

Translation and Re-creation: Kerrigan's Version of Unamuno's *Niebla*.

Cómo se hace una novela, the third Unamuno novel translated by Anthony Kerrigan in *Novela/Nivola*,¹ first appeared in French translation.² Outlining the difficulties that he had with the title, Jean Cassou has written that "the Spanish title, *Cómo se hace una novela*, I changed in my French translation to *Comment on fait un roman*, his 'How a Novel Is Made' into 'How One Makes a Novel.' I could have just as well called it '*Comment se fait un roman*,' but the Spanish reflexive is equivalent also to the French 'on,' which suggests a particular individual, personal decision amidst the universal anonymity" (p. xxix). Kerrigan elaborates upon Cassou's remarks, suggesting that "the title in the form he [Unamuno] gave it could be read as *How to Write a Novel?* or *How is a Novel Written?* or *How Write a Novel?* or *How is a Novel Made?* or, declaratively, *How a Novel is Made*, or *The Making of a Novel*, or *How to Make a Novel*: we chose the last for the title" (pp. xii-xiii). These variations show the complications involved with a translation of Unamuno's writings from Spanish into another language.

These problems are made more difficult by the personality of Unamuno, for it seems that when the moment came to publish a Spanish version of *Cómo se hace una novela*, Unamuno decided that he would rather "retranslate" from Cassou's French "translation" than face "all those prophetic pages which I covered with words in that little room where I lived out the solitudes of my Paris solitude" (p. 383). Unamuno was immediately faced with the obvious question "is it feasible for a writer to retranslate one of his own works from a translation already made into another language? It is not so much a matter of thus resurrecting a work, but rather of killing it, or it is a mortician's job. or one of re-mortification. Or even of killing the work again" (p. 383). Unamuno answered this question himself in the author's preface to *The Tragic Sense of Life* where he propounded the idea not of translation but of a re-creation of literary material. In *The Tragic Sense of Life* this re-creation takes two forms: firstly, a correction of the English texts cited; and secondly, a revision of the whole work.

The idea of correction is expressed in the following fashion: "As for many years my spirit has been nourished upon the very core of English literature . . . the translator, in putting my *Sentimiento Trágico* into English, has merely converted not a few of the thoughts and feelings therein expressed back into their original form of expression. Or retranslated them, perhaps, whereby they emerge other than they originally were, for an idea does not pass from one language into another without change."³ It appears that when Unamuno revised Mr. J. E. Crawford Fritch's translation he corrected errors, clarified obscurities, and gave greater exactitude to quotations from foreign authors, all of which faults had existed in the Spanish original. As a result "this English translation of my *Sentimiento Trágico* presents in some ways a more purged and correct text than that of the original Spanish. This perhaps compensates for what it may lose in the spontaneity of my Spanish thought, which at times, I believe, is scarcely translatable."⁴

The idea of re-creation, implicit above, becomes explicit when Unamuno's theories on the novel itself are examined, for as even the author rereads a novel so he redoes, remakes, revives, and relives what seemed to be past. As a result, each reading, and in a much deeper sense, each translation, is a re-creation, in the fullest sense of the word (see pp. 15-16). A re-creation,

moreover, which is like an eavesdropping on an eternal monologue, or the creating anew of an endless dialogue between author, characters, and the readers themselves (see pp. xix, xxxiv).

This is the background against which we must examine Anthony Kerrigan's version of *Niebla* (the first—under the title "Mist"—of four Unamuno novels translated in *Novela/Nivola*). Clearly, in the light of the above theories, Kerrigan's is merely another voice to be added to the conversation. His version is valid because it is, *ipso facto*, an accurate rendering of the translator's understanding of the meaning of Unamuno's dialogue between author, character, and reader. Is it, however, an accurate rendering of the original Spanish text? And to what extent is an accurate rendering of the original necessary? Let us answer the second question first. Both Unamuno and Kerrigan are, at times, preoccupied with the exact translation of words. Thus, Unamuno, commenting on the phrase "per ea quae facta sunt" seems fascinated by the fact that the canonical Latin version is "a not very literal rendition of the original Greek of a passage in Paul" (p. 474). Whilst Kerrigan takes Unamuno to task for a minor mis-translation of Mazzini (p. 512) showing that details *are* important. However, a close comparison of Kerrigan's version with the original Spanish reveals a surprising number of discrepancies.

The most obvious difference between *Mist* and *Niebla* is that of the print, for Kerrigan insists on copying all interior monologues in italics, whereas they are not immediately distinguishable by means of the print in *Niebla*. The punctuation, too, varies from text to text. Since Spanish punctuation differs from English one would expect normal changes, the lack of the initial upside-down interrogation or exclamation mark, for example. However, one does not expect the wholesale, radical changes frequently made by Kerrigan. Compare, for example, this Spanish passage with its English translation:

—Mejor. ¿pequeño Hamlet, mejor. ¿Dudas?, luego piensas; ¿piensas?, luego crees. (*Niebla*, p. 649)⁵

"So much the better, my little Hamlet. You doubt, therefore you think. You think, therefore you are." (*Mist*, p. 189)

The interrogations of the interlocutor have been omitted from the translation and replaced by factual statements. This is, of course, far more than a question of false punctuation since the whole tone of the English translation is vastly different from that of the Spanish original.

The question of repetition must be raised immediately. In the above passage *mejor* occurs twice in the Spanish whilst *better* is found only once in the English. Repetition is a favorite trick of Unamuno, and the elimination of repetition is an equally favorite trick of Kerrigan (see, for example, *Niebla*, pp. 586, 589, 625, 650 and their translations in *Mist*, pp. 76, 83, 147 and 191).

