INTERVIEW WITH TERESA CANEDA CABRERA

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Silence in Contemporary Irish Fiction”, funded by Spain’s Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness.

Cadernos de Tradução (CT): *You have an important contribution to the field of Translation Studies, especially related to theory and criticism. How did you become interested in translation?*

*Teresa Caneda Cabrera (TCC):* I think I have always been interested in translation without thinking about it, because as a young reader I would read a lot of what was actually coming from the United Kingdom for Spanish young readers, translated into Spanish. We do not have a tradition in children’s literature in Spain, so that you would not have interesting books for teenagers just about the age of fourteen, fifteen or sixteen. Therefore, at that time, I started reading many books in translation. I mentally produced an imaginary of another world, another culture, and other people my age. Those were books about children my age in boarding schools, children that would go on boats to camping sites... We would not do that in Spain at the time, so it was a way of encountering this otherness as a young reader, a young woman in Spain. I thought myself very connected with this idea of reading as a way of encountering other experiences. Of course that I never thought about that in terms of my engagement with translation, but it was. This is probably anecdotal, but it is still important. We were trained into reading works from other cultures, and we could even feel it in the language because the translation, very obviously, manifested that they were translation. At the time nobody in Spain would have the word “ginger” anywhere, for example, the Spanish jengibre first reached me through the reading of those books. In terms of my educational background, I got my PhD and my master’s degree in Comparative Literature. During my master’s degree at University of Southern California, throughout the curriculum of the courses we had to take, there were courses that evoked notions of comparativism that had to do with the issue of translation. Still, we
did not talk about translation that much, but that was very much there. We would take a course in French realism and we would read the texts in English, we would talk about concepts that belonged to French Realism and we were aware that we were reading the text in English. So, I got my MA in comparative Literature and was supposed to do my research on Joyce because I wanted to work on Joyce for my PhD dissertation, which was a sort of critical revision of the critical framework that have been produced around Joyce’s work. I think that through the research for the dissertation I became aware of the very interesting notion of them “framing” how so often in literary studies we take for granted approaches that are actually approaches, they are always perspectives. So, this idea of the framing became very important to me. This idea of how, culturally, from a particular perspective, we can produce, reshape and accommodate a particular work or author from a particular perspective. Still this is not translation but that was all in my mind.

When I went back to Spain from my three-year-stay at the University of Southern California, I got a position as an assistant professor at the University of Vigo. The University of Vigo in the early 90s had just started the undergraduate program in Translation and Interpretation Studies. It was one of the first universities in Spain to offer that degree. The degree did not exist before; it did not existed when I went to the university in the eighties, for example. Nobody could study translation because there was not a degree being offered, whereas in the 1990s it was approved by the minister of Education and Culture and became an official degree. That really revolutionized the panorama of studies in the humanities. When I was appointed at the University of Vigo, I started teaching English in the degree of translation and interpreting. I thought I should not teach English in a sort of neutral way, I should think about what students really required, given their need and the fact that they were translation student and not language student. So I became very sensitive towards that and I started reading about issues that had to do with discourse analysis, textual analyses. I remember that at the time there was a very interesting book that had just came out
called *Discourse and the translator* by Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, two British scholars. The book became very popular, the authors came to Spain to give a seminar in the University of Granada, and I got funding to attend it. I was still very young at the time but I had some intuition about things that were not being dealt with enough. I remember that during the seminar, the authors were talking about the idea of discourse, but for me the idea of discourse was not necessarily grounded on the literary. They had very interesting concepts that I have even used in my classes, but I remember asking them about literature and translation of literary texts, but they did not seemed to be really interested in literature as just another form of discourse. However, the very phenomena of transiting literature is in itself a sort of very idiosyncratic maneuver. It seemed to me that they did not contemplate that. But I came across all the wonderful work that was being done by people like Susan Basnett, Sherry Simon, Laurence Venuti. I remember reading Sherry Simon’s book on Translation and gender and reading Venuti’s work and then I realized that that aspect of translation, not so much based of textually *per se*, became very relevant to me. Obviously what I am doing is giving you a sort of genealogy that goes back to me being a reader of literature and my concern with the idea of differences and otherness that were showing me the language. And then, my idea of teaching English for student of Translation Studies and realizing that we were teaching from the perspective that we were European Spanish concerned with the issue of translation and coming across issues in the actual uses of language. I remember we held a conference on Translation Studies in Vigo and we invited renewed scholars like Ivan Turin and Miriam Schlesinger. I think that, at the time, as a very young professor, I witnessed the moment that the discipline was being born. It was very exciting because I was beginning to teacher in the translation program, thinking about all the aspects and conceiving all the possibilities of approaches, and at the same time, the discipline was, in a sort of meta-reflexive way, starting to think about itself and it was beginning to choose an identity of itself.
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CT: *Do you think that the discipline changed a lot since that moment you witnessed it being born? What were the main changes?*

