



## The Poetics of Translation According to Javier Marías: Theory and Practice

### Poétique de la traduction chez Javier Marías : théorie et pratique

Luis Pegenaute

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#### Résumé de l'article

L'objet de ce travail est l'étude de l'activité développée par Javier Marías par rapport à la traduction. On y tient compte de la présence de personnages traducteurs dans ses romans, de ses points de vue théoriques autour de la traduction et de sa propre activité en tant que traducteur. On relève dans les trois domaines l'adhésion à une poétique pleinement cohérente avec ses convictions esthétiques vis-à-vis de la traduction, puisque Marías rejette les partis pris traditionnels qui font de la traduction une activité secondaire par rapport à la création originale, en identifiant ainsi écriture et réécriture sans aucun préjugé hiérarchique.

# The Poetics of Translation According to Javier Marías: Theory and Practice<sup>1</sup>

Luis Pegenaute

## Introduction: Javier Marías

Javier Marías Franco, the son of the philosopher Julián Marías, was born in Madrid in 1951. A member of the Royal Academy of Spanish Language since 2006, his dedication to writing (as a novelist, essayist and columnist for several newspapers) has alternated with editing (as director of “Reino de Redonda”), lecturing (at Oxford University, at Wellesley College in Boston and at the Complutense University in Madrid), and also translating. He is one of Spain’s best known living novelists, supported by critics and public alike, and his name is frequently mentioned as a possible winner of the Nobel Prize. Over five and a half million copies of his novels have been sold around the world and he has already been translated into some forty languages in approximately fifty countries.<sup>2</sup> He has won several

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1 This article was undertaken in the framework of research project FFI2013-30781 of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, jointly financed with funding from FEDER.

2 The Spanish daily *El País* (20 November 2011) reported that seven works by Marías were to form part of the Penguin Classics catalogue from August 2012, and that Vintage Books—a division of Random House—was to distribute six of these in the U.S.A. and Canada, including his latest novel, *Los enamoramientos* [*The Infatuations*]. It is highly likely that such massive distribution in the Anglo-Saxon world will lead to Marías’s definitive international canonization.

national and international prizes, such as the Nelly Sachs Prize (Dortmund, 1997), the Comunidad de Madrid Prize (1998), the Grinzane Cavour Prize (Turin, 2000), the Alberto Moravia Prize (Rome, 2000) and the José Donoso Prize (University of Tulca, Chile, 2008), the National Prize of Narrative (Spanish Ministry of Culture, 2012), which he refused to accept, and the Formentor Prize of Letters (Formentor, Spain, 2013), all of them awarded for his work as a whole. He was also awarded the Spanish National Translation Prize in 1979 for his translation of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, by Laurence Sterne.<sup>3</sup> In 2000 the *Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres* distinction was conferred on him in France. Of the hitherto substantial number of works he has published since *Los dominios del lobo* [*The Dominions of the Wolf*] in 1971, the books that have won most prizes, both in Spain and abroad, are *Corazón tan blanco* [*A Heart So White*] (1992) and *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* [*Tomorrow in the Battle Think of Me*] (1994). The former conferred international standing on Marías thanks to the highly favourable review of the influential German critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki in his famous TV program *Das Literarische Quartet* (13

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3 To these should be added the Herralde Prize (1986) for *El hombre sentimental* [*The Man of Feeling*], the Barcelona City Prize (1989) for *Todas las almas* [*All Souls*], the Spanish Critics' Prize (1993) for *Corazón tan blanco* [*A Heart So White*] (1993), the L'Œil et la Lettre Prize (1993) for *Corazón tan blanco* [*A Heart So White*], the Rómulo Gallegos Prize (1995) for *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* [*Tomorrow in the Battle Think of Me*], the Fastenrath Prize of the Royal Academy of Spanish Language (1999) for *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* [*Tomorrow in the Battle Think of Me*] (1995), the Femina Étranger Prize to the best foreign novel (1996) for *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* [*Tomorrow in the Battle Think of Me*], the IMPAC International Dublin Literary Award (1997) for *Corazón tan blanco* [*A Heart So White*] (1997), the Mondello-Città di Palermo International Literary Prize (1998) for *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* [*Tomorrow in the Battle Think of Me*] (1998), the Ennio Flaiano International Prize (2000) for *El hombre sentimental* [*The Man of Feeling*] (2000), the Miguel Delibes National Prize of Journalism (2003) for the article "El oficio de oír llover," ["The Job Consisting in Listening to the Rain"] and the Salambó Prize to the best novel (2003), for *Tu rostro mañana, 1: Fiebre y lanza* [*Your Face Tomorrow 1: Fever and Spear*] (2003).

June 1996).<sup>4</sup> Marías—solely in literary terms—is the king of Redonda, a semi-fictitious and semi-real nation created around the uninhabited island of Redonda, a dependency of Antigua and Barbuda. Since 2001, Marías, in his role as king, has awarded the Reino de Redonda Prize annually to different personalities in the world of international arts and letters.<sup>5</sup> Marías is also the director of a small publishing house associated with Redonda, which has recovered a number of forgotten classics, prefaced by well-known writers and intellectuals, and presented in splendid editions.<sup>6</sup>

As a writer, Marías belongs to a generation which began to publish in the early 1970s, in other words, when Franco was about to die and democracy was to be restored in Spain. Marías was very much indebted to the novelist Juan Benet who, although considerably older, was a close friend. Benet was an exceptional writer, whose style set him apart from most of his contemporaries, but who exerted a tremendous influence on a good number of young writers, such as Pere Gimferrer, José María Guelbenzu, Félix de Azúa, Martínez Sarrión, Eduardo Mendoza, Vicente Molina Foix, and Álvaro Pombo, among others. They all constituted what has been called the “Neo-Vanguardist” generation, characterised by a rejection of established norms and clichés. Many of these writers shared Benet’s Anglophilia and his rejection of orthodox

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4 Reich-Ranicki stated that Marías’s *Corazón tan blanco* [*A Heart So White*] was one of the most important novels he had read in the last few years and that this novel did not admit comparison with any other in contemporary European literature. (A Spanish transcription of this TV program is available at: <<http://www.javiermarias.es/ESPECIALCTB/dasliterarischequartett.html>>.)

