Intertextuality and the Translator as Story-teller

Peter Bush
A writer has told a story and this translator has to re-tell it, otherwise readers of English who don’t know Spanish will have no access to this writing. Nothing could apparently be any simpler and straightforward. As a translator I am a species of professional reader able no doubt to keep a text at a variety of distances and at the same time I am a reader who reads for pleasure, a translator who only translates fictions he finds pleasure in and so I am a reader who re-tells, re-makes the story as he reads. Any such reading will take on a subjective hue, not from any joy in solipsism, but because it is what one might call a fact of life that any work of literature in itself—or worth its salt—carries this power of contagion, operates in a field of language consciousness and imagination where it sparks off memories, dreams, tangential thoughts, a narrative that cuts a path through the magma of the mind, shapes and is shaped, becomes other as the reader re-imagines it.

The range of readings of a fiction engaged in by the translator is intimately linked to a process of drafting and re-drafting and research that will lead to a final version of the translation. The linear series of drafts constitutes the arena where the many layers of re-interpretation coalesce in new forms, in a new language that will represent that fiction, re-write it, for a new cycle of readers. One layer will be the identification of inter-texts, and decisions about their transformation.

The interpretive moves presume some pre-existent areas of knowledge on the part of the translator, that there is such a thing as a culture of a translator that is activated by this task, a personal archive. In my case, I could enumerate some of these: the experience of living and working on and off in Spain and Latin America since 1963; the study of Spanish literature from the Middle Ages to the present-day at Cambridge University; the completion of a doctorate on Pérez Galdós at Oxford; an active political involvement in the anti-Francoist movement and against various Latin American dictatorships; a continuous reading of literature in Spanish and French and English; fifteen years teaching Spanish, French and English literature; the translation of over thirty novels and the
making of five television documentaries on Luso-Hispanic themes; study and action-research in London on the development of language in contemporary multilingual society.

4 In terms of familiarity with the literature and the societies that have nourished it the translator begins with a substantial experience of reading and living from which to interpret the words on the page and to identify inter-texts. In terms of theory, the critical consciousness in forming the experience derives very little from Translation Studies, a relative newcomer on the scene, and more from critical discussions on literature, politics and society in a marxisant strand in the English-speaking world where Raymond Williams, Edward Said and Harold Rosen were prominent. In Cambridge I may have read huge amounts of Hispanic literature but the critical focus I developed came from attending the lectures of Raymond Williams, Gillian Beer, Nicolas Pevsner and others. Leavis lectured with great bitterness on the Benthamite-technological revolution and Stephen Spender entrancingly on the Modernists. In my college, an occasional Althusserian mist would set in as Ben Brewster, his English translator, was active in a left-wing groupuscule and would hold forth on alterity; for my Tripos prize, on graduation, I requested the biography of Trotsky by Isaac Deutscher who had just delivered The Unfinished Revolution as a series of lectures in Cambridge. Similarly, when I moved to Oxford, it was initially to read a postgraduate degree in Comparative literature that had just been set up. I rapidly lost interest in a degree where one was enjoined to devote separate terms to reading English, French and Spanish literatures and then come to comparisons in the vacations by staff who had created a comparative vision but remained trapped in their national division. The locus of interest was soon only the official seminar on Literary Theory and then the alternative “radical” theory seminar that I set up with a number of fellow students who included Jonathan Culler and Keith Reader: Lucien Goldmann, Barthes and Lukacs were amongst the authors we read and much hot air we generated on the themes of subject, text and history.

5 Although I cursed Oxbridge in the spirit of the times as redoubts of reaction, the space opened up there for critical reading and the possibility of attending lectures in whatever subject appealed were invaluable. In terms of a university education, the immediate degree qualification was an important but relatively small part of the process.