*TCC: Yes, it changed a lot. First it was attached to programs that had to do with applied linguistics and it stayed there for a while, but then, all the issues that had to do with culture, mainly coming from the fronts of literature, comparative literature or gender studies end up making it more interesting. I am not saying that applied linguistic aspect is not important, but I thought that it got to the point that it was a little sterile in the sense that...I mean, what do you do when you analyze texts from that perspective and you come to the conclusion that it had to do with people. What do you do with your finding that there is a lack of equivalence or whatever? So, for me, the cultural aspect taken into consideration by scholars such as Sherry Simon and Susan Bassnett became very relevant. And of course we invited people to Vigo and we engaged in dialogues with them. Venuti came to Vigo before he had published the *Scandals of Translation*. He had just finished it and he talked about the book. That was 1997, I think. It was very interesting to engage in debates with people like them.*

CT: *You are a translator scholar and a James Joyce scholar. What came first? Were both interests related since the beginning of your academic career?*

*TCC: It is an interesting question. I wander if it was a matter of fate or fact. Because I think that anybody on Joyce’s studies becomes aware of issues that have to do with the language and unconsciously if you are a non-native English reader reading Joyce, you become aware of Joyce’s sort of manipulations with the language. When I started working on Joyce during those years I think there were all under the influence of post structuralism and the notions of the materiality of language. The notions of language being already contaminated with meanings,*
the very Derridean notion of logocentrism and eventually phallogocentrism. So, what I am saying is that it had given the notion of language a lot of thought.

Then, it just came very naturally that being interested in translation (as someone who had just recently joined a program and started teaching translation) it became a natural thing to see that Joyce related very easily to issues of translation. On the one hand, you have this idea because Joyce is this universal writer, the sort of representative of world’s literature that everyone talks about and everyone wants to read because there is this big thing about this canonical writer who has been pronounced one of the best writers of world’s literature ever. People wanted to read him and people that had no access to the original, because they did not read English, read translation. Thus, this idea of how Joyce has been translated, what had been translated or who had translated him has always been there.

Another thing that became even more relevant to me was the way that Joyce himself had lived across different territories of Europe, as we know, Italy, Trieste (at the time it was not part of Italy), Rome, Paris, Zurich, back to Ireland and the UK, Joyce became this sort of writer who was very aware of the notion of using different languages. I think Joyce writes with this very obvious sensitivity towards the notion of language awareness that comes from someone that does not speak just one language, someone that is not a monoglot. Someone who, maybe in one day is learning one language, is taking in another language, is addressing his children in another language. As we know, Joyce and his wife spoke English; they would speak triestino when they were in Trieste. Joyce was good at languages, he taught himself Norwegian in order to be able to translate Ibsen. This is someone whose mind is very far away from the notion of the monoglot, so translation becomes an important issue for him as a principle, as a creative principle. Thus, these two interrelated aspects became central for me. I did not really forced that. It just happened that I thought, while reading texts on translation: this is Joyce.
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CT: In Joyce’s first published novel, A portrait of the Artist as a Young man, Stephen Dedalus says that the Dean’s Language, English, and I quote: “So familiar and so foreign, will always be an acquired speech”, this passage make it possible for us to glimpse the linguistics tensions in the context of Ireland, a country that went through a long period of colonization. What are the particularities of translation in the context of Ireland?

