

Dirty Pretty Language: Translation and the Borders of English

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This article analyses the politics of English, and translation into Englishness, in the film *Dirty Pretty Things* (Frears). With a celebrated multilingual cast, some of whom did not speak much English, the film nevertheless unfolds in English as it follows migrant characters living illegally and on the margins in London. We take up the filmic representation of migrants in the “compromised, impure and internally divided” border spaces of Britain (Gibson 694) as one of translation into the imagined nation (Anderson). *Dirty Pretty Things* might seem in its style to be a kind of multicultural “foreignized translation” which reflects a heteropoetics of difference (Venuti); instead, we argue that *Dirty Pretty Things*, through its performance of the labour of learning and speaking English, strong accents, and cultural allusions, is a kind of domesticated translation (Venuti) that homogenises cultural difference into a literary, mythological English and Englishness. Prompted by new moral panics over immigration and recent UK policies that heap further requirements on migrants to speak English in order to belong to “One Nation Britain” (Cameron), we argue that the film offers insights into how the politics of British national belonging continue to be defined by conformity to a type of deserving subject, one who labours to learn English and to translate herself into narrow, recognizably English cultural forms. By attending to the subtleties of language in the film, we trace the pressure on migrants to translate themselves into the linguistic and mythological moulds of their new host society.