6 This cultural consciousness develops alongside and within a continuum of story telling and language learning that has to do directly with varieties of English, a continuum from which must spring some of my English for the translation. There are many graduates with foreign language degrees and doctorates who do not become translators and many who could not. One of the ironies that face translator trainers throughout the world is that the majority of their students come armed with foreign language degrees though they have never really devoted much time to honing themselves as writers in their own language, in which they may have unsuspected, if unexploited, reserves. At most, they will have developed the ability to write in an academic discourse that continues to privilege impersonality and encourages absolute disconnection from non-standard, colloquial and other less formal strands in an individual’s linguistic repertoire, a possible source of energy for a more creative use of language. Let alone an interest in the diverse texts from which a likely “inter-text” may come forth.

7 Again if I recount elements from my autobiography as a speaker and reader of English, it is to establish some parameters for my knowledge of the language into which I translate...
as a literary translator and which I mine freely for the turns of phrase necessary for a re-
telling of somebody else’s story.

8 My English grew always as a set of Englishes. I was brought up in a Lincolnshire market
town within a working-class family where my mother spoke in non-standard Yorkshire and
my father in non-standard Lincolnshire. They could both speak and read standard
English but the variety for family intimacy was non-standard. My father was a
typographer working on provincial newspapers and national magazines and took much
pride in the display of his pages and the correctness of the English there but at home and
in family get-togethers, it was always “ain’t it, mate” or “we was” in an absolutely
consistent dialect. And the fuel of family conversations was gossip, local politics or my
father’s work where he was also the trades union organiser—and the past, the stories
from two world wars, the Depression, the stories of two families with sixteen children,
one belonging to the backward culture of village life, a shepherd and his unlettered
midwife wife, the other to the industrial city of Sheffield, a carpenter and his wife, living
in a mining community in the centre of the city where the culture encompassed
everything from flappers to socialist cycling clubs. Other entertainments and sources of
language and culture were the radio and the cinema.

9 By the time I went to school I was familiar with several dialects of English and used the
non-standard family variety as my own. It was then quite a shock to the little boy’s
system to be told that his English was not correct, that he didn’t speak properly, and that
his first institutional steps in reading were similarly improper even at the level of that
hallowed phrase “The cat sat on the mat”. However, it wasn’t that I couldn’t speak
“correctly” but that I thought the parental way must be the right one. I then fully
developed as a speaker and writer of standard and became a voracious reader of
adventure comics—The Rover, The Tiger... and novels of imperial stamp—Tarzan, Mowgli,
Peter The Whaler...—or schoolboy adventures of the Jennings vintage. Another important
language site was Sunday schools. Neither of my parents was a believer but my younger
sister was a Baptist and she dragged me along to chapel and I became a reader of the
Bible.

10 The next step was the move to the Grammar School after passing the 11 + examination
which was the way English society divided up young people at the time into streams for
vocational, practical jobs and streams for an academic elitist education. It was here that I
began to learn French, Spanish and Latin and be prepared to go to Oxbridge. And it was
here that the class divides were felt more sharply: few students from my primary school
had made it here and I was surrounded by the socially more confident children of the
town’s middle class and local farmers. This had a peculiar impact on me. I became silent
in class and excelled in foreign languages that were largely all taught as if they were
dead. Finally in the sixth form, at the age of 16, I began to enjoy reading literature in
French, Spanish, Latin and English. My English literature was read in a class that was like
a battleground, namely General English, where those specialising in Sciences were also
expected to read and hated it. By the time I left for a spell teaching in Madrid, my
language range was accompanied by an acute sensitivity to social class in a market town:
a sense of separation from my family but at the same time an intense loyalty, and all
heightened by a reading in particular of Flaubert, Balzac and D. H. Lawrence. I had this
vision of the town and the surrounding countryside: the butchers, the farmers, the local
dignitaries, the priests and the vicars, the scoutmasters whose public persona and private
hypocrisies I knew so well. I thought the novel was my favourite genre and was
determined to wander in real cities. They were initially to be Madrid, Cambridge and Oxford.

