, with the title. What is translation studies, you go into with—through different chapters—what is history? what is literature translation? what is drama translation? So we really...it's really the first book that is trying to show what this discipline, in its early years, what was it going to be, really.

BASSNETT: I think that's right, but that's because of the purpose of that series. The series was to write very easily accessible books for students and young academics and so what I had to do was, in a sense to translate complex linguistic theories and other theories into a text that would be readable. And I think that's why the book has done so well—because I do remember at the time, with my very dear friend André Lefevere, André said to me, 'you know there's a lot of people who feel that the work that you do and the work that I do is dumbing down because we're writing in a way that is very accessible.' Mieke Bal, the narratologist, wrote to me and she said, 'you've written a book of theory that reads like a novel'. And I thought that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to make it accessible because to me if theories are too abstract and inaccessible, then first of all, very few people can access them, but secondly and I think probably more important, a group of people end up talking to themselves.

NERGAARD: Yes.

BASSNETT: And I didn't want to talk to myself. I wanted to talk to a lot of people.

NERGAARD: And that's I'm sure the reason also why the book is still selling—because now you can really choose among hundreds of books on translation, but your book is still selling because it's accessible too. And accessible is not for dummies, it's not simplifying; it's telling something important, but with words that are comprehensible and accessible to students and scholars too.

BASSNETT: That's what I try to do. I mean, all my work is trying to make things accessible. I don't believe in using an esoteric language and I don't believe in writing in such a way that only a very small number of people can actually access it. I think, and in a sense, I suppose you could almost say that *Translation Studies*, the book, is a kind of translation. It's a translation of a vast mass of literary, linguistic theory, semiotic theory as well into a very accessible language.

The close collaboration with André Lefevere

NERGAARD: Definitely yes, so it's very, very important. You were mentioning André Lefevere and if we follow your story one of the next books was the one you edited together with him, *Translation, History and Culture* that came out in 1990, ten years after the first one. It's a completely different book because it's also an anthology and I think it was one of the first books that introduced other concepts, central concepts in literary/cultural theory at the moment. It's one of the first books that mentioned gender in connection with translation, one of the first books that, or maybe the first book, that mentioned post-colonialism and translation, media and translation, so many central concepts that now have been developed in this huge discipline—so it was a milestone in another way. I would like you to tell me about the book and also about your close collaboration and friendship with André Lefevere.

BASSNETT: Right, well André and I and just hit it off personally, we got on very, very well. I got on well with the whole group, with José Lambert, with Gideon Toury, we all got on. But André and I had a kind of, I don't know, I think we shared a sense of humor and we got on very, very well, and André had left Belgium and gone to the States. And then we organized a conference in 1988 in Warwick, André was helping me and also it was organized with my colleague David Wood, who was in philosophy there at Warwick. And it was a crazy idea. It was a conference we called, 'Writing the Future'. I can't remember but I think we had well over 250 papers, it was enormous. We had people from all over the world. It was really David with his ideas about philosophy and me with translation and comparative literature and narratology and when we first advertised this we began to get people who wanted to give papers coming from theological departments, from anthropology, from literary studies and so that was really, really interesting. And I think a number of publications came out of the writing—

which you know, in the English speaking world you don't do conference proceedings, so there wasn't a conference proceedings—but what André and I then thought was we had a number of very interesting papers on translation. And so we thought maybe we could make a book. And we called it *Translation History Culture* because it seemed to us (and I know this book has been generally heralded as bringing about the cultural turn in translation) that translation was demonstrably about language, but about much more than language: language in context, cultural issues. I remember one of the papers in that volume that I was particularly pleased to have was by a very good friend, who sadly now has died, Vladimír Macura from the Czech Academy of Sciences and what Vladimír was looking at was nationalism and translation in the nineteenth century in the Czech context. Well, he was writing just about the Czech context, but I think out of that essay came enormous possibilities for thinking about translation and the emerging nation state. I think in many ways that was a pioneering essay. And there were a number of other essays in that book that we liked enormously. We could have published a lot more, but we actually focused on those and, as you say, it did introduce questions of gender, nationalism, the beginnings of post-colonialism. It brought about a whole number of different avenues that were then followed.

