

## SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE TRANSLATION OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE* INTO GALICIAN

*Cara ó Faro* was published by Sotelo Blanco (Santiago de Compostela) in 1993. It was the first novel by Virginia Woolf to be translated into Galician. Both my colleague, Xavier Castro, and I sincerely hope that our efforts in the translation of this text will help future translators to improve the Galician version of Woolf's work. It is my belief that there is no definitive translation; ours, being only a first attempt, could never claim such an honour. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the criteria followed in our work, so that our experience may be of use for others in the future.

Our main principle was the fidelity to Modernist experimentation with style and narrative devices. This may sound like a commonplace, like an ordinary aspiration on the part of any translator, but I hope that the debate of our motivations to opt for fidelity and the exposure of our difficulties in its implementation will prove our claim to be more challenging than it may look at first sight. Three are the main reasons why fidelity should be a guiding tenet in the translation of Woolf's narrative:

1. The reader of the translation should go through a decoding process as similar as possible to the process undergone by the reader of the original.
2. Woolf transgresses the standard literary style by means of deviations that contribute to the "literariness" of her narrative. Therefore, the correction of these deviations will undermine the "literariness" of the text.
3. When a Modernist text transgresses a stylistic norm, it calls the reader's attention to its own artificiality and breaks free from the naturalistic illusion: the conventional relationship between language and reality is challenged. The modification of the transgressions seriously contravenes the Modernist claim to expose the arbitrariness and artificiality in the relationship between language and reality.

I am ready to anticipate some objections to the former justifications of a literal translation. It could be easily argued that it is a chimera to attempt at any kind of equivalence of experience between the reader of the original and the reader of the translation, given their different cultural backgrounds. Still, I do not approve of a translation which tries to help and orientate the reader by supplying information that is not in the main body of the original text. Such is the case, for instance, of the translation that presents a narrator with an explanatory function which s / he no longer has in much Modernist narrative.

Another obstacle may be the difficulty to define the norm and the transgression, both in English and in Galician, in the twenties and now. Although terms such as "norm, "

“transgression,” and “literariness” may sound like obsolete remains of Russian Formalism, they are still operative for the type of analysis I want to carry out here. However evanescent the norm may be, some consensus can be achieved as to Woolf’s use of certain deviations which I shall discuss presently.

Considering, then, the difficulties of the Modernist text, its occasionally hermetic quality, and its stylistic and narratological experimentation, there are at least two main temptations that the translator should resist: to explain the meaning of the transgressions, and to correct those deviations that may look or sound “odd.”

Let us consider several discourse levels at which Woolf’s deviations may lure the translator away from fidelity to the original:

1. Punctuation: Woolf’s narrative often shows what may look like an excessive abundance of commas, semicolons, and full stops that seem to mark turns in the flow of consciousness. Using the modern standard of punctuation in Galician would distort both the rhythm of the discourse, which is extremely important for the lyrical novel, and the representation of the way in which the mind works.

What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children, who, sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness (here Mr Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon), one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure. (pp. 8-9)<sup>1</sup>

Todo o que dicía era verdade. Sempre era verdade. Era incapaz de trabucarse; endexamais amañou un feito; nunca alterou unha palabra desagradable de xeito que puidese redundar en satisfacción ou comenencia de mortal ningún, na dos seus fillos menos ca de ninguén, que, sendo carne da súa carne, cumpría que soubesen desde a infancia que a vida é dura; que os feitos non admiten medias tintas; e que o paso pola lendaria terra onde as nosas esperanzas luminosas se extinguen, as nosas fráxiles embarcacións se mergullan nas tebras (e ó chegar aquí o señor Ramsay erguía as costas e musgaba os seu ollíños azuis albiscando o horizonte), require, sobre todo, coraxe, sinceridade e capacidade de resistencia. (pp. 6-7)

We may also find occasional examples of free direct discourse in which the character’s words are not marked by inverted commas, but only by a capital letter. In this way, the narrator’s and the character’s words are intermingled, and the narrative achieves a polyphonic effect that

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<sup>1</sup> The editions quoted are the following: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), and *Cara ó faro*. Transl. Manuela Palacios & Xavier Castro (Santiago de Compostela: Sotelo Blanco, 1993).

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privileges no voice in particular. If the translator uses the dashes that are normally employed in the Galician text to mark the character's direct discourse, *s / he* may eliminate one obstacle in the reader's decoding process, but *s / he* will also do away with the theoretical point that such ambiguous polyphony wants to make.

Qualities that would have saved a ship's company exposed on a broiling sea with six biscuits and a flask of water - endurance and justice, foresight, devotion, skill, came to his help. *R is then - what is R?* (p. 48, emphasis mine)

Virtudes que habían salva-la tripulación dun barco exposta no mar a unha calor abafante con seis galletas e unha cantimplora de auga: resistencia e xustiza, previsión, entrega, destreza, viñeron na súa axuda. *O R daquela é ... ¿Que é o R?* (p. 44, emphasis mine)

2. Lexicon: Repetitions of words often reflect the characters' concerns or obsessions in this type of narrative which has the representation of subjective experience as one of its main goals. Besides, repetitions contribute to reinforce the poetic rhythm of Woolf's lyrical style.