A translator’s storehouse of language and experience will inevitably bring its resonances to the interpretive process of translation, resonances that will remain concealed from the reader in the way that the private resonances residing in the words of any literary work for the author will stay a closed book to the reader. They are part of a creative agency which survive such concepts as the “death of the author” and without which no translation would have a life of its own. This is not to say that the individual storehouse contains all the solutions to the difficulties of a translation. The critical consciousness activated by the multiple editing of drafts will alert the translator to necessary new research which may have to do with content, historical, cultural references, or the need to develop a new strain of language, to recognise a parody or inter-text and transform it. The translation in draft form will also possibly be read by the author, an editor or two and there may be an existing body of literary scholarship behind the text; in the case of a canonical text, a set of previous translations to which the new translation will respond. However, I have insisted here on the recognition of the distinctive individual culture of the translator since the would-be scientific researchers in Translation Studies run scared of subjectivity and the relativist post-structuralist post-modernists run shy of history and identity. It is true that there are translator scholars who have written about their translations and the role of subjectivity but the excellent work by Carol Maier, Suzanne Jill Levine and John Felstiner is marginalized within mainstream Translation Studies. I have frequent contact with postgraduate students of literary translation from different UK universities and they are rarely familiar with the writing of these three American Professors, even though the subject of their research is the role of the literary translator!

Now it is time to examine the translation of inter-texts to highlight in action the working of this culture and agency. I have chosen three different kinds of inter-text, two from translations I have recently completed and one from a translation I would like to see prompted by the interpretation of a new inter-text.

**Inter-Text as the Lever for Interpretation**

I will start with the inter-text that is key to the Borges story about Pierre Ménard, a story that has been turned into a speculative parable on the nature of translation by scholars such as George Steiner. Pierre Ménard is hard at work copying out Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* in a word-for-word replica that is not a mere copy. Enamoured of Walter Benjamin’s Kabbalistic notions of translation, Steiner appeals to Novalis and rapidly engages in a metaphysical interpretation of the literary activity of Ménard which is clearly a metaphor for the act of translation, even though Ménard who has a record of publications as a translator, is clearly copying out the *Quixote* and not translating it into French: if he had been translating into French, then the translation connection would cease to be speculative and would throw up questions as to the real nature of translation at less of a “philosophical” remove. Ironically, the act of translating the story into English focuses the translator and reader on the act of translation, given that the key inter-text from Cervantes has to be translated into English—and its eventual translation questions the interpretation of the whole story. Of course, a possible bold move by a translator would be to leave the Cervantine words in the original Spanish if Ménard is only a speculative copyist but such an interpretive move would assume that the meaning of the words
themselves were irrelevant to an interpretation of the short story, an assumption I would dispute.

14 The quotation from Chapter IX of Part One of Don Quijote is as follows:

la verdad cuya madre es la historia, émulo del tiempo, déposito de las acciones,
testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo de lo presente, advertencia de lo porvenir.

15 These lines have been translated in many ways including the following within translations of Don Quijote:

truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, storehouse of great deeds,
witness of the past, example and lesson to the present, warning to the future. (Translated by J. M. Cohen, 1950)

truth, whose mother is history: the imitator of time, the storehouse of actions and the witness to the past, an example and a lesson to the present, and a warning to the future. (Translated by John Rutherford, 2000)

truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, the repository of great deeds, witness to the past, example and adviser to the present, and forewarning to the future. (Translated by Edith Grossman, 2003)

16 And within the Borges story:

truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and advisor to the present and the future’s counsellor.


18 The question a would-be translator immediately wishes to ask is, why did Borges choose this particular quotation from the great opus? Is it a random choice or does it hide ironies relevant to the theme of the story? Does it suggest another possible reading that is more historical and less metaphysical than Steiner’s? Could its translation foreground this new reading?

19 The context for the quotation is Cervantes’s narrator’s fortunate encounter in a Toledan market with the missing parts of the novel about the Don. He purchases them after he has discovered that the Arabic manuscript is the rest of the story of the knight’s adventures and contracts a morisco, that is a Spanish Muslim who lived publicly perforce as a Christian in Inquisitional Spain, to translate the Arab chronicle. By 1610 the Spanish monarchy will have decreed the expulsion of some 300,000 such Muslims for failing to be pure-blooded Spaniards, a resolution that many in the Catholic Church had been advocating for well over fifty years. So might there be a warning from history here for Pierre Ménard and company?