5 The awards have been conferred to J. M. Coetzee, John Elliott, Claudio Magris, Eric Rohmer, Alice Munro, Ray Bradbury, George Steiner, Umberto Eco, Marc Fumaroli, Milan Kundera, and Ian McEwan. In addition to an economic reward, they have all received an honorary duchy, enlarging a long list of “nobles” which includes numerous Spanish and international writers and filmmakers.

6 For a full description of Marías’s activity as king of Redonda see: <<http://www.javiermarias.es/REDONDIANA/reinoderedonda.html>>

realism.<sup>7</sup> What is relevant here is that some of these novelists (Marías most prominently) opted for a hybridization that endows their literary works with a note of foreignness. Their stories no longer have the kind of Spanishness that characterized the social novelists of the previous three decades. Indeed, to a large extent, the literary style of these novelists was a reaction against the patriotism of the previous generation(s). In Marías's words, "The difference [...] was that we made a distinction between our writing and our duties as citizens. We were as anti-Francoist as they were, but they had been working on something that has been called *Realismo Social*" (Ingendaay, 2000, n.p.).

The new generation aimed at cosmopolitanism rather than genuineness or social compromise. According to Amador Moreno, "in their rejection of [...] traditional elements, their particular styles place the emphasis on form and language, and open the door to the influence of foreign elements" (2005, p. 202). Marías grew up reading books written in English, spent part of his childhood in the United States, studied a major in English at university, taught for two years in Oxford and set the action of some of his novels in England. Marías's contact with British and American culture quite obviously left an important imprint in his writing, which some critics soon attributed to a certain degree of "un-Spanishness" and a considerable degree of snobbery. It was actually said of Marías that his novels sounded like translations, which was something that he took with a phlegmatic attitude (British humour, we might add, if that were not ironical).<sup>8</sup>

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7 According to Alexis Grohmann, "The origins of Javier Marías's novelistic development are determined in great measure by a reaction to Spanish writing under Franco and, in particular, the Spanishness, mimesis, realism, seriousness, localism, as well as the emphasis on a 'message' that characterized many novels" (2002, p. 7). For a comprehensive study of Marías's writing, including analysis of his literary formation, see Herzberger (2011).

8 In his own words, "one of the things I didn't want to be was what they call a 'real Spanish writer.' In the 1980s, when my later books were more successful than the earlier ones and started being translated into different languages, still many Italian publishers, surprisingly, turned my books down. They said they were 'not Spanish enough.' [...] The characters

It seems highly desirable to pay some attention to the relationship between Javier Marías and translation, not only because translation forms a thematically integral part of some of his literary works, but also because he has pondered its nature (in several articles and newspaper columns)<sup>9</sup> and he has frequently been a practitioner (in some cases introducing quite a radical poetics). Javier Marías may well be approached, therefore, not only as the writer of books in which the translating activity of some of his characters is highlighted, but also as a translation theorist and a translator himself. This brings this article in line with several recently published studies devoted to analyzing the relationship between writing and translation.

### **1. Studying the Presence of Translation in Marías's Novels: Towards a "Fictional Turn" in Translation Studies?**

We may assume that, to a large extent, the public perception of both translators and interpreters depends on three sources of information: their representation in works of fiction (be they films or literary works), autobiographical material (for example, translators' memoirs or their own comments about the art), and non-fictitious accounts (biographical studies about translators, press reports, etc.).<sup>10</sup> In recent times, Translation Studies has been laying the stress on translators as the basis of research. This is in line with Laurence Venuti's claim for the need to make their activity

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in my novels are ordinary people, similar to the ones you could find in Milan or Dublin, or in Paris. They belong to our middle class—modest, educated people. So my novels don't have bullfighting, no passionate women like Carmen. Lacking those ingredients of 'Spanishness,' my books were said to sound like translations. Obviously to me that was a praise, but they meant it as an insult" (Ingendaay, 2000, n.p.).

9 The most important ones are Marías (1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1993d, 1993e).

10 Carol Maier (2007) suggests that these are the three forms of experiential material related to translators that can offer valuable insights into the effects of their activity as agents of intervention. I am suggesting that they can also determine the general image that society builds up of translators.

more visible in the whole context of society<sup>11</sup> and Anthony Pym's advocating a humanization of translation history.<sup>12</sup> Academics are currently paying increasing attention to the aforementioned means of constructing translators' identities.<sup>13</sup>

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11 According to Venuti, a translated text is considered acceptable when it reads fluently and looks like an original text rather than a translation. In his own words, "This illusion of transparency is an effect of fluent discourse, or the translator's effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning. What is so remarkable here is that this illusory effect conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator's crucial intervention in the foreign text. The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text" (1995, pp. 1-2).

12 According to Pym, "if the ethical task of Translation Studies is to ultimately improve relations between cultures, and the task of translation history is to make sense of those same relations between cultures, we require more than just raw data about texts, dates, places, and names. We must also be able to portray active people in the picture, and some kind of human interaction at work, particularly the kind of interaction that can string the isolated data into meaningful progressions" (2009, pp. 23-24).