TCC: This is a very interesting reflection on Joyce’s part on the very condition of Ireland. Michael Cronin, who has done a very interesting work on the notion of translation in Ireland, spoke about that in very eloquent terms, he wrote, “translation is our condition”. Of course, we do not know enough about Irish literature and Irish culture and the situation and politics of Ireland. We do not realize that even on the level of ordinary people, they may think of themselves as not speaking the language correctly, this idea that there is another language ghosting them. In the sense that it was a language imposed on them and that they have another language. So, in Ireland there is a very interesting kind of dynamic relationship with the two languages in a sort of problematic but also in a productive way.

This idea of living between languages is something that people actually think and talk about, and of course, it is recent in literature. Seamus Heaney talks about it, Joyce talks about it and I think that when we read literature written in English here in Ireland, there are always reflections on use of words, the language, and the meaning of certain words. This is something you do not find in Spanish Literature, although you do find that in the Galician Literature. So, when you are in contexts in which there are languages battles, not necessarily battles, but contexts in which two languages exist, have existed, or co-exists, be it diglossia, bilingualism, co-officiality, or officiality plus another native language...there are many possibilities. I think sometimes those are very controversial and conflictive situations from the point of view of politics, but from the point of view of language they are very productive. And I think
in Ireland they have become very productive and we have so many work, so much poetry and so much writing in general that actually reflect on the language. There is this wonderful poem by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, “Ceist na Teangan” / “The Language Issue”, in which she talks about putting the language in a basket like Moses, put it there just in case some princess would rescue the basket from the river and keep it alive. The baby in the basket in her poem is the Irish language.

It reminds me of my students reading a story, which was translated from Irish into English, and it was about a protagonist who was an homosexual man living in rural Ireland. He wanted to tell his father about his sexuality, after his mother had died. He wanted to disclose for his family that he was homosexual and because they spoke Irish and there is no word in the Irish language, he did not know how to tell that to his father. I think this kind situation is emblematic because they tell a lot about translation and its impossibilities. We can be trapped in some situations because of language issues that have to do with cultural issues. This is all very appealing to me because I was born in Galicia, and we also have two languages there. I would speak Spanish with my parents because I was raised during the Franco years, and “we would not be educated in a language of the peasantry”, and supposedly of the uneducated, although we have amazing literary and cultural tradition that was produced in the Galician language. It was somehow similar to what happened here in Ireland.

When I was a student of English at the University of Santiago, we staged the play by Brian Friel entitled Translations. This play has remarkable reflections about the way in which these two languages co-exist in Ireland. Not, of course, without controversy. It is a play about the translation of the names of places and that happened to Galicia during the Franco years, too. The name of many places were changed so that they could sound Spanish, just as the way it happened here in Ireland in the nineteenth century, when they translated the names of the places. It is pretty much the historical aspect that Brian Friel illustrates in his play.
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CT: You have a fascinating research on the political use of translation in the context of Cuba, how did you get to know about the specific use of the Cuban translation of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young man*?

TCC: I knew about the existence of both translation to Spanish at the time, the canonical one, by Dámaso Alonso, published in 1926, and the other one published in Cuba in 1964. I was in Havana in the year 2000, just after I had finished my dissertation on Joyce. That was a time when you would go to a bookshop and you would have access to an incredible amount of books that had been published in the 1960s, 1970s, a very dynamic period. The post-revolutionary years. Then, I saw the Cuban translation of *A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* at a bookstore and I bought it. When I read the introduction by the translator Edmundo Desnoes, I was amazed because it was something written in 1964, and obviously it was very political. It was very much as a sort of political manifesto about the way in which Joyce could be read in the island of Cuba, that is, as a revolutionary writer. I was amazed mainly because the only things that I had read at the time that had remotely shaped Joyce as a political writer had been published after the 1980s. If you go back beyond that in the English language, there is nothing about Joyce as a political writer.