20 If the story is reviewed from this perspective, there are many ironic pointers to Spanish and European contemporary historical conflict. Although it is a cliché to speak of Borges as apolitical at best and as neo-fascist at worst, in the late 30s he did write articles warning of the rise of fascism in Germany and the new persecution of Jews in Europe. The Pierre Ménard narrative is full of ironic pointers to these political tensions and particularly to the Spanish version of fascism as reflected in the rabid nationalist discourse favoured by the Francoists. It is located in Nîmes and as if written in Nîmes in 1939, the year of General Franco’s victory. This southern French town is one where traditional Spanish culture flourishes, bull-fights, flamenco and fine horses, the kind of culture that French fascist writers like Henry de Montherlant were so fond of. Ménard operated in an aristocratic milieu and he is pulled one way or the other by the discourse...
from the Spanish right. A Protestant newspaper is mentioned whose readers are described as “Calvinist, if not masons and circumcised”: the Falangist one-party state had a particular hatred of Jews and freemasons. Ménard in turn identifies with a Cervantes who recovers a Catholic faith, fights against Moor and Turk and bids to forget history from 1602 to 1918, decides against becoming too familiar with an enlightenment strand that goes from Leibnitz, Russell to La trahison des clercs, decides against the local colour of gypsy goings-on or conquistadors or mystics, Philip II or inquisitional autos-da-fé and finally declaims against those who wish to bury Cervantes’s irony beneath “patriotic toasts, grammatical arrogance, obscene de luxe editions”. Ménard’s narrative is then replete with resonances of the fantasies of the Spanish right as articulated by writers like Miguel de Unamuno or Ernesto Giménez Caballero and a thousand imitators. Without then being overly mechanistic or indeed historicist, one can conclude the translation of the Cervantine inter-text and, in particular, the word advertencia as warning or forewarning and not as counsellor as it is in the two present existing translations, could lead to a more nuanced translation re-telling the whole story and pointing up the ironies of history.

**Inter-Text: New Potential Realised Through Translation**

21 My second example of the translation of inter-texts springs from a translation I have just completed of Havana Red, a Cuban novel by Leonardo Padura, that was commissioned by the new publishing house, the Bitter Lemon Press, that specialises in crime fiction in translation. I was interested in this project because I had already translated the original screenplay of the film Strawberry and Chocolate and edited an anthology of Cuban stories. The subject of Padura’s novel, the murder of a transvestite, the accompanying theme of the repression of homosexuals in Cuba, in particular, a leading dramatist, and the baroque nature of the language and intrigue meant that it was a complex fiction dealing with Cuban issues I was already familiar with.

22 What I was unfamiliar with was the way of working of the publishing house. Every new translation with a new editor is an adventure in learning. I completed the translation, taking slightly longer than Bitter Lemon wanted me to take, and sent the final draft off. Bitter Lemon outsource their editing to a small production company but my commissioning editor read the translation carefully and sent his comments to the copy-editor working on the book who subsumed them into her edit but made it clear they weren’t her queries. There were two criticisms that had to deal with my translation of important inter-texts.

23 The death of the transvestite took place on the day of the Transfiguration in the Havana Woods and the victim is dressed in a red robe designed to be worn by Electra in a production of Virgilio Piñera’s play by Alberto Marqués, the repressed dramaturge—in real life the repressed writer was Piñera himself. The detectives responsible for the case discover that the transvestite was obsessed with the pages of the gospels describing Christ’s Transfiguration and several biblical verses are quoted in the novel. I decided to translate the verses by using the King James Bible. The baroque language of the English translation is not available for Spanish readers but it seemed to me that if the transvestite had had the choice, he would have loved its poetry and also that this language was in keeping with the linguistic tenor of the novel which also pays homage to the great Cuban
baroque Catholic homosexual novelist, Lezama Lima, and the poet, Eliseo Diego. It was a case of a translation option that enhanced the potential of the original. My editor wished to implant a plainer modern version which, it is true, would be more “faithful” to the letter of the Spanish, but not, I maintained, to the spirit. I also realised that my editor was using as the basis for his edit the French translation of the same novel and the French translators opted for a simple version, so that an example of the possibilities for one verse was as follows:

