THE FICTIONNAL TURN OF TRANSLATION STUDIES

Introduction

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In “Some Versions of Homer”, Borges begins his text with a phrase that has become famous for translation scholars: "No problem is as consubstantial to literature and its modest mystery as that posed by translation"; thus sealing the link between translation and literature. In some of his other intriguing works, such as Pierre Menard, author of the Quijote and The Translators of The 1001 Nights, he further advances the relationship between translation and literature by describing translators as literary characters immersed in intrigues characteristic of genres as diverse as biography, in the first case, and, the detective novel, in the second. Therefore, Borges (to open with an author whom it has become obligatory to quote) has established the link between translation and the intricacies of fiction.

With this example of an author who, from the perspective of literature, permits the fictionalisation of translation in order to reflect on it, this edition of Doletiana delves into the representation of the translator in literary and audiovisual fiction.

Since the end of the 20th century, translation studies have shifted their focus from textual descriptions of translations to the incorporation of aspects both cultural and sociological, and finally, to the study of the subject who performs this task: the translator. In fact, the current growing interest in this figure has led scholars such as A. Chesterman (2009) to reformulate Holmes’ original map of "Translation Studies" (1976), proposing the “Translator Studies”, that is the inclusion in the
discipline of traditional aspects associated with vocational training and new ones related to the agent's politics and ethics. In line with Chesterman, A. Pym (2009) and J. Delisle (1997) further suggest the need to humanize the history of translation, situating the translator in the centre in order to construct a critical history on a human scale. From the optics of this "non-strict methodology" that reminds us of the idea of the sui generis knowledge referred to by A. Berman (1989), the authors defend a "subjectivation of the object" (Pym 2009: 2).

In this sense, in addition to the works, including biographies or portraits of translators (Delisle 1999, 2002 for works in French, Lafarga and Pegenaute 2009, 2013, Bacardi and Godayol 2011, for works in Spanish and Catalan), and the personal testimonies of professionals themselves such as those compiled in the Trujamán magazine of the Instituto Cervantes, as well as recent books by writers/translators (Arnau and Bornas 2013, Calvo 2016, Cohen 2014), we should also consider many literary and cinematographic works that portray translators, situating their action in the field of the imaginary.

The "fictional turn" of Translation Studies, mentioned for the first time in 1998 by Else Vieira: "literary works should be used for theorizing translation" (Kaindl 2012: 147), is more clearly delineated in the 21st century in the collective work edited by Delabastita and Grutman: Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism (2005), which has contributions from different areas of the globe. These authors assert the existence of a "fictional turn" as seen in the increasing amount of fictional material, films or books that incorporate translators as lead characters.

Intertwined with studies of Comparative Literature, World Literature, postcolonial studies, studies on globalization and postmodernity, the translator appears as a prototypical character of our present world. Migration, deterritorialization, and border identity make this figure a witness to contemporaneity. From the accounts about Malinche to Don Quixote or the mythical Pierre Menard, the figure of the translator inhabits fictional texts. A number of writers from various languages, such as P. Auster (Book of illusions), M. Frayn (The Russian Interpreter), D. Malouf (Remembering Babylon), U. Eco (Il nome della
rosa), C. Bleton (Les nègres du traducteur), H. Murakami (Dance Dance Dance), J. Cortázar (62 modelo para armar), C. Fuentes (El naranjo) J. Marías (Corazón tan blanco), A. Pauls (El pasado), A. Neuman (El viajero del siglo), S. Benesdra (El traductor), among many other authors, have dealt with the issue. The figure of the translator and interpreter also appears in films such as “Lost in translation” (2003), “The interpreter” (2005), and “Babel” (2006), as analysed by M. Cronin in Translation Goes to the Movies (2009).

This edition of Doletiana brings together five articles by researchers from Belgium, the USA, France and Switzerland, whose corpus consist of novels by the Latin American writers Juan José Saer and Carlos Fuentes, the Spanish writer Julián Ríos, the English writer David Mitchell, the Swiss writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt, the American writer Ted Chiang, and the Canadian filmmaker Denis Villeneuve. In each article the fictional representation of the translator and the translation is studied, focusing on the various issues outlined below.

On the one hand, what characteristics do these fictional translators have? Are they invisible beings, frustrated in their attempts to communicate? Or, on the other hand, are they central agents, visible in the process of linguistic mediation? The first three articles offer us distinct unexplored features of figures such as colonial interpreters, amateur translators and translators of alien languages. In "Retranslating the Spanish Conquest: fictional accounts of real interpreters in (post)colonial literature", Denise Kriper deals with two interpreters of the Spanish Conquest: Felipillo and Francisco Friar Jerónimo de Aguilar, whose real lives were made into fiction in two stories by Saer and Fuentes with the dual goals of offering a postcolonial re-reading of the history of the Spanish Conquest and situating translation as the practice of political and cultural resistance. In "La Représentation fictionnelle du traducteur amateur chez David Mitchell" Thibault Loïez describes the actions of the two amateur translators in two of David Mitchell novels in very different historical and geographical settings (Thatcher’s Britain in the 80’s; Japan in the 17th Century). In spite of these differences, the amateur translators have things in common, such as carrying out a task resembling an odyssey imposed on them by a third person, whether for personal development or to uncover a crime, in a language that the translator...
learns during the process of translation. In these cases, the translation becomes a practice that transforms the person or a state of society, that transgresses certain norms or customs and frees the translator from the prison of monolingualism. In "Traduire l'heptapode: la figure du traducteur dans Premier Contact", Alice Ray introduces the figure of a translator who acts as a go between for "heptapodes" aliens and by means of arduous linguistic effort manages to crack the invader’s code, along the way destroying some frequent stereotypes in the representation of translators, such as the solitary nature of the work, removed from the urgency of daily life.

On the other hand, what genre do these translators play a role in? In the case of Kriper the fictionalisation of an historic event in short stories, the historical novel in the case of Loïez, and Science Fiction in that of Ray. In the two remaining articles in this edition detective and experimental novels are added to this mix. In "Ecrire dans les airs et dire sans mots: traduction et rencontre dans Das Versprechen de F. Dürrenmatt" Arno Renken introduces translation as a tool to both question and move the detective genre forward. In Transferre in fabula. Larva. Babel de una noche de San Juan et le travail de la traduction", Amaury de Sart studies the creative function performed by translation in a multilingual novel, threatening its legibility. Thus, in addition to the presence of translators as characters in the plots of the literary texts mentioned above, Renken and De Sart describe the features of the writing in which translation plays an important formal role, that is, with both situated on the plane of literary enunciation. Renken demonstrates on the one hand how the translation functions as a layer that adds complexity to the detective genre—a requiem for its death—and, on the other, presents a narrator-translator who translates a police investigation, removing the reader from the source of the truth, making the mediation involved in a translation evident. De Sart analyses translation in figures of style—following the classification of the Groupe µ—present in the multilingual novel Larva by Julián Ríos. This novel makes us question the doxa about the act of translation, as in the novel translation equals creation, resisting falling into the paradigm of fluency.

Thus, the five contributions to the current edition of Doletiana allow us, through the medium of fiction, to question the representation of translation as a merely linguistic operation with the translator as an invisible, and consequently, secondary actor. The translators
represented in the works of fiction analysed here attempt to destroy the stereotypes associated with the figure and vindicate the practice of translation for its transgressive, liberating and poetic value. This edition presents its readership with new roles for translators of fiction, permitting them to work in a more audacious and suggestive way than is possible with non-fiction, proposing singular rhetorical uses of the translated word, a creative approach to the role of the narrator and the conventions of literary genres to the extent of subverting the material quality of the writing itself.

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