One can only sympathize with Kerrigan when he is faced with the translator's nightmare: Spanish diminutives. There is no equivalent in English for the progression "Eugenia—Eugenita" (p. 565), nor for "¿Cuidadito! . . . ¿Cuidadito!" (p. 651), nor for "quietecito" (p. 651). One is left echoing the protagonist "Pero esos diminutivos—penso Augusto—, esos terribles diminutivos!" (*Niebla*, p. 565).

Another insoluble problem is that of the Spanish forms *usted* and *tú* which can only be approximated with the solitary English *you*. This can cause some real difficulties. In the following passage from *Niebla* the social standing of master and servant is immediately plain, whereas no such clarification is possible in the English translation:

—Y ahora, ¡vete!, ¡vete!

—Me echa usted? (*Niebla*, p. 646)

“And now you must go! Leave!”

“Are you throwing me out?” (*Mist*, p. 183)

An interesting adaptation of the Spanish occurs in the card game described briefly in Chapter IV. The Spanish game of *tute* demands a forty card pack with four suits of ten cards each. The suits are named *copas*, *bastos*, *oros*, *espadas*, and are symbolized by chalices, wooden clubs, gold coins, and swords respectively. To translate *copas* as “hearts” is clearly incorrect, and it is almost impossible to find an English equivalent for the scoring and calling system of the Spanish game of which “¡Veinte en copas!” (*Niebla*, p. 567) is a suitable example. “Twenty in hearts!” (*Mist*, p. 44) is an approximation, but it clearly leaves a great deal to be desired and an explanatory footnote would have been a welcome addition to the translation.

I would like to end this all too brief examination of *Mist* by commenting on Kerrigan’s translation of a repeated image, that of *la rana*, the frog. The term is used initially in the sense of an amphibian used in the laboratory for experiments, “Es inútil, pues, tomarla de conejilla de Indias o de ranita para experimentos psicológicos” (*Niebla*, p. 647). “It’s a waste of time trying to use her as a guinea pig for psychological experiments” (*Mist*, p. 185). In his translation Kerrigan omits one of the two beings (a guinea pig and a frog) presented by Unamuno. His choice of the guinea pig rather than the frog as the central object of the images which follow will cause several problems for *rana* is almost immediately rendered as “the object of experimentation” (*Niebla*, p. 650, *Mist*, p. 190). The wider meaning has been kept, but the literal translation has been lost. This makes the direct substitution of “guinea pig” for “frog” possible (*Niebla*, p. 651, *Mist*, p. 192), but it is this very substitution that creates difficulties later on the same page.

‘Esto es hecho’, pensó Augusto, que se sintió ya completa y perfectamente rana. (*Niebla*, p. 651)

It has been decided for me, August thought, and he felt like the perfect example of a guinea pig. (*Mist*, p. 192)

Rana has the secondary meaning of “fool” or “idiot.” Not only does Augusto feel like a frog, he also feels a fool. This secondary meaning has been lost in the translation (*Niebla*, pp. 651, 652, *Mist*, pp. 192, 193). The full extent of the problem is revealed in this final example:

Tú, querido experimentador, la quisiste tomar de rana, y es ella la que te ha tomado de rana a ti! ¡Chapuzate, pues, en la charca, y a croar y a vivir! . . . Quisiste hacerla rana, te ha hecho rana; acéptalo, pues, y sé para ti mismo rana. (*Niebla*, p. 661)

"You started by trying to turn her into a guinea pig and, instead, it is she who has transformed you into the guinea pig. So now you can begin to act the guinea pig. . . . You wanted to be a guinea pig and so you've turned into one: well, accept the situation, and become a guinea pig." (*Mist*, pp. 209-10)

The frog may return to his puddle, and croak, and live. The guinea pig may not; and the whole force of the frog image has been irremediably lost as a result. The choice of an adjective to qualify the noun (for example, "experimental frog" and "foolish frog") would have eliminated many of the difficulties stemming from Kerrigan's original choice of "guinea pig" and rejection of "frog."

On the positive side, however, Kerrigan's version is consistent and, if one accepts the elaboration, expansion, and paraphrase of the original text, it is a well-written piece of work. I would like to classify it as a good re-creation. This term should not offend Unamuno or Kerrigan, for it is well within the traditions of Unamuno's writings.⁶ As a translation, Kerrigan's *Mist* tends to stray too far from the original. As a re-creation, however, it achieves a remarkable consistency.

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NOTES

¹Miguel de Unamuno, *Novela/Nivola*, trans. A. Kerrigan (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1976), p. 517. All subsequent references will be noted in the text.

²Miguel de Unamuno, *Comment on fait un roman*, trans. J. Cassou, *Mercur de France* (15 mai, 1926).

³Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. J. E. Crawford Fitch (London and Glasgow: Fontana, 1962), p. 19.

⁴*The Tragic Sense of Life*, p. 20.

⁵Miguel de Unamuno, *Obras completas*, ed. M. García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1967). The second volume (*Novelas*) contains *Niebla*. All references to *Niebla* are to this edition and henceforth will be given in the text.

⁶It is also well within the traditions of expansion and paraphrase that have been with us since Cicero and Quintilian. See Glyn P. Norton, "Translation Theory in Renaissance France: Etienne Dolet and the Rhetorical Tradition," *Renaissance and Reformation*, 10 (1974), 1-13; also F. A. Kretschmer, "The 'res/verba' Dichotomy and 'copia' in Renaissance Translation," *Renaissance and Reformation*, II (1975), 24-29.