Sus vestidos se pusieron resplandecientes y muy blancos, como no los puede blanquear ningún batanero de la tierra. (Máscaras, Leonardo Padura Fuentes)

And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them. (King James version as used by Peter Bush in his final draft translation 2004, Havana Red)

His clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleach er could make them. (Translation proposed by publisher, 2004)

Ses habits devinrent resplendissants et très blancs, comme ne pourrait les blanchir aucun foulon sur terre. (Électre à La Havane, translated by René Solis and Mara Hernández, 1996)

I argued my case with the editor who, as a learned Biblical scholar, was able to point out that there was no snow in the original Greek but I won the day for my injection of canonical English prose. Of course, many younger readers of the translation will not recognise the words as they are no longer the daily bread of secondary education as it was in my Grammar School assemblies and R. K. classes but they will, as sensitive readers, be able to engage in the transfiguring nature of the language that heightens the dramatic tensions in the narrative.

The second intriguing inter-text in this thriller was a little phrase, “esquálido y conmovedor” used by the Lieutenant Mario Conde, the chief investigator on the case and protagonist of Padura’s cycle of four novels set in Havana. Conde is also a writer who hasn’t made it yet but still has lingering ambitions. Havana Red includes a short story by the detective: his repeated aesthetic ideal was clearly a quotation but not one I recognised. I put it on a list of queries eventually to send to the author. In the meantime I translated it as “seedy and moving”. Esquálido is a tricky, fascinating adjective that can mean all that the English cognate would suggest but it can also mean spare, empty... and is used to describe fishes like sharks. My editor opted for “spare and moving”. I wasn’t convinced by what was a distinct possibility because the spare didn’t chime in with the nature of Conde’s story and his clear espousal of a form of critical realism which in his school magazine fiction had led him to fall foul of headmasterly censorship. However, my editor was taking his lead from the French translators who had “dépouillé et émouvant”. I wrote to the author and at the same time decided to read the next volume in the cycle and there the enigma was resolved at once: on the dedication page is a quotation from J. D. Salinger’s Franny and Zooey with those words “escuálido y conmovedor”. A quick search on the Internet reveals that Salinger has “For Esme, with love and squalor”. The French translators had taken on board the translation of the quotation as it stands in the French version of Salinger. The dépouillé is repeated in the dedication page of the next novel in French translation and throughout the French translations of the cycle. A few days later, I had a confirming reply from the author which nevertheless holds out a resonance in the direction of spare, and also the more emphatic dépouillé, though an English translation has necessarily to follow the Salinger original:
Seedy is about it. Something “squalid” is thin, almost skeletal, but almost something very spiritual, pure essence. In any case, the “escuálido y conmovedor” is a reference to “For Esme, with love and squalor”, Salinger’s story. That “squalid” spirit in a story is what Conde is searching for. (e-mail from Leonardo Padura, 25 October, 2004)

Inter-Text and the Holistic Creation of the Translation

My final example of the translation of inter-texts is taken from my translation of Juan Goytisolo’s Carajicomedia, A Cock-Eyed Comedy, a novel Goytisolo structures around a series of parodies and other literary games played with Spanish literary works from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century as he charts the progress of his homosexual hero who assumes different literary guises throughout the ages and focuses humorously on the Church’s hostile and opportunistically accommodating attitudes to homosexuality: a text which is a tissue of inter-texts.