The 1990s. Impact of Global Changes and Centrality of Translation

NERGAARD: In 1990 we can say maybe that the discipline has been established.

BASSNETT: I think, **I don't even know if I would call translation studies a discipline.**

I think in this I'm still ambiguous, but certainly translation studies had begun to be noticed. I think by the 1990s there were journals beginning. André and I edited a series of books for Routledge and then afterwards we took the series to *Multilingual Matters*. I think you know there were people talking about Theo Hermans's book on the manipulation of literature, which came from another conference; it had come out in '85 so people were talking about the cultural turn, the manipulation school. There was a lot more interest in translation in comparative literature circles, so things had started to happen really. And also journals were being published, there were quite a lot more conferences and I began to see a rising number of students interested in studying translation and I think that's another point. But I also have a theory as to why that happened in the 1990s which has nothing to do with books.

NERGAARD: So what does it have to do with?

BASSNETT: It has to do with major world political events. It has to do with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the opening up of China to the West and the end of apartheid in South Africa because those are three huge changes—they were three constraints. In the 1980s you had an apartheid regime, which not only had an impact in South Africa, but, of course, the whole continent of Africa. China was pretty well closed, certainly in terms of regular traffic of students moving; and of course, Eastern Europe was closed. And then all of a sudden by 1995 you've got this huge opening

and at this point you've got millions, literally millions more people moving. They're moving for economic reasons, they're moving for pleasure, they're moving for discovery, and so you've got this enormous, enormous change in the world. You can see it in every airport. One of the things I remember is sitting two or three years ago with friends in Copenhagen in the sunshine in a bar and next to me were two young Chinese men, who were meeting someone from Italy, and at another table is an Australian who's talking to a Russian. All of a sudden you have this extraordinary cultural interchange and that means that people are bringing languages. They're bringing cultural expectations in totally new ways and so I think that has had a big, big impact on why people have come to see translation as important.

Translation and Post-colonialism

NERGAARD: Yes, I see, and then you don't only speak about Europe, but about the world. The world has changed. And then we have new encounters between translation studies and post-colonial studies and you are part of that game too, since you in '99 published the book on *Post-colonial Translation* together with Harish Trivedi.

BASSNETT: Yes, because, you see, that also interested me and I was very, very lucky really. I went to China in 1988 for the first time and I was in Beijing and I was in Northern China and at that point people from the West were so rare in the outlying areas. I remember when I was up Shenyang, children would come up and touch me in parks because they hadn't seen a blonde woman before because China was still so closed. And also in the 1980s (I mentioned Vladimír Macura earlier, I could mention a number of other Czech friends and so on), I had begun to meet people and so I had gone to Eastern Europe, also because some of the very early excellent work in translation studies. There were Anton Popovič and Jiří Levý, Czech and Slovak writers. So I had actually had a fellowship at one point from the British Academy to go to Prague; and many of my colleagues in literary studies in the UK were not interested in going to remote areas of China or to Eastern Europe. They wanted to go to Princeton or whatever, so I was going East and they were going West and then after 1989 all of the sudden the world changed. And a whole load of the people that I had known suddenly became professors, heads of department, and were organizing things in the East and I remember writing an article for, I think it was the *Journal of Women's Studies*, which was called 'How I Became an Expert on Eastern European Women Overnight' because it was just from all those years of talking to people. And also I had some Czech as well. So in order to talk to people suddenly meant that again the world had changed and I was kind of involved in it. And so I was very interested to see what happened, certainly in China, there was this huge—as they moved more towards opening to the West—a huge translation boom which is still going on. And then partly because I was so interested in that part of the world, I traveled for the British council in Bulgaria, in Turkey, in Uzbekistan, in Kazakhstan, you know in a number of remote places in the early 90s. And then I had this wonderful invitation to go to India and to chair a project on translating South Indian languages, which was