I was attending a talk about this topic at the James Joyce’s Centre the other day and Emen Nolan referred to Dominic Manganiello as the first to place Joyce as a political writer. She was the second one, of course, when she wrote *Joyce and Nationalism* in the 1990s. I knew about it very well because of the research I had done for my dissertation, which was a revision of the critical framework that had accompanied different reading of *A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, so I was amazed and decided to talk about this prologue. I went to Leuven to teach a seminar, because we have an exchange program between Vigo and Leuven. It must have been in 2008, or something like that. I was very lucky to have José Lambert sitting there listening to me. When we had the question and
answer section, he seemed to be very interested in my reading of Joyce in Cuba and my analysis of the very interesting prologue that obviously functioned as a manifesto, as a way of shaping Joyce as a revolutionary writer for Cubans. Writers and readers. Very much a role model for Cuban revolutionary writers. José Lambert said that I should look at the text more closely because if the prologue was so interesting, maybe the translation had been manipulated in ways in which it would fit the ideology of the prologue.

I guess I have neglected the text for a while because, as we know, it was a revised translation. It was based on the one that had been made by Dámaso Alonso. The revisions are minors, but they were still there. Eventually I found out that José Lambert was right in his suggestion. I was very thankful for that because I started looking more closely at the text and I realized that the very minor changes actually had to do with semantic choices which were very ideological, and which were helping to shape Joyce from the perspective of him being a writer committed to a sort of revolution. Not only in terms of the style and the writing, but also in terms of ideology. From that moment on, I moved towards other flanks that had to do with that period in time and the concern of Cuban intellectuals with Joyce. That concern had always been there because of the fact that Joyce was Irish and there were some other Irish historical connections that were also embedded.

CT: In Modernism: A comparative History of Literature in European Languages, you wrote a chapter entitled: “The untranslatability of Modernism”, in which you discuss about the tension between modernism and translation, the first associated with the “crisis of representation”, as you reminds us, and the latter “a mode of representation”, and then you suggest that “we think of translation in terms of it being an inquiry and an experiment, a provisional response to the original” (Caneda-Cabrera, 2007, 686 p.). Do you think translators need to be guided by theories when translating a modernist text?
**TCC:** As we know, translation does not exist in a vacuum. One the one hand, you can have a scholarly translation: A translation commissioned to someone by a particular age who is looking for scholarly work or critical work, intellectual thinking, and academic knowledge being introduced in the shaping of the translation. If that happens, I think that it would be important to have a sort of theory behind. I myself when I translated a few short stories by Catherine Mansfield into the Galician Language, I did that for a publisher in a series that was concerned with translating women for Galician readers. So, we would have young Galician writers as models, in this case, I had this theory behind. It was a sort of feminist translation, which basically meant that I had to be alert to issues that were there in the language and that I think had been neglected in the Spanish translation, because there was not a feminist concern behind it. You are asking me about this modernism thing, by the way, Mansfield is also a modernist writer and in her agenda you really see how both issues, feminism and modernism, actually conflate. That was a very challenging translation for me because I really wanted to be subtle enough as to preserve that very poetic style. But at the same time, it is a poetic style that is not innocent, it is not harmless. It plays with the ambivalences and ironies of modernism to produce very radical statements about the role of women in society. But, that was me being a scholar in translator, being a passionate reader of Mansfield trying to produce my Mansfield, a new Mansfield for Galician readers and as a role model for possible young Galician women writers. That was me trying to rewrite Mansfield for all these particular objectives. That does not happen when you have, let say, a commercial translation in which what you have is someone being asked to translate Paul Auster, or any other writer. I think Translators have always to produce some sense of theory.