Before embarking on the translation, several of Goytisolo’s translators met with him at the International Literary Translation Centre in Arles where it was agreed the translated versions would not include the small anthology of “source” texts which came in the Spanish version and the author suggested a small number of cuts to his own narrative. When the English publisher read the draft he asked me to prepare for inclusion a Dramatis Personae at the front of the book to help the reader unfamiliar with a host of characters from Spanish literary and intellectual history. Before we reached the final proof stage, I had to revise the translation further because the author wanted to edit the original further. Now that an American edition is in the offing, the author has introduced a set of further cuts centring on a degree of repetitious accounting of cottaging around the Gare du Nord and one or two sections dealing with episodes from literary life and Madrid high society in the seventeenth century which might seem obscure to an American reader, even one possessed with the information in the Dramatis Personae.

This particular set of inter-texts provides evidence of the complex process of re-writing and editing that leads to the final published translation. It shows how if, in Spivak’s words translation is the “most intimate” act of reading, it is even more a unique form of interpretive writing where rigorous research and thought coalesce with ludic aspects of writing, though always framed by a close response to the original text. The “subjective” or apparently “irrational” are not introduced on a whim but as part of a holistic process of literary creation. Words come to the surface that fit the rhythm of the translation: propelled by the different strands of activity with the translator’s consciousness. Sometimes, these are very literary or archaic words that are lodged in the brain, dug out by the process and which then I have to check by further research since they are so unfamiliar. I describe them as products of the “ludic” aspects of literary translation because they are those most associated with the phase of the translation when it is the quality of the writing in English that is at the forefront of the translator’s mind.

An extra dimension in this translation was that the French translator, Claude Bleton, and I exchanged drafts at a late stage so we could see if any solutions we had reached individually in our respective French and English translations could help our endeavours.

The following extract is taken from section 5 of chapter 6, “The transmigrations of Friar Bugeo”, when the Friar transmigrates into the character of Guzmán de Alfarache, the hero of the picaresque novel of the same name written by Mateo Alemán. The first five
sentences are adaptations from part of Alemán’s narrative that is included in the anthology at the end of the Spanish edition.

¡Oh bondad grande e Dios! ¡Largueza de su condición hidalga! Desnudáronme para vestirme, quitáronme de pedir para darme y pudiese dar. Nunca Dios quita, que no sea para hacer mayores mercedes. Este santo varón lo hizo a su imitación. Luego de asegurarse de que me hallaba limpio y arreado, Monseñor se acercó bonico a mi cuarto. Holgóse de verme porque correspondían mucho mi talle, rostro y obras. Con la diligencia del santo curtido y cursado, se inclinó a contemplar mi natura y las acarició con manos de seda. Entre retozos, meneos e invocaciones a la Madona, de la cual era muy devoto, completó su labor y contentamiento con muchas mercedes limpias de polvo y paja.


First draft:

O God so great and good! Largesse from his gentlemanly condition! They stripped me to dress me, spared me begging to give to me and what a wherewithal. God only takes away, to give more generous bounty. This saintly male followed in his imitation. After ensuring I was clean and tidy, Monsignor perkily approached my quarters. He warmed to my sight because my figure, face and fruits fitted. Expertly like a saint practised in performance, he bent down to peruse my peter and caressed it with silken hands. Stroking, fingering, invoking the Madonna, whom he worshipped devoutly, he drew his task to a contented conclusion with heartfelt thanks clear of jerks or interruptions.

“A tuerto...”

Third Draft:

O God who art so great and good! Largesse from his gentlemanly condition! They stripped me and dressed me, spared me from begging in order to give to me and so I could give. God only takes away, so he can shower more bountifully. This saintly male followed in his imitation. After informing himself that I was clean and tidy, Monsignor perkily approached my quarters. He warmed to my sight because my figure, face and fruits fitted. Expertly like a saint practised in performance, he bent down to peruse my peter and caressed it with silken hands. Stroking, fingering, invoking the Madonna, whom he worshipped devoutly, he concluded his task with a spurt of thanksgiving straight from the heart.

“Lord and Master of all that we survey,” did he say. “One tailor stitches another for naught!”