called 'The Oak and the Banyan Tree'. And out of this, of course, I then began to learn so much more about, well about South India and about Indian languages generally in the role of translation. And I'd known Harish Trivedi since 1985 when I'd invited him to Warwick and he came. He was in Birmingham with his wife, she was doing a PhD and we just met. And so then it seemed very logical that we would put together our shared interest by then with what was happening outside Europe and look at post-colonialism in translation so that was another book, *Post-colonial Translation*, that just grew organically like *Translation, History and Culture* had. I think all my books have developed, I'd say organically, very logically from what I happened to be doing at that particular moment in time and the collaborations have been very logical collaborations. I mean André and I wrote a book together that came out in 1998, *Constructing Cultures* and that again was a very, very logical collaboration so all the collaborations have been entirely, yes, in keeping with what I happened to be interested in.

Translation are Constructing Cultures

NERGAARD: Could you tell us about that new collaborative effort with André Lefevere, a book entirely written by you two together.

BASSNETT: We had done a lecture tour of Finland together, and were planning more for the future. We realized that we were working on parallel tracks, as it were, with similar, yet slightly different interests, so we conceived the idea of writing a book consisting of essays on particular areas of individual research. I had written a book called *Comparative Literature* in 1993 that argued provocatively that comparative literature should be seen as a branch of translation studies, rather than as an over-arching discipline, and André had written his book *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* that came out in 1992, arguing that all translation was rewriting, so we thought a joint book would enable us to pool our efforts and argue even more strongly for the importance of translation. André finished his four essays first—I had been delayed by the arrival of my third daughter, Rosanna—but then shockingly he died. I did not find the energy to finish the book for a good two years after his death, because I had to edit his work as well as my own and it was very painful. But I think he would have been pleased with the book *Constructing Cultures* (1996), and that too has been translated into several languages.

NERGAARD: It seems to me that again, your work and your publications are very parallel to what happened to translation studies. You must be very good in timing, or by accident, or maybe because you opened up doors and then other scholars followed that path. You were working with people in the right moment, creating innovative work in translation studies. Your later book—also collaborative—with Esperança Bielsa on *Translation in Global News* is representing something new: you are going out of the context of literary translation and start to investigate other areas where 'real' translation is going on. ... It's going on because we travel, because the world has changed; but in the media that's really where translation is taking place, where they are discussing

politics and the change in our world, not only literature. That was all a new important step for translation studies.

The responsibility of an academic

BASSNETT: I think, if I can take you up on two things there: one is, **I believe very, very strongly that as an academic it has been my responsibility and duty to help younger scholars** and also if you like, to talent-spot. So when André and I were editing our series for Routledge we were looking all the time. You know Sherry Simon's book on gender and translation was because we met Sherry Simon and we thought, 'Oh, my goodness this woman is terrific.' I mean you look at what she's writing now and you can see how over twenty years that's developed. Michael Cronin was another one. I was sent a manuscript many years ago by Cork University Press to assess and I read this and I thought, 'gosh, here's a really, really bright mind.' Also there was Edwin Gentzler, I came into contact with such people, and because of the advantage of editing a series of books or organizing conferences or whatever, I was then able to invite them to do things and I think that is also important, that you have a bit of faith in people. And the collaboration with Esperança was again, that was a book that came out of an award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which basically employed Esperança for three years; she was the research fellow on that and she was a sociologist. A marvelous young Catalan scholar who'd also done a lot of work on Latin American media and so that was how that book came about, but again I think it's a timely book and I'm interested that the Arabic and Chinese editions are supposed to come out any time now. I haven't seen them yet, but the contracts have been signed and there's a lot more people now working in this because this is an important area. Again if you go back twenty years I've talked about the political side of things, but you could also say, you know, in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down we didn't have the internet. Now, we've gone not only to the internet but we've gone to 24-hour breaking news and so one of the questions I think which is hugely important now is: **we've always had this issue about whether you trust translators (because in one sense you have to trust them because you don't know the other language, you've got to trust the person translating for you), but with the news this is terribly important.** So what the project, what Esperança and I started to do was to look at how the news arrives to us. If you think of what's been happening in Libya lately, how does the information from some of those very isolated places arrive on our television screen and in our newspapers? And, of course, the answer is that it goes through the most incredibly complicated processes of interlingual transfer from one language to another, but not only interlingual transfer, but very complex processes of editing, reshaping (what we would call manipulation). And so, by the time you get your quotation from someone who has been there, for example who saw Quaddafi shot, my goodness it's gone through so many transformations! And so the question of trust and authenticity and veracity, thinking of Habermas and the whole veracity debate, that becomes very,