13 There are numerous sources of information compiling translators' own opinions about their activity. Indeed, throughout the history of translation it has been translators who have contributed most to translation theory, at least in the first (and lengthy) period into which Steiner, quite idiosyncratically, has divided this history. According to the latter, from Cicero to Hölderlin (that is, over more than eighteen centuries) we have "seminal analysis and pronouncements which stem directly form the enterprise of the translator" (1975, p. 236). Numerous anthologies in different languages have been devoted to compiling these statements (for example, Robinson, 2002 or Weissbor and Eysteinnsson, 2006). We also have contemporary accounts, whether of individual translators (for example, Rabassa, 2005) or of multiple ones (for example, Wilson, 2009). As regards non-fictional accounts concerning translators, such as biographies, see for example, Delisle's portraits of both male and female translators (1999; 2002).

Among the three sources of information referred to, the first is of particular interest here. Indeed, Delabastita and Grutman (2005, p. 28) suggest that something like a “fictional turn” is taking place in Translation Studies. According to them, at the object level, this is a consequence of the increase in fictional materials that involve translation scenes; at the meta-level, this is due to the currently widespread conviction that all kinds of statements about translation are documents as worthy of research as translations themselves. Whether it is true or not that we are about to witness this “fictional turn,” it is undeniable that there has been an important increase in the study of pieces of fiction involving translation. One good illustration of this is Delabastita and Grutman’s collection of papers about *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism* (Delabastita and Grutman, 2005) or the First International Conference on Fictional Translators in Literature and Film, held at the University of Vienna in September 2011.<sup>14</sup> Among the numerous recent works devoted to this subject, we may mention Barnett (n.d., n.p.), who analyzes three Argentinean novels published in 1998; Wakabayashi (2005), who analyzes some forty Japanese novels; and Curran (2005), who analyses one American, one Australian, and one Canadian novel. These, however, are not the most relevant contributions for our own study. We find others whose conclusions are in line with those that we can reach when studying the presence of translation and translators in Marías’s novels. Strümper-Krobb (2003), for example, analyzes the use of fictional translators in narrative texts from three different literatures (German, Spanish, and Swedish), and concludes that the presence of translators in these narrative fictional works undermines the perception of translation as a process of transculturation capable of enabling successful intercultural communication. According to her, the figure of the translator “is used to explore themes of displacement and loss of self, of image building and manipulation, in which the concerns of contemporary writers meet with those of more critical approaches to translation as complex cultural process (2003, p. 121). In a similar vein, Wilson (2007), analyzes two contemporary Italian novels in which fictional representations

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14 See <<http://transfiction.univie.ac.at/>> for a full description of the topics suggested.



of translators are prominent and suggests that they represent a discursive strategy aimed at underlining the translator's social presence rather than his habitual invisibility. According to him, translators are not presented as neutral social agents capable of transcending linguistic and cultural frontiers in a non-traumatic way. He also finds that writers construct images of themselves in their translator characters, thus underlining the association that emerges between writing and translation as forms allied with their own personality. Finally, Jean Anderson, after analyzing several fiction narratives written by translators concludes that they provide "a literary representation of a profession whose members are marginalised, transgressive, even fraudulent or impostors; at the very least, prey to identity instability" (2005, p. 171). Other academics, such as Michael Cronin (2009), have analyzed the way in which problems of translation are depicted not in literary works but in films, such as the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera*, *The Star Wars Trilogies* and *Lost in Translation*. He proves that translation has been a concern for filmmakers when dealing with questions of culture, identity, conflict and representation. It is quite symptomatic when he declares, in the opening line to *Translation Goes to the Movies*, that his book is "about the visibility of translators" (2009, p. x). According to Cronin, although it is true that a lot of recent work in Translation Studies has been devoted to translators, "less attention, however, has been paid, to translators not so much as agents of representation but as objects of representation" (*ibid.*).

In Marías's narratives there are abundant references to translation, often in connection with the slipperiness of language and its limitations in achieving perfect communication. It thus becomes an instrument for exemplifying how interpretative acts function. In some cases, moreover, translation comes to be a fundamental element in the plot. It might also be said that auto-textual references abound in Marías, which Ilse Logie understands as a form of auto-translation: in her words, "se traduce a sí mismo como traduce a otros, citando constantemente de su propia obra, [lo que le permite] destacar la función central de la traducción en todos los procesos de interpretación, sean estos ficticios o no" ["he translates himself as he translates others, constantly quoting his own work, [which enables him] to bring out central function

of translation in all processes of interpretation, whether these be fictional or real"] (2001, p. 67). This presence of translation is clearly in harmony with the author's own convictions, as on numerous occasions he has questioned the traditional hierarchy that associates translation with a secondary, derivative activity, far less demanding than original creation. Indeed, as we shall see, given his double aspect of translator and writer, translation has served him as a creative driving force.

With the exception of his early works, we discover in Marías's novels a strong presence of the voice of the narrator, who becomes the protagonist. As Requena (2003) points out, this enables the novelist to have the narrator link up the events that form part of his narration with the considerations that emerge from them. It might be said that thought would appear to have outweighed action, precisely as Marías's beloved Laurence Sterne had done in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, without, however, going to the latter's extremes. Different events in the plot are recalled, relived or reconstructed, setting in motion numerous digressions that give shape to an authentic life-enhancing mosaic. If the digressions do not end up unravelling the story, this is because an idea or quote (often originating in Shakespeare) is recovered, which in its reiteration finally gives genuine cohesion to the text, endowing it with full meaning. In works such as *Corazón tan blanco* [*A Heart So White*], *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* [*Tomorrow in the Battle Think of Me*], *Tu rostro mañana* [*Your Face Tomorrow*], *Todas las almas* [*All Souls*], *El hombre sentimental* [*The Man of Feeling*] or *Negra espalda del tiempo* [*Dark Back of Time*], we meet narrators who in their own discourse question language's capacity for recording a story by frequently delving into the limitations of language. In these works it is by no means rare to come across digressive explanations about the possible meanings of particular words or expressions, and about the degree of their potential translatability. Thus, for example, the narrator in *All Souls* (1999, p. 172) states that the English verb *to eavesdrop* can only be translated into Spanish by explaining it and he offers his (Spanish) reader its compound meaning: the sum total of its constituent parts would imply listening indiscreetly, secretly, deliberately, at a certain distance, like someone positioned by the eaves of a roof listening to the dripping of the falling rain. The