French translation by Claude Bleton:

Oh, infinie bonté de Dieu! Générosité de sa noble nature! On me dépouilla pour me vêtir, on m’ôta toute raison de demander l’aumône pour m’en donner et me donner de quoi en donner. Jamais Dieu n’ôte rien, si ce n’est pour nous combler de plus grandes grâces. Ce saint homme ne faisait que l’imiter. Après s’être assuré que j’étais propre et équipé, Monseigneur s’approcha gentiment de ma chambre. Il se réjouit beaucoup de me voir, car il appréciait beaucoup mon maintien, ma mine et mes attitudes. Avec la diligence du saint prouvé et éprouvé, il se pencha pour contempler ma nature et la caressa de ses mains de soie. Entre badinages, ballottements et
invocations à la Madone, dont il était très dévot, il compléta sa besogne et contentement avec beaucoup de grâces tombées du ciel et du fiel. (2002 : 155)

34 Sixth draft and published translation:

O God who art so great and good! O what largesse from that gentlemanly estate! They did strip and dress me, spare me from begging in order to give unto me, so I could give unto others. God only taketh away, so He can shower more bountifully. This hallowed male followed in His imitation. After informing himself that I was clean and tidy, Monsignor perkily approached my quarters. He warmed to the sight of me because my figure, face and fruits were a perfect fit. Expertly, like a saint practised at what he performs, he stooped to peruse my peter and caressed it with silken hands. Stroking, fingering, invoking the Madonna, whom he worshipped devoutly, he concluded his task with a great spurt of thanksgiving straight from the heart.

“Lord and Master of all that we survey,” did he say. “One tailor’s needle never leaves another’s idle!” (2002 : 100)

35 The packed intertextuality of Goytisolo’s narrative is demanding for the Spanish reader but the jokes, archaism, parody and pastiche which provide the movement in the prose can be enjoyed in their satirical attack on the Opus Dei and Catholic Church without the recognition of literary sources of the various barbs on the part of the reader. Since he is an established author of challenging novels that re-pay a re-reading, one can assume that there is a cultured Goytisolo Spanish readership out there which is up to the task. Moreover, the novel was published in the run-up to the Pope’s sanctification of Escrivà Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, whose book of moralistic aphorisms, The Way, is the main target of parody. This added contemporary spice assured good sales in Spain. But can one assume a similar depth of reaction in the more Protestant, English-speaking world?

36 There is in the English tradition satirical humour at the expense of the Church and a familiarity with archaic forms of English, through the influence of the King James Bible and Shakespeare. There is also a long tradition of using “cod” archaic English in comedy whether with the Goons, Cyril Fletcher, Frankie Howerd on his way to the Forum, Morecambe and Wise, the Black Adder television series or the earlier Benny Hill school of innuendo. I exploited this vein in my final drafts, relying on memory in relation to the Bible and popular humour and by reading several of Shakespeare’s comedies. The writing itself depended on a drafting procedure where playful enjoyment had to prevail. The French translation achieves this through a series of alliterations and double-meanings: la caresse de ses mains de soie, entre badinages, ballottements, sa besogne, du ciel et du fiel. In English, the idea of God showering bountifully assumes these are his gifts or Mercedes; by leaving out the noun, the text allows a broader range of possibilities. Similarly, perkily for the colloquial bonico allows for possible hindquarters to resonate behind quarters. The second round of thanks involves a great spurt on the way to the climax of the sequence in the proverbs via the seminal coupling of polvo y paja where behind the cleanliness free of dust or straw are references to love-making and masturbation.

37 The first draft skirts the issue of the archaic veneer of verb forms, adjectives and prepositions because I had decided to add that at a later stage when I had got deeper into the text and could add the veneer in one long concentrated session. The first draft introduces a series of comic alliterations: “because my figure, face and fruits fitted” and
then “like a saint practised in performance, he bent down to peruse my peter”. The two key changes are fruits for obras or works and peter for natura; both Spanish words are religiously and sexually charged as are the English which are also more immediate and palpable: fruits, as in those of an honest or sinful life or of the vine, peter as in a colloquial word for penis, St. Peter or the rock of life. Peter is, however, an example of a word that came from my childhood, used by my mother, I presumed it was hers because of my name and not of a more general coinage. Subsequent reference to a dictionary revealed that this is a colloquial or archaic use. Claude Bleton has, in the first case, turned to alliteration, “mon maintien, ma mine et mes attitudes”; and, in the second, to a repetition of “noble nature” and “ma nature” playing on the religious/sexual double meanings of nature.