very important and I think that will grow in importance because not only do we have so much happening interlingually now, but we're having it done at such a fast pace that the possibility of checking, double-checking, verifying is not there ... as it was even a few years ago, and so that's important.

What is an original?

NERGAARD: What you say about the internet, it is so challenging also because, what is the text? What are you translating from? And the ordinary idea we have from that language to the other language, source language and target language, we can't, they are not sufficient any more and we have to have other concepts, other ways of thinking about how translation is taking place.

BASSNETT: I think this is right. I think to me the most interesting thing happening in translation now is that in one sense we are looking—when I say 'we' I think some of the most interesting work in the field is enlarging the boundaries of translation and almost deconstructing the notion of translation itself. What is, for example, an original? With my students I've looked many times at—you know if you look at mass international marketing of products, you have so many things that you can buy in twenty different countries. And when you open the packet the instructions they're in twenty different languages—those are not translations. **there is no original here. What there is is a brand product that is then being written for different markets. So the question then is: is there such a thing as an original?** And I think, I'm very, very interested in the work, I mean Edwin Gentzler now is working on what he sees as a whole (I don't even know if you can call it that) genre of literature which involves translation: books about translation, books written by people who see themselves as translated. Is interlingual—well not just interlingual—but is intercultural movement a form of translation? Who, you know Jhumpa Lahiri or what is she? Is she an Indian American, an American you know she has very strong views about who she is, but I think that this is an increasingly fascinating problem for a very, very mixed world with more and more people who are speaking a number of languages and shifting in and out between cultures. And I think the old notion of a fixed and rigid original and a translation, this binary opposition, is really something that we, OK if we're translating—what can I think of, if we're translating legal documents or poems or whatever—clearly there is a text and you need to bring it into another language. But at the same time **within translation studies we do need to be thinking much more broadly about what we understand by translation and whether or not a translation always has to have an original**, which I think is now a contentious question.

NERGAARD: I agree.

BASSNETT: Oh, good.

NERGAARD: I agree also because we have founded this new journal which is called *translation*

and the reason why we call it 'translation' is that we would like to open up a transdisciplinary dialogue and discussion and debate about what translation is and the only thing we have in common in all the different approaches and disciplines and thoughts and views is the concept, translation. It can be very, very wide and we have to discuss it and we have to take into the reflection on translation all these different concepts even without the original that is really the foundation of the real translation problem. But maybe today we have to discuss and problematize this because we also live in such translational conditions. We are all continuously translating our self and maybe not even from one language to another, but the condition is translational, but where from and where to is not really clear any more, neither in our subjectivity nor in our cultures.

BASSNETT: I think that's right. Years ago I used to do an exercise (because I've taught creative writing for many years and I used to do a thing with my creative writing groups) where I would ask them to produce three versions of the same story and the story was always an imaginary story. I would say to them, OK here we go, you've lost your job. You know why you've lost your job, there might be dark reasons or whatever, but you've lost your job and now you have to write three letters. You write to your mother, you don't really want to tell your mother that you've lost your job so you've got to write this ambiguous letter. You've also got to write a letter of application for another job and you don't know how much that other person might know. And then you write to a friend and tell them the truth. Now I saw all those forms of writing, in a way, as translations because they're all translations of the same, if you like, scenario, and you could argue that there is an original. The original is the particular position that the person holds. But you see, I think also you could move on from that and **you could say that biography, autobiography, life writing, memory studies, trauma studies, all of these fields that have grown and grown in the last few years are all in a way connected with translating.** They're all translating experiences, they're all translating text. I think memory studies... I think the possible link between memory studies and translation studies is an absolutely fascinating one.