narrator in this particular novel, considered on some occasions to be the novelist's *alter ego* (something that Marías has strenuously denied) for being, as the author himself had been, a literature don at Oxford, reappears in the work *Your Face Tomorrow*, which Marías published in three volumes. If in this novel he works initially as a language interpreter, in such a way that what the reader can read is what the narrator has turned into Spanish, he then goes on to operate as a spy, and becomes an interpreter of faces capable of predicting the future behaviour or attitudes of those whom he scrutinizes, by intuitively examining their facial features (symbolised in the title of the work, which the author has taken from a quote from Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part II*), their moral potential, vitality and decision-making capacity. We also find considerations here on the difficulties inherent in the practice of translation and the limitations encountered when trying to find equivalents between different languages; for instance, in the scene in which the narrator-protagonist recalls (in Spanish) his involvement as an interpreter in the encounter between an Italian and an English character, and his inability to correctly translate the words *invaghirsi*, *sfregio*, *bazza* (Marías 2006, pp. 84-86).

Yet it is in the novel *A Heart So White* where translation—and also interpreting—takes on a more predominant role, as De Maeseneer (2000) has stressed. This work has proved to be one of Marías's most popular novels. Different critics have stressed the core role played by language in this novel, to the extent that it comes to be one of its real protagonists. In this sense, it is no surprise that the main character earns a living as a translator and interpreter. Professional concerns invade his private life and we frequently come across numerous references to the difficulties and limitations of translation and interpreting, in addition to the mediator's capacity for undertaking conscious manipulation of discourse, as he himself does in particular cases where he is involved as an interpreter. Indeed, we might extend these reflections undertaken in an inter-linguistic context to suggest that the whole novel turns on the eagerness to make discoveries and acquire knowledge and truth by overcoming communication interruption, breakdown or concealment. It is the narrator's professional dedication that leads him to wish "to understand *everything* that people say and everything that I hear, both at

work and outside, even at a distance, even if it's in one of the innumerable languages I don't know" (Marías, 2003, p. 29). He is only at ease when he becomes aware that something is totally unintelligible to him. The rest of the time, when he understands, he cannot avoid translating mentally into his own language and even into other languages that he knows, if what he hears has been spoken in Spanish. The narrator states that, paradoxically, he only finds solace in his day-to-day existence precisely in those situations that prove most compromising in the exercise of his profession: when the sounds are inexplicable. In his own words:

That's the chief curse of the working interpreter, when for some reason (terrible diction, a tic foreign accent, my own absentmindedness), you can't separate or select and you lose the thread and everything you hear sounds identical, a jumble or an uninterrupted flow, that might just as well have remained unuttered, since the fundamental thing is to distinguish individual words, the way you have to distinguish individuals if you want to get to know them. But when that happens and you're not at work, it's also your main consolation: only then can you rest completely and not pay attention or remain alert, and find pleasure instead in listening to voices (the insignificant murmur of speech), which you know not only have nothing to do with you, but which you are, besides, unqualified to interpret or transmit or memorize or transcribe or understand. Nor even to repeat. (2003, p. 30)

When the narrator mentions the presence of some new sheets on his bed, he states that this is part of the "trousseau" (Spanish *ajuar*), which makes him say that he does not know how to translate a strange, old-fashioned word like that (2003, p. 134).<sup>15</sup> In a similar sense, when one of the characters uses the

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<sup>15</sup> This comment disappears in the English translation of Marías's novel. This is of course due to what Jakobson would call the metalinguistic function of language, which may posit numerous translation problems. Theo Hermans has convincingly argued that in instances in which this metalinguistic function is prominent, translations may run into some kind of "performative self-contradiction." According to Hermans, "the resulting incongruities that open up in the text are due to the fact that, while we generally accept that translated texts are reoriented towards a different type or reader in a different linguistic and cultural environment,

word “jinx,” the narrator instinctively thinks of translating it into the languages that he knows, but he cannot find the equivalent word (2003, p. 126); nor with “mal de ojo” in English or Italian (“‘evil eye,’ yes, ‘jettatura,’ but it’s not the same thing”), although he does find one in French (“guignon”) (2003, p. 127). With regard to vulgar expressions such as “cunt” and “quim” the narrator states that they are “difficult words to translate, but words which fortunately are never used in the international organizations I work for” (2003, p. 121). On the contrary, when he mentions the word “respaldar” he makes reference to its perfect English equivalent, “to back” (2003, p. 66). The fact that the narrator protagonist is an interpreter enables him to detect that a letter written in English has been originally written (or mapped out) in Spanish:

The English was very correct, but there were a few hesitations, one obvious error and several expressions which were not only un-English, but which seemed to have been too literally translated from the Spanish: all three of us, Berta, Luisa and I, are very good at picking up the errors our fellow countrymen make when they speak or write other languages. (2003, p. 151)

Chapter 4 (not numbered, pp. 47-67) is devoted entirely to detailing the activities of translators and interpreters in international organisations. The narrator acknowledges that he does it basically “to make a living” (2003, p. 47) and that he finds this work:

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we expect the agent, and hence the voice, that effect this reorientation to remain so discreet as to vanish altogether” (1996, p. 9). To illustrate his point, Hermans refers to Derrida’s discussion of the final chapter of Descartes’ *Discours de la méthode*, in which Descartes states that he has written his book not in Latin but in French. In the Latin translation of this work, this sentence was not translated, since it would be quite contradictory to state that the translation was not written in Latin. While Derrida has frequently exploited these kinds of paradoxes in his own essays, even challenging the translators to find solutions to particular instances of wordplay, Hermans makes use of them to prove that in translations “there is, clearly, another voice at work, a voice we are not meant to hear, which echoes and mimes the first voice, but never fully coincides with it” (*ibid.*).

boring in the extreme, both because of the identical and fundamentally incomprehensible jargon universally used by all parliamentarians, delegates, ministers, politicians, deputies, ambassadors, experts and representatives of all kinds from every nation in the world, and because of the unvaryingly turgid nature of all their speeches, appeals, protests, harangues, and reports, (2003, p. 47)

although it offers the comforts of being able to work only one half of the year for alternating two-month periods in cities like London, Geneva, Rome, New York, Vienna or Brussels. He acknowledges that, while it may seem interesting to have privileged access to news on the widest range of subjects which affect major decisions in world politics and economics, the truth is that he finds this activity tedious, given the insistence with which these texts and speeches (which often, in fact, lack any significance) are indiscriminately rendered into different languages:

When we are working, we translators and interpreters do nothing but translate and interpret, indiscriminately and almost without a break, for the most part without anyone knowing why something is being translated or for whom it's being interpreted, more often than not, if it's a written text, it's purely for the files and, if it's a speech, for the few odds and sods who don't understand the second language we're translating into anyway. Some idiot has only to fire off some idiotic remark to one of these organizations for it to be instantly translated into all six official languages. (2003, p. 49)

The narrator sarcastically thinks that the greatest stress experienced by political representatives in international forums is not the result of the discussions between the different political representatives but happens when, for different reasons, there is no interpreting available, or when it is done poorly. In his own words: "the one thing delegates and representatives really care about is being translated and interpreted, not having their speeches and reports approved of and applauded or having their proposals taken seriously or implemented" (2003, p. 50), which De Maeseneer correctly interprets with "translation becomes the end and no longer the means to that end" (2000, n.p.). The narrator recalls the incident that took place at a meeting of

Commonwealth countries in Edinburgh, in which the Australian representative insisted on being interpreted into English. On discovering that no interpreting service had been hired, he strained his accent until it became practically unintelligible and only returned to a natural diction when his request was attended to. Reference is also made to the enmity between interpreters and translators: "Interpreters hate translators and translators hate interpreters, just as simultaneous translators hate consecutive translators and consecutive translators hate simultaneous translators" and to which of the two activities is his own favourite: "having worked both as a translator and an interpreter (though now I work solely as an interpreter, the advantages outweigh the fact that it leaves you utterly drained and affects your psyche), I'm familiar with the feelings associated with both jobs" (2003, p. 52). Translators think that they do their jobs much more professionally than interpreters (although this may only be because their performance may be subject to checks or inspection) and in working and salary conditions that are much less advantageous. According to the narrator, the interpreters' visibility in performing the act of translation means that they are held in higher esteem, which makes them conceited. Yet they supposedly agree that, when acting together, they are undertaking a mechanical and thoroughly unrewarding activity, from an intellectual point of view:

Even at the moment I was translating I could remember nothing, that is, even then, I had no idea what the speaker was saying or what I said subsequently or, as one imagines happens, simultaneously. He or she said it and I said or repeated it, but in a mechanical way that has nothing whatsoever to do with intellection (more than that, the two activities are completely at odds), for you can only repeat more or less accurately what you hear if you neither understand nor assimilate any of it (especially if you're receiving and transmitting without pause). (2003, pp. 52-53)

The narrator-protagonist ponders the fact that interpreters are not subject to any form of quality control. As a result of this they have great power to manipulate or distort spoken discourse. Only at political summit conferences, in which they must interpret for high-ranking leaders, is the figure of the network-



interpreter introduced, with a view to assisting (checking on, perhaps?) the main interpreter if the latter is in doubt or makes a mistake. According to him, it is precisely in such contexts that the interpreter is least necessary, because the higher the standing of the participants, the lesser the importance of the meeting. The narrator is fully aware that it is the high-level aides who really undertake the negotiations, the leaders' role being limited to holding mere protocol encounters. Whatever the case, their presence is still important for the following reasons: "the highest-ranking politicians generally know no other language but their own; if we weren't there they'd feel that not enough importance was being given to their chatter; and should an argument break out they can always put the blame on us" (2003, pp. 55-56). It is precisely at one such encounter that the character meets his wife, who is working as a back-up interpreter. In fact, Marías manipulates the context of the interpreting activity: in order to guarantee the faithfulness of the interpretation for both parties in a real situation, the established norm is two interpreters, but each one of them at the service of each one of the two interlocutors. The reader is told about an interview taking place between a high-ranking Spanish politician and his British female counterpart. Given the difficulties that they both seem to experience in setting up fluent, relaxed communication, the interpreter twists one of the questions formulated by the Spaniard, in order to encourage a personal *rapprochement* between them. Thus, the question "Would you like me to order you some tea?" is interpreted as "Tell me, do the people in your country love you?" (2003, p. 59). The interpreter's intervention is unexpectedly successful and this encourages the interlocutors to begin a relaxed conversation, throughout which the interpreter takes the liberty to suppress fragments, as when the Spanish politician states "[dictators] are still more intensely loved by those who do love them, whose numbers, moreover, are always on the increase" and the interpreter considers that "this final remark was a little exaggerated, not to say inaccurate, so I translated everything except that phrase (I omitted it, in short, and censored it)" (2003, p. 60). In a similar way, when the British dignitary states:

If you order a country to love its rulers, it will end up convinced that it does love them, at least much more easily than if you



didn't order them to do so. We can't force them to, that's the problem," the interpreter decides to suppress "that's the problem," holding it to be "too extreme for the democratic ears of our high-ranking politician. (2003, p. 61)

Throughout his performance, the interpreter undertakes a neutralisation of cultural specificity so that he will not jeopardize communication, as when he decides to translate "la Plaza de Oriente" (a square in the historical centre of Madrid, associated for all Spaniards with the mass demonstrations held there by the dictator, Franco) as "a large square" (2003, p. 62), which seems totally suitable. It would appear less correct, in order to maintain the traditional monitoring conditions, for him to translate the words of the British politician in an absolutely creative way and make her ask her interlocutor to put away his keys, alleging that their jingling annoys her. In any case, the most flagrant of substitutions apparently happens when he interprets the statement "if we do something well, nobody organizes a demonstration to show us how pleased they are" as "If you don't mind my asking and you don't think I'm being too personal, have you, in your own experience of love, ever obliged anyone to love you?" (2003, p. 63). This is an action on the interpreter's part that is wholly creative and unjustifiable from any ethical perspective. The result of this scene, as De Maeseneer puts it, is to make the reader totally mistrust the work of interpreters (and, by extension, that of translators):

"[a través de esta sátira] se destruyen los mitos sobre el carácter científico, pertinente y fiable de la traducción y se insiste en la duda y en la inseguridad [...], subrayando el poder falso de la palabra" ["[by means of this satire] the myths surrounding the scientific, pertinent and trustworthy character of translation are destroyed and emphasis is laid on doubt and insecurity [...] underlining the false power of the word"] (2000, n.p.).

## **2. Javier Marías's Opinions on Translation: The Translator as Writer (or the Writer as Translator)**

At least three recent collections of essays have been devoted to studying the relations between translation and writing, which testifies to the interest that this topic has been receiving of late

in Translation Studies. Bassnett and Bush (2006) have attempted to bridge the gap between those who study translations and those who produce them by compiling a number of essays written by well-known translators who comment on their own work as distinctive literary practice. By emphasizing the creative aspect of translation, they argue that translators are effectively writers or rewriters, and should acquire a proper visibility. Secondly, Loffredo and Perteguella (2006) have brought together eleven chapters written by academics and translators who discuss the links between translation and creative writing from linguistic, cultural, and critical perspectives. The relationship between translation and creative writing is brought into focus by theoretical, pedagogical, and practical applications. Finally, Buffagni, Garzelli and Zanotti (2011), have edited the proceedings of a conference held at the University of Siena in 2009 in which both scholars and professional translators discussed the theoretical applications and applicability of the author-translator paradigm. The relationship between translators and authors is addressed in its various manifestations, from author-translator collaboration to self-translation and to authorial practices of translating. In line with these contributions, the studies compiled by Paschalis and Kyritsi (2008) have investigated the relationships between self and translation, arguing that acts of translation connect intimately with formations of the self and issues of individual or cultural identity. Also worth noting is Wilson (2009), who offers and contrasts a wealth of data about translation from his own experience as a translator and from more than fifty eminent translators, writers, and critics.

These studies approach writing as a type of translating and translating as a type of writing. If the former can never be totally original, the latter can never be exclusively subsidiary. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind the contributions of academics such as Lefevere (1992), who understand translation as a form of rewriting (in fact, one of the most easily recognizable as such), able to constitute itself as a genuine act of interpreting and whose cultural impact is immense, since it has an important effect on different areas directly related to issues of power, manipulation and ideology. Translation thus constitutes a formidable weapon in the construction of the canon and the transmission of

imagological perceptions. In the case of translators who also happen to be writers, we could argue that their role is enhanced by the fact of their being hyper-specialized mediators.

The study of the double activity of a writer/translator (the writer who translates and the translator who writes) contributes to a better conceptualization of the relationship between these two activities and to harmonizing the status that both have traditionally been granted, bridging the qualitative distance generally associated with them (that is, a hierarchical, vertical relationship, which equates literary writing with production, originality and innovation, and which relegates translation to a mere imitative and derivative reproduction). According to Holman and Boase-Beier:

There are two assumptions that people commonly make when they speak of translation in contrast to original writing. One is that the translator is subject to constraints which do not apply to the original author. The other is that the act of translation is by nature less creative than the act of writing an original work. (1998, p. 1)

This traditional approach, quite obviously, is tantamount to implying that translation is derivative in a way that original writing is not, taking for granted the supremacy of the original over the translation, a notion that has been challenged in recent times by deconstructionists. Much of the debate about the relative merits of writing as opposed to translation has revolved around the notions of creativity and constraint, the former supposedly being far less restricted by constraints and, accordingly, more able to reach a free and original expression. Yet as Holman and Boase-Beier convincingly argue, not only writing is also bound by different political, social, poetic, and linguistic constraints, but the very fact that the translator is inescapably enslaved to the model of the original text and to the limitations imposed by the target language, forces him/her to be necessarily more creative than the writer:

A translator must take into consideration all the constraints, whether social and contextual, poetic and conventional, or linguistic and formal which helped shape the original. In

addition he or she must carry the sheer burden of constraint imposed by the new target language, culture and audience, and by the need to balance freedom with faithfulness and one's own knowledge, background and beliefs with those of the author. Then, too, there are added constraints caused by cultural, linguistic or pragmatic mismatches between SL [Source Language], and TL [Target Language]. (1998, p. 139)

The importance of the translator's creative capacity is not diminished by the presence of the original. Rather, according to Loffredo and Perteghella, "the source text offers the starting point for a journey and becomes the space 'into' and 'through' which the translator is given to explore creatively and perform his/her subjectivity" (2006, p. 10). From this point of view, it is precisely constraints that prompt creativity. In Hermans' words, "creativity *within* and *thanks* to constraints" (2006, p. x). The concept of creativity seems to open a new door to the dead alley of the equation between writing and originality, rewriting and reproduction, and to the qualitative connotation generally associated with them.