But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q - $\dot{R}$ -. (pp. 47-48)

Pero, ¿e despois do Q? ¿Que vén? Despois do Q hai unha serie de letras, a última delas a penas visible ós ollos dos mortais, pero que brilla vermella ó lonxe. Ó Z só pode chegar un home en toda unha xeración. Así e todo, se el puidese chegar ó R xa había ser algo. Polo menos aquí estaba o Q. Chantou os talóns no Q. Do Q estaba seguro. O Q podía demostrar. Se o Q é o Q, o R ... (p. 43)

3. Syntax: Woolf makes extensive use of long chains of subordinate clauses which add to her general syntactic complexity. Apart from her characteristic subordinators "as if", or "for", she is fond of embedding phrases or sentences in between parentheses. She frequently juxtaposes seemingly unrelated ideas, which provokes an effect of simultaneity that challenges the linear plot. The confusion of past, present, and future experience, together with the multiplicity of points of view, signal the artist's reorganization of experience.

She was now formidable to behold, and it was only in silence, looking up from their plates, after she had spoken so severely about Charles Tansley, that her daughters -Prue, Nancy, Rose- could sport with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other; for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, of ringed fingers

and lace, though to them all there was something in this of the essence of beauty, which called out the manliness in their girlish hearts, and made them, as they sat at table beneath their mother's eyes, honour her strange severity, her extreme courtesy, like a Queen's raising from the mud a beggar's dirty foot and washing it, when she thus admonished them so severely about that wretched atheist who had chased them to - or, speaking accurately, been invited to stay with them in - the Isle of Skye. (pp. 11-12)

Resultaba imponente observala agora, e só en silencio,<sup>1</sup> erguendo a vista dos pratos, despois de que ela falase con tanta severidade sobre Charles Tansley, as súas fillas -Prue, Nancy, Rose- ousaban deleitarse con ideas desleais, que elas mesmas argalaran, dunha vida diferente da dela; en París, se cadra; unha vida máis libre; sen ter que estar sempre a coidar deste ou daquel home; xa que na súa mente había unha dúbida calada sobre a amabilidade e a cortesía, sobre o Banco de Inglaterra e o Imperio da India, sobre os dedos enxoiados e o encaixe, aínda que todas elas atopaban neste un certo celme de beleza<sup>2</sup> que espertaba o sentido da masculinidade no seu corazón de nenas, e que as obrigaba, mentres estaban sentadas á mesa baixo a mirada da súa nai, a honra-la súa estraña severidade, a súa extrema cortesía, coma a dunha raíña que tira da lama o pé luxado dun mendigo e o lava, despois de berrarles con tanta severidade por mor daquel ateo infeliz que os perseguira (ou, para falar con máis exactitude, que convidaran a quedar con eles) na illa de Skye. (pp. 9-10)

4. Register: This is one of the aspects that should deserve further research on the part of translation theoreticians. Phrases from an upper-middle-class, learned, and poetic register such as Woolf's cannot be translated into colloquial expressions from rural, non-written varieties of Galician, however common or popular these may be. Therefore, an idiomatic expression like the one Woolf chooses for the beginning of this novel: "But you'll have to be up with the lark" triggers connotations as to the characters' social context that are totally different from those conveyed by a phrase like "erguense coas galiñas / pitas". Galician has survived through centuries of hostile linguistic policy thanks to the oral tradition rather than to print, thanks to the lower classes from rural areas rather than to the city upper-middle-classes. To find equivalent lyrical registers will require a special effort on the part of the translator to explore the Galician literary, lyrical tradition in search for the necessary tools.

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<sup>1</sup> The Galician printed version says "e só *estaba* en silencio", an obvious mistake for which the translators are not responsible, as we never proposed such an alternative in any of our drafts. Another serious mistake for which we would like to disclaim responsibility is on page 209 of the Galician printed version. The original says: "Then she was gone. 'And at last we shoved her off.'" (p. 222). The publisher's advisors apparently ignored that, in English, ships may be referred to as "she", so in their confusion they opted for the ridiculous translation: "Logo a treboada desapareceu".

<sup>2</sup> I offer here an alternative translation of this clause which I think is more accurate than the one we proposed for the printed version.

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It is obvious, although also often forgotten, that a translation does not finish when the translator hands in the last draft to the publisher. Actually, the problems start when looking for a Galician publisher for Woolf's work. She is neither a contemporary best-seller nor, apparently, an ineluctable milestone in "universal" literature.<sup>1</sup> A large section of the Galician literary market of translations is dedicated to texts for school teenagers, and Woolf's plots based on a succession of moments of being rather than on action and suspense do not seem suitable for this readership. Both publisher and translator may also fear that the contemporary fin-de-siècle audience will not sympathize with, or will not even understand, British Modernist experimentation from the twenties. A very literal translation may be branded as "archaeological work", and the transgressions above discussed may be seen as a hindrance for the book's saleability. It is very likely, then, that the translator will be forced to reach a compromise between academic rigour and adaptability to market requirements.

Manuela Palacios González  
University of Santiago de Compostela

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<sup>1</sup> "Universal" is a word that I resent for its ethnocentricity and its connotation of a permanent, unchangeable literary essence. For this reason, I was annoyed to find this word inserted in my own introduction to the Galician translation (p. xiv).

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