Translation as Memory

NERGAARD: Because translation is always a kind of memory of something.

BASSNETT: Absolutely. And then so much of when you read the vast literature on translation is about what is being lost. I'm particularly interested in seeing how memory studies and translation studies move together increasingly. There is a new *Journal of Memory Studies* that's been founded I think about two, three years ago and I just find this absolutely fascinating. The two may be coming possibly from different interdisciplinary positions, but they they're meeting. Then something else I've written about in the past is translation and travel writing. When you go on a journey and you write about your travel, the travel narrative is another form of translation so I think we have to really, really open the concept of what we understand by translation.

I particularly like the marvelous definition of translation as an intersecting category which Bella Brodzki promotes in her book, that **we need to think about translation as we have come to think about gender, as a category, as something without which basically we can't engage in textual analysis.** Translation studies, the disadvantage of 'translation studies' as a term is that I—I mean I've said this and I would say it again unashamedly—too many people have decided to define themselves as translation studies experts and boxed themselves in. I think when you try to establish a new field and you start writing to one another and speaking to one another, there is a real danger that you don't open out. I think translation studies as a field has not reached out nearly as far as it should have done and I think that's perhaps why some of the best work in translation at the moment is being done by people who don't call themselves translation studies specialists at all. But I'm not worried about how I'm labeled and I never have. I wrote *Translation Studies*, I'm at present preparing the next edition, the fourth edition, but I just, I think I see myself as someone who's basically concerned with what I suppose you would describe as intercultural communication through translation, through literature and whatever. But I do think there is something of a problem in terms of terminology and that has to do with the disciplinary bases within institutions that want to label: this is 'translation', that is 'comparative literature'. I'm very happy with 'world literature', it's a good loose category, but somebody will come along in a little while and say that's too restrictive as well.

NERGAARD: Yes, maybe that's why, how things are going on, but I think... I was saying 'discipline' and I think we need to speak about discipline because of all these people that have done so much to create the discipline.

BASSNETT: Oh, yes.

The Future of Translation Studies

NERGAARD: So and it has been defined and it has been identified as a discipline. You can see it positively or negatively, but now it's... I think we need to make a step further. Maybe it was important to call it discipline and identify with the discipline to really start to fly, but now that we are flying maybe we don't need it any more and it's too restrictive.

BASSNETT: Yes, I think possibly to give it respectability, to make it respectable, so now translation studies is respectable. But and I can't emphasize this too strongly, **translation studies from the beginning was a contestatory field;** it was Even-Zohar, Lefevere, myself, all of us, we were protesting against what we saw as restrictions and so my concern is, 'what happens if you want to call it a discipline, what happens when a discipline becomes very respectable?' It has to be challenged by someone because **change never comes from the establishment. Change comes from the margins.** From people saying we're not happy with that and so what I'd like to see is a whole load of people saying we're not happy with translation studies at the moment—it's got

too conservative, it's too narrow in focus. Let's do something else.

NERGAARD: We are trying with our journal; time will show and we are calling this project *Post-Translation Studies*. Do you think it could work?

BASSNETT: Well, we've had feminism and post-feminism and we had structuralism and post-structuralism. Post-translation studies, I mean part of the problem with 'post-translation studies' is that translation is still at the center of things. I know we have talked with various people about, 'Is there another way of getting beyond the very word translation?' and one of the things that comes out in the book that Esperança Bielsa and I did is how few of the people doing what we would call translation in news call themselves translators. They call themselves international journalists and I have a student at the moment who is doing a super PhD on advertising in particular in the automobile industry in England and Italy. And again when she looks at advertising agencies they don't want to call themselves translators so there is a kind of difficulty around the very notion of the word 'translation'. So maybe 'post-translation' is sufficiently provocative for now, but I don't think it's going to be—I can't imagine a discipline of post-translation studies.

