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INTERVIEW WITH TERESA CANEDA CABRERA

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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 actually read a lot of what was coming from the UK for Spanish young readers, translated into Spanish. We do not have a strong tradition in children's literature in Spain and, at the time, interesting books for teenagers just about the age of fourteen, fifteen or sixteen were scarce. Therefore, in my generation we read many foreign books in translation. As a consequence of this, at an early age I had this imaginary of other young people in another world and from another culture. Reading was a way of encountering this otherness as a young woman reader in Spain. I eventually gave a lot of thought to this idea of reading as a way of coming in contact with experiences of otherness. Of course, back then I never thought about it in terms of this being an engagement with translation, but it certainly was. This is probably anecdotal, but I think it's very revealing. We got used to reading works from other cultures, and accepted a language that was not necessarily "typical" and. also, a context that was unfamiliar and showed that these were, after all, "foreign" books. For example, at the time nobody in Spain would have used the word for "ginger". It was very uncommon. It was reading English books for young adults in translation that I first came across the Spanish *jengibre*.
In terms of my educational background, both my PhD and my M.A. are in Comparative Literature. While studying for my master's degree at the 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, again, it was very much there. We would take a course in French realism and 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.

I got my M.A. 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 a revision of the critical framework that had been produced around Joyce's work. I think that through the research for the dissertation I became aware of the very interesting notion of "framing"; how so often in literary studies we take for granted approaches that are actually "approaches", they are always perspectives from somewhere. So, the concept of framing became very important to me: the idea of how, culturally, from a particular perspective, we can produce, reshape and accommodate a particular work or author from a specific perspective.

When I went back to Spain, in the early 1990s, after my three-year-stay at the University of Southern California, I got a position as an assistant professor at the University of Vigo which had just started an undergraduate program in Translation and Interpreting Studies. It was one of the first universities in Spain to offer the degree. The degree did not exist before when I went to the university in the 1980s but it actually became an official degree in the 1990s. That really revolutionized the panorama of studies in the Humanities. When I was appointed at the University of Vigo, I first 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 the fact that they were translation students and not language students. So, I became very sensitive towards that and I started reading about issues that had to do with translation and discourse analysis and textual analysis. I remember that at the time there was a very interesting book that had just come 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 at 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 their idea of discourse could not

account for my own experience as a reader of literary texts. They exposed very interesting concepts that I had even used in my classes. I remember asking them about how they envisioned literature and the translation of literary texts, but they did not seem to be really interested in literature as discourse. I was brave (being so young!) to argue that the very phenomena of translating literature was itself a sort of very idiosyncratic discursive maneuver. Eventually, I came across all the wonderful work that was being done by people like Susan Basnett, Sherry Simon, Lawrence Venuti. I remember reading Sherry Simon's book, *Gender in Translation* (1996) and reading Venuti's work and then I realized that the aspects of translation that they explored, not so much based on language *per se,* became very relevant to me.

I guess that this long answer is for me a way of reflecting retrospectively and giving you a sort of coherent narrative that goes back to my being, first of all, a reader of foreign literature concerned with how the experience of difference and otherness was present in the language of the translations I read. And then later on, as a young scholar, what became important for me was the realization that the teaching of English for students of Translation Studies should be concerned with sensitive language issues that would be relevant for their future tasks as translators.

I remember that it was in those early years that we held a conference on Translation Studies at the University of Vigo and we invited renowned scholars like Gideon Toury and Miriam Schlesinger. I often think that I was privileged to have witnessed the very moment when the discipline of Translation Studies, as we understand it today, was being born. It was very exciting because I was beginning to teach in the Translation program, thinking about all the aspects and conceiving of all the possibilities and approaches, and at the same time, the discipline was, in a sort of meta-reflexive way, starting to think about itself.

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 ended up making it more interesting. I am not saying that the perspective from applied linguistics was not important, but I thought that it got to the point when that pervasive approach was making the field a little sterile. So, for me, the cultural aspect taken into consideration by scholars such as Sherry Simon or Susan Bassnett, to name but the most obvious ones, became very relevant. And of course we invited some of those revolutionary scholars in the field to the University of Vigo and engaged in dialogues with them. Lawrence Venuti, for example, visited to Vigo before he had published *The Scandals of Translation* (1998). He had just finished writing it and we were privileged enough as to hear him talk about the genesis and development of the book. That was 1997, I think. It was very interesting to engage in debates with these translation scholars when so much was happening for and within Translation Studies.