There are a number of dictionaries translating proverbs but, as with other bilingual dictionaries, are only of use as general guides to basic meaning. Proverbs should be translated in context and, again, not mechanically, following the most obvious route to the “equivalent” English proverb, if such a one exists. Here, the sexual charge and comedy is what is most important, as the proverb is the climax to this short episode of sexual exchange between boy and cleric. The proverbs which can be translated simply as “To the left and right our house to the ceiling” and “Tailors don’t pay for repairs done for each other” depend for their impact on the context and repetition of sound as much as any obvious word-for-word meaning. My final translation takes an English saying “Lord and Master of all that we survey” and engineers a humorous rhyme with the archaic “did he say”. The second is an invented proverb that endows the tailor with a hyperactive phallic needle and comic rhyme idle. The movement of the narrative as parody and translation creates some apparently spontaneous solutions which are in fact generated by the long and concentrated process of the translation in which the translator’s existing linguistic and stylistic repertoire and stocks of knowledge have to be stretched in new, unexpected directions.

In conclusion, my autobiographical preamble and examples of published translations of inter-texts are intended to challenge the often simplistic notions of what constitutes the “voice” of the translator or the “style” of the translator as described in many publications from different schools of thought in Translation Studies. The meagre results of the enormous amounts of time, energy and money invested in corpus studies or the arid debates over “foreignising” and “domesticating”, “text typologies” or “translation methodologies” belong to scholastic spheres that are hard put to engage in the complex creativity of literary translation. It would matter little if these spheres did not seek justification for their existence as the necessary theoretical underpinning of translator training. A broader, more humanistic critical pedagogy with a creative writing element would be much more apposite. For a literary translator, the ability to write is at a premium, not a facility to theorise or “methodologise”!
BIBLIOGRAPHIE


GOYTISOLO, Juan, 2000, Carajicomedia, Barcelona, Seix Barral.


RÉSUMÉS

Cet article se propose d'examiner la pratique créative des traducteurs littéraires et le rôle majeur joué dans cette pratique par leur expérience de lecteurs, écrivains et sujets historiques. L’étude du processus interprétatif, qui mène à une re- Création du récit, se fonde ici sur des exemples d’intertextes tirés de Pierre Ménard de Jorge Luis Borges; du polar cubain de Leonardo Padura, Électre à La Havane; et du texte satirique de Juan Goytisolo, Foutricomédie. En outre, l’auteur vise à faire ressortir le besoin d’une pédagogie de la traduction qui dépasserait les frontières étroites imposées par les tendances qui prévalent actuellement en traductologie.

This article focuses on the creative practice of literary translators and the critical role of their personal experiences as readers, writers and historical subjects. Three examples of the translation of inter-texts in Borges’s Pierre Ménard, Leonardo Padura’s Cuban thriller, Havana Red and Juan Goytisolo’s satire, A Cock-Eyed Comedy, are sites for the examination of the process of a translator’s interpretive moves in what constitutes a re-telling of stories. The article’s narrative calls for a translation pedagogy that extends beyond the narrow confines of present trends in Translation Studies research.

AUTEUR

PETER BUSH

Peter Bush vit à Barcelone où il travaille comme traducteur littéraire indépendant. Ses travaux les plus récents incluent Queen Cocaine de Nuria Amat (City Lights), The Blind Rider de Juan Goytisolo (Serpent’s Tail) et Tour- isms The Defeat of Dissent (Fundació Antoni Tàpies). Il a dirigé le British Centre for Literary Translation de l’Université d’East Anglia, où il a également occupé une chaire.
de traduction littéraire. Il vient de réaliser avec Susan Bassnett la co-édition de *The Translator as Writer* (Continuum, 2006).