
El Traductor Martí. Lourdes Arencibia Rodríguez. *El Traductor Martí*, 2000, 171 p.

El Traductor Martí by Lourdes Arencibia Rodríguez is a comparative analysis in Spanish of the celebrated Cuban intellect, José Martí (1853 – 1895). One of the most influential writers, poets, diplomats and journalists of the 19th century, Martí is honored as a great poet and Cuban patriot, but he also had a deep knowledge of literature in English, French, Latin and Classical Greek, interests that led him to work as a translator. Besides translating out of economic necessity during his years of exile (1871 – 1895), Martí viewed translation, from the perspective of a revolutionary activist, as a way of supporting Cuba's lengthy struggle for independence from Spain. As there is little knowledge about Martí's approach to translation, in this book, Rodríguez focuses on delineating Martí's purpose and methodologies as a translator.

Rodríguez organizes her book into two primary sections. Through the first half of the

book, she introduces Martí's motivations as a translator: to develop Cuba through democratization and cultural acceptance. In the second half of the book, Rodríguez analyzes Martí's translations. Here, the author provides a comparative investigation of a variety of genres, literary types and authors translated by Martí.

In notes and entries in his journals, José Martí proposed the act of translation to be: *Impensar* and *transpensar*. For Martí, these two words mean to appreciate, to internalize, to process and to recreate the thoughts of an original author in order to produce an omniscient, faithful and culturally acceptable translation. Martí's idealist and pansophical definition of translation embodies the author's purpose as a translator; to foment the cultural development of nineteenth-century Cuba.

Arencibia Rodríguez devotes nearly forty pages to an explanation of Martí's social purpose as a translator which she calls, "*proyecto cultural y sociopolítico de Martí a través de la traducción* (Martí's cultural and sociopolitical project through translation)." Martí believes that democratization would come to Cuba through the acceptance of other cultures,

which explains why he translates classical and contemporary literature from France, Greece and the U.S. Rodríguez describes how Martí uses translation as a political vehicle to promote democracy and cultural acceptance in Cuba.

To fulfill his goals as a political activist, Martí also worked as a poet, professor, essayist, literary critic, journalist and editor. For example, Martí also fought for the spread of democracy as a journalist. In 1875, while exiled in New York, Martí wrote an article which was published in the *Revista Universal de México* to illuminate the story of twenty young Cubans who were accused of subversion against the Spanish regime and imprisoned before trial. Martí announced the need for democracy in newspapers such as the *Revista Universal de México*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Sentinel*, and others.

As a parallel activity to translation, Martí invented a children's magazine called "*La Edad de Oro*" (The Golden Age). With this publication, he hoped to educate the children of Cuba through short stories from countries and cultures around the world in order to prepare the next generation

of Cuban leaders to accept and embrace difference. *La Edad de Oro* materialized Martí's desire to reintroduce translated fictional texts that function as a vehicle for the spread of culture.

As a translator, Martí chose to translate only works that epitomized the culture of a historical time period. For example, Martí translated "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe, a man who represented the American Romantic movement and who would come to be one of the most translated poets of that period. Thus, for Martí, Poe's poems and short stories was a compelling representation of late nineteenth-century American culture.

After addressing Martí's objectives as a translator and political activist, Arencibia Rodríguez makes a transition to the second half of the book in which she devotes nearly 100 pages to a comparative analysis of Martí's translations. This section is organized into two categories: prose and poetry.

In the prose chapter, Arencibia Rodríguez focuses on Martí's natural ability to select vocabulary that embodies the cultural significance of a translated text, not merely the dictionary defini-

tion of words. She provides paragraphs of the translated text, underlining words or phrases such as *espíritu* and *juicios claros*. She then discusses a plethora of possible meanings, nuances or stigmas attached to these underlined phrases in the original language and in the language of the translation. For example, in translating Victor Hugo's *Mes Filles*, Martí adds a sarcastic connotation to the word *Décorar*, to decorate, by saying, "they decorated him with six months of prison." This phrase might be translated more conservatively as, "he was decorated then sentenced to six months of prison" (Arencibia Rodríguez 64).

This section also elaborates on Martí's use of translational liberties. Rodríguez includes fragments of an original text alongside Martí's translation to illuminate the omission of words, phrases or entire sentences. Rodríguez speculates that Martí manipulates the original text until it becomes a platform for his own political campaigns.

In her analysis of the translations of poems, Rodríguez provides the reader with the original poem, Martí's translation and translations by two other trans-

lators, for comparative purposes. The reader sees line by line differentiations between literal translations, liberal translations, word choice, and varying loyalty to the rhythm and grammar of the poems. Although this section is thought-provoking for a monolingual Spanish reader, it would be extremely stimulating for those readers fluent in both English and Spanish.

These two sections are particularly intriguing because they allow the reader to personally analyze Martí's translations. Rodríguez explains theories behind Martí's translations in the first section of the book and, here, facilitates proactive reading and critical thinking.

In *El Traductor Martí*, Lourdes Arencibia Rodríguez writes with straightforward language, includes plentiful definitions and organizes her chapters and sections strategically so that the book serves as a valuable resource in the field of literary translation studies for a wide audience, ranging from undergraduate students to Cuban sociologists. As one of Martí's literary interests is the etymology of regionalisms, he kept a dictionary of words and phrases used throughout the Americas that

intrigued him. Rodríguez includes this dictionary and a comprehensive bibliography so that readers are able to research any lingering questions about José Martí. Rodríguez concludes by reiterating that Martí's goals as a trans-

lator consists of developing Cuba through democracy and the spread of classical, European and U.S. culture in Spanish translation.

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