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 in Joyce's studies becomes aware of issues that have to do with language and, unconsciously, if you are a non-native English speaker reading Joyce you become aware of Joyce's sort of manipulations with language. When I first started working on Joyce during those years we 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, by the time I started reading Joyce I had given the notion of language (and meaning) a lot of thought.

Then, it just happened very naturally that being interested in translation (as someone who had just started teaching in one of the first undergraduate university programs in the country which offered the degree of Translation Studies) I would very easily relate Joyce to issues of translation. On the one hand, Joyce is this universal writer, proclaimed as one of the best writers of world literature that everyone talks about and everyone wants to read. And, of course, many people who can't read English will necessarily read him in translation. Thus, this idea of how Joyce has been translated, what has been translated or who has translated him became relevant to me. On the other hand, something that became also important to me was the way that Joyce himself had lived across different territories of Europe, as we know, Italy, Trieste (a multilingual city of the Austro-Hungarian empire) Paris, Zurich. Joyce became this sort of writer who was very aware of the notion of using different languages. Thus, 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 who is not a monoglot; someone who may be through his day is learning one language, talking with students in another language and addressing his children in yet another language. As we know, Joyce and Nora spoke English but they family would speak *triestino* during their years in Trieste. Joyce was good at languages, he taught himself Dano-Norwegian in order to be able to read 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 force that. It just happened that I thought, while reading texts on translation: this is Joyce!

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 very interesting work on the notion of translation in Ireland, spoke about that in very eloquent terms, he wrote, "translation is our condition". In Ireland there is a very interesting kind of dynamic relationship between the two languages, Irish and English, in a sort of problematic but also in a productive way. Writers like Joyce dealt with the idea that the Irish language is ghosting English, after all "an acquired speech".

This idea of living between languages is something that people actually think and talk about, and of course, it is recurrent 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 the use of words, the language, and the meaning of certain words. 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-exist (diglossia, bilingualism, co-officiality, or officiality plus another native language...there are many possibilities) I think sometimes those contexts are very controversial and create conflictive situations, not necessarily from the point of view of politics, but from the point of view of language, these "frictions" are very productive. And I think in Ireland they have become clearly very productive with so much poetry and so much writing in general that actually reflects 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 Irish language in a basket (as they did with Moses)

hoping that some princess would rescue the basket from the river and, thus, the language, like baby Moses will be kept alive.

It reminds me of the story "Father" by Michael O'Conghaile which was translated from Irish into English. This is a story I often discuss with my students. The protagonist is a gay man, living in rural Ireland, who wants to tell his father about his sexual identity after his mother dies. But, since the family speak Irish and there is no word in the Irish language for homosexual, he did not know how to tell his father. I think this kind of situation is emblematic because it tells a lot about translation and its impossibilities. We can be trapped in some situations because of language issues that have to do with cultural, social or political issues. This is all very appealing to me because I was born in Galicia, and we also have two languages. As a child raised during the Franco years, I would speak Spanish with my parents because we would not be educated in a language of the "peasantry" and, supposedly, of the "uneducated"; although, or course, we have an extraordinary literary and cultural tradition that was produced in the Galician language. I'm generalizing, of course, but this was somehow similar to what happened here in Ireland where the Gaeltacht remained primarily rural and, thus, speaking Irish was also attached to certain prejudices.

When I was a student of English at the University of Santiago, we staged Brian Friel's play *Translations*. As is well known, this play offers remarkable reflections about the way in which the two languages have co-existed in Ireland by focusing on the mapping of Ireland by the Ordnance Survey in the 1830s which enforced the translation of Gaelic place names into English. Not, of course, without controversy, Friel provides a compelling metaphor for the Anglo-Irish historical relationship. As Galician students of English we felt so close to the reality of the play. The translation of place names which the play addresses happened also in Galicia during the Franco years when the name of many places were officially changed (a brutal form of translation!) so that they would sound Spanish.