NERGAARD: No, of course. That's not the idea of course, but I think maybe in some areas the concept of or the word 'translation' doesn't work any more, but when you go into other disciplines, especially in this historical period you see that the word 'translation' is used more or less as metaphor. It's very strong, it's a very useful concept to speak about today, what is happening today: about borders, about this new globalized, fragmented world. It's a very powerful metaphor.

BASSNETT: Very much so and I mean so far that a number of people, I think, in a recent issue of the journal *Translation Studies*, I think Doris Bachmann-Medic, who was editing that issue has talked about a translational turn in literary studies and I think that's actually quite an interesting idea, so you are quite right. Translation has been used as a metaphor.

NERGAARD: No, I agree, I agree. No, the concept, not translation studies.

BASSNETT: The concept, the translation concept absolutely and that has to do with, as I said, with what I see as not just epistemological shifts, but also actual socio-political shifts, though epistemological shifts obviously come as a result of those other changes, so yes.

The recently published book, *Reflections on Translation*

NERGAARD: Thank you. You have written a new book, it came out this year.

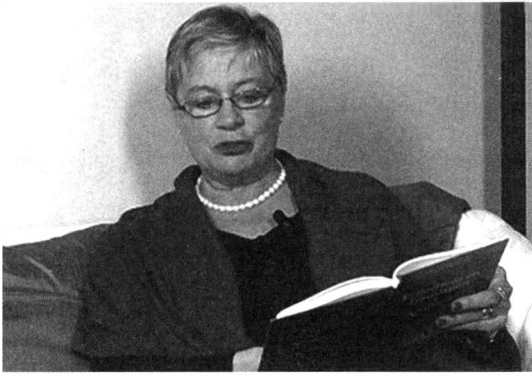
BASSNETT: In June. 2011, yes.

NERGAARD: *Reflections on Translation*. It's a book with thirty-nine essays, I think, and they have been published...

BASSNETT: Pieces of journalism yes, over ten years, yes.

NERGAARD: Could you select maybe one of them and read something for us, or do you want to say something about this book first?

BASSNETT: Yes, the book came about because, as I said, I had been writing these columns for two journals, for two professional journals—one *The Linguist*, which is the Institute of Linguists' monthly publication, and the other, *The Institute of Translators and Interpreters Bulletin*—and it's absolutely liberating because I've been allowed to write about anything that I wanted to. So I could write about translating menus, I could write about the debate between theory and practice, I could write personal things, or about translating theater, so I've been able to write about all sorts of things, but the one little bit that I think I would like to read is about a topic that is very dear to my heart. I think it is a very important topic and it is about something I was talking about earlier: the need for us to trust translators and the immense danger involved in translation. And this essay



was triggered by the incredibly brutal murder of some translators and interpreters in Afghanistan by the Taliban. They had their tongues cut out and were murdered and it struck me thinking how many times through the ages people have been burned to death and executed because of translation, and so it's a topic I keep coming back to again and again and if I can just read two little tiny bits from this. And one is this:

Language is powerful. There is an old English saying which goes, 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.' This is simply nonsense. Words can wound more sharply than knives and as can be seen by the death threats issued to translators through the ages, translation whether of a written text or an oral interpretation can be punishable by death in some context. [...]

We have always needed translators and interpreters, especially in times of conflict and international antagonisms. Wars are fought with weapons, but peace treaties are made with words, and without men and women who seek to diffuse tensions and misunderstandings by bringing the enlightenment of mutual comprehension to the table the shaping of such treaties would be impossible. The brutal murder of the Afghan interpreters serves to show us all how vital interlingual communication is if we want to create a better world, and how badly we all need brave people capable of facilitating that communication. The risks they take is huge, because they are dealing not only with the hostilities of a particular conflict, but with deep-seated psychological fears of Otherness, fears that stem from the terrible power of a language that is unknown to us, outside of us and belonging to other people who may be our enemies. Translators and interpreters who have the courage to face down those fears in their day-to-day work deserve our respect and admiration. ("Dangerous Translations," 22-23.)

And that for me is really why translation matters.

NERGAARD: Thank you.

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