
Como traducir la obra de Juan Rulfo. Sergio Lopez Mena. Mexico: Editorial Praxis, 2000, 75 p.

Como traducir la obra de Juan Rulfo is a collection of eight essays compiled by Sergio Lopez Mena, who provides a prologue as well as an essay of his own entitled "George D. Schade, traductor de *El llano en llamas*." The contributors all participated in the international seminar, *El llano en llamas*, held at the House of Culture in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, on May 15, 1999. The seminar had two purposes: first to honor the works and struggles of Rafael González de Alba, who dedicated his life to education and the promotion of cultural understanding; secondly, to analyze the classic book by Juan Rulfo in terms of

how it has been translated into a variety of languages, including Hindi, Catalan, and Korean. After a brief section dedicated to one of the most important Mexican writers of the twentieth century, Juan Rulfo (1917-1986) and his literary works, López Mena discusses how regionalism is an important part of the narratives of Rulfo, which the author uses to describe the circumstances of time and place, as well as the human condition. The challenge for most translators of Rulfian literature is the question of faithfulness to meaning rather than form, especially since these two aspects of Rulfo's writing technique are interrelated.

For Chandra Bhushan Choubey, this idea of faithfulness is like a woman: "lovely when she's not faithful and faithful when she's not pretty." In her essay, "Rulfo en Hindi," she addresses the im-

portance of translating in general, saying that it is essential because it allows the work to cross boundaries of culture, language, and nationality. Translating Rulfo's work to Hindi is particularly important for Choubey, despite the fact that both cultures are very different from one another. She has noticed that Mexican literature and the prose of Rulfo in particular, have not been translated to the Hindi language, which is spoken by 300 million people. Instead, only certain works by Rulfo have been published in India translated into English, which is spoken by less than 5 percent of the population. Because of this, the Indian reading public is not aware of Rulfo. Choubey explains this lack of translations to the differences between the cultures, both in terms of traditions but also, of course, language. In the Hindi culture, there is no Virgin Mary, and words such as 'thank you,' 'you're welcome,' and 'excuse me' do not exist. Choubey herself was faced with the decision of translating literally and changing the meaning or looking for equivalents, which, even so, still produced a changed meaning. However, where, exactly, does this leave the reader?

This is the question that Dolores Bosch I Sans poses in her essay, "Juan Rulfo en catalán: 'Ens han donat la terra'." She wonders if the reader is able to understand what is written or translated, and asks if the translator should include footnotes that explain the Mexican cultural references as a way of helping readers understand Rulfo's work. For Bosch I Sans, this is possible, since, for her, to translate is to move from one place to another. She has translated the first story from "*El Llano en llamas*" into Catalan, a language currently spoken by eleven million people. It is an accomplishment to translate Rulfo's work into Catalan, considering the fact that the language is enjoying a resurgence after it was banned for forty years under Franco's regime. In addition, Sans recognizes the differences between colloquial Catalan and the official language promoted by the government. However, Bosch I Sans uses the latter language and is convinced that this does not inhibit comprehension.

Jorge Luis Borges says that "there is nothing more characteristic of a country than its imaginations, but what happens when geographically and culturally

different countries find similar ‘imaginations’?” This is the reasoning that Bong Seo Yoon uses to introduce his essay “La Experiencia de Traducir *Pedro Páramo* al Coreano,” to explain why Koreans want to read the work of Juan Rulfo. Yoon says that translating is not just about the knowledge of the language but also of the culture. The dictionary is not going to give translators every answer they need, and that is why, when translating “*Pedro Páramo*,” Yoon gave his manuscript to three other translators: a Korean and two Mexicans. Being informed about the culture is especially relevant in this case due to the vast differences between the Oriental and Occidental: in Mexico, it is customary to have more than one coffin in a burial niche, whereas in Korea people are buried in individual graves.

Not all the contributors in the book agree, however, with the idea that meaning is the most important element when it comes to translating the works of Juan Rulfo. In his essay, “La Traducción al Inglés de ‘No oyes ladrar los perros’,” Adam Critchley

defends the idea that rendering the way characters speak is the essence of translation. Translators must not “domesticate” the translation and make it their own in the targeted language. Also, Critchley advises translators to be aware of the aridity of Rulfo’s language, a quality that admits neither a shortage nor an excess of words. It is this language that reflects the impoverished human condition that the characters experience in Rulfo’s work.

The contributors to *Como Traducir la obra de Juan Rulfo* all struggle to restore in translation different aspects of Rulfo’s work. Some attempt to convey the author’s style, while others focus on an overall meaning. What matters most, however, is that Rulfo’s magnificent work now has been translated into important minority languages such as Hindi, Catalan and Korean. These new translations of the literature of a regional Mexican author, whose main theme is poverty, confirm Rulfo’s world class stature as a writer.

Nertila Koni
St. Lawrence University