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 translations into 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* in 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 before 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 Emer Nolan referred to Dominic Manganiello as the first who read Joyce as a political writer. She was also one of the first ones, of course, when she wrote *Joyce and Nationalism* in 1995. 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 readings of *A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I was very intrigued by the Cuban prologue. I went to Leuven to teach a seminar, because we have an Erasmus 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 prologue that obviously functioned as a manifesto, as a way of shaping Joyce as a revolutionary writer for Cubans, both 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 had neglected the text for a while because, as we know, it was a revised translation. It was based on the one that had been written by Dámaso Alonso. The "revisions" are minor, but the question (which I had failed to ask myself was, why were they 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 his 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 time period and was surprised by the Cuban intellectuals' interest in Joyce. I later discovered that this interest had always been there because of the fact that Joyce was Irish and, thus, fit some other intriguing Cuban-Irish historical connections.

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. There are scholarly translations: translations commissioned to someone by a particular agent/publisher 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 Katherine Mansfield into the Galician language, did that for a publisher in a series that was concerned with translating women writers for Galician readers. I was invited to participate in this feminist translation project, which basically meant that I had to be alert to issues that being there in the language had been neglected in the Spanish translation (because, it was obvious to me that the concerns that had triggered previous translations had nothing to do with Mansfield's feminism). Mansfield is a modernist writer and in her agenda you really see how both issues, feminism and modernism, actually conflate. This was a very challenging translation for me because I really wanted to be subtle enough as to preserve Mansfield's poetic style. But at the same time, I was aware that her poetic style is not innocent, it is far from harmless. She consciously plays with the ambivalences and ironies of modernism to produce very radical (and critical) statements about the role of women in society. That's how I approached this particular translation, as a scholar and a translator who was a passionate reader of Mansfield and was trying to shape her for a particular readership and turn her into a role model for Galician women writers. That was me trying to "rewrite" Mansfield in the light of these objectives.

In other words, I think translators should always work with some sense of theory in mind. I was once at conference on Translation Studies at the University of Durham and I have this wonderful memory of sitting next to Lawrence Venuti and commenting on the presentations with him. Then, some 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 make 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 you can find a theory; a translation always tells us about its relationship with the original in some way. So, I think that, in the end, because translation is about the representation of a previous text, anything you decide to do with this relation between the two texts may well be seen as a theory. You may disregard certain questions, to be very concerned with others, to be very attached to the language and rhythm of the original, or you may decide to produce a very creative response. These are all translation practices that ultimately are illustrations of your theory.

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: The 1920s was a very fruitful cultural period for Galician letters, with a number of intellectuals being concerned with translation 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 and the culture of the so-called *Mitteleuropa*. There you have a group of philosophers, thinkers, writers, translators, geographers, anthropologists of the so called "*Nós* Generation" being concerned with all these other cultures and obsessed with, specifically, the writers of the Irish Literary Revival which had also struggled to revitalize the native culture and the Irish language. From Galicia, in peripheral northwestern Spain, these men turned to their Irish contemporaries as emblematic

role models. The political aspirations and cultural practices of the Irish Literary Revival were enthusiastically followed and frequently invoked by them, what was being done in Ireland reflected their own aspirations, their own cultural and political agenda.

In 1926, they translate several fragments extracted from the "Ithaca" and "Cyclops" episodes of *Ulysses* into the Galician language and published them in their journal, which was entirely in the Galician language. They published this under the title "Ulysses: fragments of the major novel by James Joyce put down into Galician from the original text". This tittle is fascinating because it means "we Galicians have read the universal writer Joyce and we have been able to translate it into our native language". Frequently invoked as an act of literary heroism, this pioneering translation (the first translation initiative of Joyce's novel in the Iberian peninsula) stands to this day as an extraordinary landmark for the Galician literary system. Scholars have argued for years whether this fragmentary translation was based directly on the original English text or was influenced by previous French translations. For me, that is beyond the point. Ultimately, why would that matter, what is the relevance of it? The important thing, I believe, is that the Galician *Ulysses* becomes itself a remarkable translation gesture (the relevant issue here for me is not so much the text but the gesture). This early translation of Joyce's *Ulysses* lends itself to be interpreted as an interesting example of the many complexities of translation functioning as an intermediary practice when attached to the global circulation of literary texts in minority language contexts. I have written about this as "the shaping of Joyce as a universal Celt", because there is an absolute concern on the translator's part with presenting Joyce as a universal writer and at the same time "one of us". In other words, translation functions here a sort of embrace with a form of otherness, which is simultaneously (re)presented as a form of sameness.

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