Javier Marías's writing is so imbued with his experience as a translator that, in Logie's opinion, his poetics could be defined as a "derivative aesthetics" (2001, p. 67), as it serves as a starting point for many of his texts, both in essay format and as literary creation. In her words:

[Estos textos] despliegan unas reglas de construcción que los definen como "discursos al segundo grado" derivados de traducciones literarias, de otros textos de otros autores ("intertextualidad")—a menudo de textos "menores" de autores de "segundo orden"—, de otros textos del propio Marías reaprovechados ("autotextualidad") o de metatextos críticos. (Logie, 2001, p. 68)

[[These texts] employ rules of construction that define them as "second degree discourses" derived from literary translations, from other texts by other authors ("intertextuality")—often from "lesser" texts by "second rate" authors—, from other texts by Marías himself of which new advantage is taken ("autotextuality") or from critical metatexts.] (Logie, 2001, p. 68)

There can be no doubt that translation for Marías provided a genuine strategy for literary apprenticeship. The majority of his translations come from the 1974-1986 period, which we may well consider his apprenticeship years before he achieved real critical and reading public success with the work *Todas las almas* [*All Souls*] (1989). During these years he alternated translation with the publication of the novels *El monarca del tiempo* [*The Monarch of Time*] (1978), *El siglo* [*The Century*] (1983) and *El hombre sentimental* [*The Man of Feeling*] (1986), although it should be mentioned that prior to 1974 (the year of publication of his translation of *The Withered Arm and Other Stories* by Thomas Hardy), he had already published *Los dominios del lobo* [*The Dominions of the Wolf*] (1971) and *Travesía del horizonte* [*Voyage along the Horizon*] (1972). In any case, to be more precise it should also be said that these references do not entirely reflect the whole of his creative and translating activity, for in 1966, aged only fifteen, he wrote a novel that he never published, *La víspera* [*The Day Before*], and three years later he earned his first salary by translating horror film scripts for his uncle, the film maker Jesús Franco. In certain particular cases, Marías combined writing and translating: such is the case of the novel *El monarca del tiempo* [*The Monarch of Time*] and his translation of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, both published in 1978.

During his formative period as a writer Marías experienced a marked influence from English literature and culture. This influence, explicitly recognised by the writer, has not always been enthusiastically received by the critics, who have been markedly reticent over his Anglophilia and, by extension, the fact that he displays a somewhat “foreignized” style and does not cultivate Spanish themes. Marías alluded to all this in a lecture given on 16 November 1984, at the *New Ibero American Writing Symposium* at the University of Texas at Austin, provocatively entitled: “Desde una novela no necesariamente castiza” [“From the perspective of a not necessarily traditionalist Spanish novel”]. Here he commented on the fact that his first novel (*Los dominios del lobo* [*The Dominions of the Wolf*]), published when he was nineteen and written between the ages of seventeen and eighteen, was a combination of adventure stories that took place in the United States which were both a parody of, and homage to, the

Hollywood of the forties and fifties and a series of American writers. Marías recalled how a considerable number of critics had pointed disapprovingly to the fact that the work was excessively indebted to foreign models. Thus, what was missing, they said, was greater inspiration from personal experience and observation of immediate reality; in other words, the society, culture and history of his own country. In his lecture Marías considered his own career retrospectively, stating that in fact that “[él] había tenido la conciencia de no desear escribir necesariamente sobre España ni necesariamente como un escritor español” “[he] had been “conscious of not wishing to write necessarily about Spain or necessarily as a Spanish novelist”] (1993c, p. 49). He justified this rejection by arguing that the tradition of the Spanish novel was excessively realist or even over-indebted to “local colour” and that, as a result, he had been more attracted in his youth to the novel in England and France, as well as that of Germany, Russia and the United States. Moreover, he defended the view that he and his contemporaries were “literalmente hartos con España” [“literally fed up with Spain”] as a literary theme, because it had been over-exploited, both by the so-called Generation of ‘98 and that of social realism in the fifties. Finally, he presented ideological reasons, because writers in the seventies had received an education that was so obsessed with the virtues of the motherland that they had come to loathe it, identifying “Spanishness” with Francoism. According to Marías, these factors had made writers like Félix de Azúa, Luis Antonio de Villena, Leopoldo María Panero and Vicente Molina Foix cultivate a kind of literature more related with the foreign than the national. His second novel (*Travesía del horizonte* [*Voyage along the Horizon*]), published in 1973, would also show a clear foreign influence, particularly that of the Edwardian novel, Conrad and Henry James above all.

