

## Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica

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Number 83

*Vías Transatlánticas: Crítica Latinoamericana  
en la República Checa*

Article 25

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2016

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#### Citas recomendadas

Dykstra, Kristin (April 2016) "Regarding Translation; Regarding These Translations," *Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica*: No. 83, Article 25.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/inti/vol1/iss83/25>

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## REGARDING TRANSLATION; REGARDING THESE TRANSLATIONS

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I describe translation as an anxiogenic activity. Translation appears in and around situations that themselves produce anxiety: highly loaded social and political scenarios, emotionally charged negotiations of difference, asymmetries of power. Meanwhile translation itself provokes anxieties, most visible in our clichéd yet necessary fixation on interplays between fidelity and betrayal.

*Literary* translation, echoing with creative expressions that delineate and disturb the bounds of language, recognizes no conventional bounds on its territory. The uncontainability of literary translation is therefore discomforting. And it is, for this reason, an endlessly challenging and new experience.

Another way to examine the uncontainability of literary translation is to begin by saying: The central motion of translation is change. Over the years I have heard many confessions from people highly skilled in two languages that they cannot tolerate the experience of change that a conscious act of literary translation enacts; they do not want to tolerate the change, the stress of translation, for every act reveals that one's drive for perfection is no more than myth. Translation calls our contradictions out of us.

Where some want to reserve literature as an uncontaminated space, others see its beauty in its very contaminations. As I identify with the second group, it seems senseless to focus on the ceaseless building of fences to keep others out. But with every text, in my own contradictory fiction, I too need to drop into a state of mind that allows myth to retake the scene, convincing me that I can create words out of some energy other

than pragmatism. Let's call this state a working mythology of translation.

Two of the poems that follow are from the collection *Catch and Release*. Reina María Rodríguez took this phrase in English for her otherwise Spanish-dominant poetry collection because she likes the way this approach to fishing, catching a fish only to release it, acts as a metaphor for the writing of poetry. I similarly find "catch and release" to be a strong working metaphor for literary translation. One marshals all of the intellectual resources at hand in order to establish a reading of the poem, and this can mean drawing on scholarship, perhaps extensively. However, the delivery of ideas in effective literary language requires compromise with an equally uncompromising point of view: the pitiless drive of creativity. Relinquishing the safe spaces of scholarship, their comforting authority, allows other intricacies of expression to emerge.

One tricky aspect for the translation of these poems was projecting the paired concepts of tempo, in a musical respect, and time, activated on more existential plane of inquiry. I'm interested in how contemporary Cuban poetry so often enacts what Rafael Rojas has identified in prose as "a ritualized chaos" of temporalities and am in fact working over these same remarks from Rojas as I finalize the introduction to a book by an entirely different poet, Marcelo Morales, right now.<sup>1</sup> Why might the projection of chaos be appropriate for these very different poetic works and styles? In the late twentieth century, Rojas argues, Cubans "begin to lose their sense of historical orientation," and that disorientation finds expression in literature in the merging of times: "The temporality of the island begins to function in a synchronic sense instead of a diachronic one" (129). While musical imagery and vocabulary are essential in some Rodríguez poems, then, I usually find that I want to create a certain density in the experience of time; here, time is dual.

Another characteristic of Rodríguez' writing that appears in small here is her interest in Virginia Woolf. "Lily pond," a climactic poem from *Catch and Release*, is dedicated to Woolf. Rodríguez has long lionized Woolf, writing her into all manner of poetry and prose. I find it useful to periodically read texts by Woolf in order to defamiliarize myself from my own English. In this example the poem invokes biographical events and images, even quite violent ones. Yet like Woolf herself, Rodríguez manages a signature elusiveness in the poem as a whole: it is the elusiveness of a poem that achieves its fullness only in an internal opposition between actions, a catch and a release.

1 "The Illegible City: Havana After the Messiah." Tr. Eric Felipe-Barkin. In *Havana Beyond the Ruins: Cultural Mappings after 1989*, ed. Anke Birkenmaier and Esther Whitfield, 2011. 119-134. 123.