In a conference on Translation Studies at the University of Durham, I remember sitting in the back of the room with Lawrence Venuti and commenting on the presentations. Then, some Chinese Students approached him and said, “we are students of translation
and we find your theory so difficult because we do not know how the theory applies to the translation”. I remember he was very casual in his response, but I thought he was absolutely right. He said, “You know, you always have a theory about what you are doing in your life, no matter if you explicit it or not. Everything you do has a theory behind it. So, as a translator you have to have a theory”. Even in commercial translations that are produced not to be the subject of scholarly discussions, you can find a theory, or if not, a lack of theory that eventually would account for a poor translation or a translation that somehow does not connect with the original in any way. So, I think that, in the end, translation is about a previous text, anything you decide to do with this relation is a theory. If you decide to disregard it, to be very concerned, to be very attached, or if you decide to produce very creative responses. But, I would certainly distinguish between those of us who are translation scholars and those commercial translators out there.

CT: In one of your recent lectures at University College Dublin, you mentioned the importance of Ulysses, by James Joyce, to Galicia; can you go back to that subject once more?

TCC: Because the Galician literary system is a minor one, and we are talking a about a language that is a minority language, that lacked the status it has now, in the 1920, before the Spanish civil war and eventually the politics of Franco within the Spanish Peninsular, the country had to be just one, and all notions of differences had to be done away with. The 1920s was a very fruitful cultural period for Galician Letters, with a number of intellectuals being concerned with translation and with it as a way of accessing the cultures of Europe, with translation as a way of connecting and therefore bypassing the Spanish hegemonic culture and so connecting with other Atlantic cultures, the culture of the so-called Mitteleuropa. There you have a group of people, philosophers, thinkers, writers, translators, geographers, anthropologists being
concerned with all these other cultures, and there you have them concerned with Ireland. At the time, very obviously involved itself with the revival of their culture, the revival of their language and aspiring for independence.

In 1926, they made an amazing effort to translate fragments of Ulysses into the Galician language and published them in their journal, which was entirely in the Galician language. That journal had already published articles about what the Irish were doing. Pretty much the Irish being a role model for the Galicians. “Because if they were able to revive the language, the culture, and aspire for independence, maybe we should have them as role models”. And also, this link with the idea that in the nineteenth century the Galician historians and anthropologists had produced this theory of Atlanticism and Celticism, the idea that the Celtic people of Europe and Galicia being one of the Celtic people of Europe together with Ireland, Britany, The isle of Man, Wales, so on and so forth. When they decided to translate Ulysses, fragments from Ithaca e Cyclopes, they published this under the subtitle “Ulysses: fragments of the major novel by James Joyce put down into Galician from the original text”. The tittle is fascinating because it tells already what it was about. It meant: “we Galicians have read the universal writer Joyce and we have been able to translate it into our native language.

Translation here becomes a sort of embrace with a form of otherness, which is also a form of sameness. “He is just like us because he is Irish”, there is an absolute concern with Joyce being universal and at the same time “one of us”, a sort of universal Celt. They really managed to convert Ulysses into an icon of Galician modernity at the time. We were one of the first to translate Joyce into Galician, to appropriate Joyce and demonstrate that he can sound wonderful in Galician. Can be one of us. There are even fictional engagements with the character Stephen Dedalus, from Ulysses, coming to Santiago de Compostela, speaking the language, talking about the notion of being Irish, being Catholic, being Celt. The Nós generations themselves had a very complex kind of mixture
of discourses that had to do with Catholicism, Ethnocentrism and Celticism. Joyce was very appealing to them. Eventually, because we had the civil war, all the rich, fruitful development of the 1920s was interrupted for 40 years. That became one of the major and last sort of ultimate paradigm of modernity for Galician Letters. It is often invoked, even people in Galicia that does not know anything about Joyce, they know that Joyce was translated by those people in the 1920s and that made us very modern and very special. I think it is a very interesting gesture. Translation here works as a gesture.

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