As on the previous occasion, critics again denounced its “foreignizing” character. Indeed, it was even said of Marías that he used a Spanish that “sounded like translation.” It proved highly significant that for him a commentary of this nature, which most writers would take almost as an affront, “no estaba necesariamente reñido con un elogio” [“was not necessarily incompatible with a praise”] (1993c, p. 53). In fact, Marías would go on to alternate

writing and translating, finding the latter almost as satisfying as the former. Moreover, in his own words,

Hasta cierto punto considero—como creo que todo traductor de literatura debería hacer— estos textos míos que hacen reconocible en mi lengua a Laurence Sterne, Joseph Conrad o Sir Thomas Browne, tan propios como mis novelas. (1993c, pp. 55-56)

[To a certain degree I consider—as I believe any literary translator ought to do—those texts of mine that make Laurence Sterne, Joseph Conrad or Sir Thomas Browne recognisable in my language to be as much mine as my own novels.] (1993c, pp. 55-56)

Marías considers translation work to be so complementary to his own writing that he says he translated these writers because they were “[aquellos] a los que deseaba estudiar, de los que quería aprender, o bien [...] aquellos que más me habían influido de manera consciente y aun deliberada en mis propios escritos” “[the ones] I wanted to study, from whom I wished to learn, or else [...] those who had influenced me most consciously and even deliberately in my own writing”] (1993c, p. 56). Thus, he commented that if he had decided to translate Sir Thomas Browne it was not only because in the novel *El siglo* [*The Century*] (1983) he had sought inspiration in the English writer, but also because he had inserted into it a couple of paraphrases originally from Browne’s *Hydriotaphia*. According to Marías, it was highly unlikely that this inter-textual debt could have been noticed by readers before his own translation had been published, as only Borges and Bioy Casares had translated it into Spanish, limiting themselves to translating the fifth chapter.<sup>16</sup> Yet if this data were not sufficient to confirm that his translating activity must have been a necessary influence on Marías’s training as a writer, we might refer to his own words in a lecture on 25 March 2009, entitled “El escritor que traduce” [“The Writer Who Translates”], given to mark receiving the “José Donoso” Premio Iberoamericano de Letras Prize at the University of Talca. Here he states:

16 Marías refers to this translation by Borges and Bioy Casares in the essay “El apócrifo apócrifo” [“The Apocryphal Apocryphous”] (1993d).

Cuando un joven escritor me pregunta si tengo algún consejo que darle a la hora de abordar su incipiente carrera, [...] si tiene la posibilidad de conocer una segunda lengua, le recomiendo traducir, traducir y traducir cuanto pueda. (n.p.)

[When a young writer asks me whether I have any advice to give when it comes to approaching his upcoming career, [...] if he has the chance to learn a second language, I recommend him to translate, to translate and to translate all he can.] (n.p.)

And moreover:

Si alguna vez tuviera un taller literario, Dios lo prohíba, lo único que haría sería admitir a los alumnos que pudieran traducir de una lengua a otra. Creo que éste es el mejor ejercicio posible para aprender a escribir, mucho mejor incluso que la escritura. (n.p.)

[If I ever had a literary workshop, though God forbid, the only thing I would do would be to admit pupils who could translate from one language to another. I think this is the best possible exercise for learning to write, much better even than reading.]<sup>17</sup> (n.p.)

Marías added that although translation is generally held to be a mechanical activity, the writer who, notwithstanding, succeeds in translating a foreign text into his own language is undertaking an extraordinary exercise in the act of writing, as he must transmit the original meaning, even when its original language has been lost. In his lecture, Marías addressed other ways of understanding “translation,” even in everyday language, depending on who the interlocutor is. In addition, he used the same concept when pointing out that the writer must be alert to this phenomenon, for interpreting what others wish to say is a form of translation.

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17 This lecture remains unpublished, but fragments exist in different sources to be found on the internet. The same opinions are to be found in interviews with Castellanos (1989) Alameda (1996), Vázquez (2001) and Pino (2001), which testifies to a long-standing conviction of the writer's regarding translational matters.



It can be clearly seen that translation for Mariás is not in fact very different from original writing. He says so explicitly in an interview given recently to the Colombian writer Juan Gabriel Vásquez (2010), although he recognises, evidently, that the translator has a lesser degree of freedom. As it is, Mariás understands that this limitation can give the translator a sense of security that the writer lacks, as he has a text to keep to. The writer, on the contrary, depends solely on himself, which at certain moments can be problematic in the face of lack of inspiration. Mariás illustrates this situation with a metaphor that is quite common when referring to translation; thus, he comments that translating is like interpreting a musical score. Indeed, he states that when he writes, he likes to start off from a previous rough draft that in some way is similar in concept to the original from which he has to prepare the translation.

Mariás's main views on translation have been gathered together in the "Asuntos traslaticios" ["Translational Subjects"] section of the work *Literatura y fantasma* [*Literature and Ghost*] (pp. 183-219), in which several of Mariás's essays on literary issues are compiled. Five contributions dated between 1980 and 1991 appear here, of which we shall consider only three (two in this section and another in the following one), as the other two are of much less interest.

In "Ausencia y memoria en la traducción poética" ["Absence and Memory in Poetic Translation"] (1993a), Mariás studies how far translation can be considered different from literary creation. As a starting-off point, he states that theorists like Octavio Paz, Steiner or Benjamin are probably the ones who come closest to making them indistinguishable. Mariás, however, considers that in their writings certain questions prevent this affirmation from taking shape; thus, for instance, according to Paz they are "operaciones gemelas" ["twin operations"], in other words, two, so they could not be one and the same.<sup>18</sup> Steiner, for his part, when considering that any linguistic act implies in itself

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18 A similar opinion is expressed by Paul Valéry, whom Paz in fact knew: "Writing anything at all, as soon as the act of writing requires a certain amount of thought and is not a mechanical and unbroken or spontaneous inner speech, is a work of translation exactly comparable

an act of translation, confers universality on it, but this does not make it indistinguishable, *stricto sensu*, from literary creation. Benjamin, lastly, despite his metaphysical vision of translation as an activity capable of manifesting “pure language,” the substrate common to all languages, would not put it on a par with the act of creation.

In order to explore these relationships, Marías presents his own formulation of translation, which he defines as:

[...] una operación consistente en trasladar un significado dado de unos significantes a otros sin que lo primero se pierda o cambie, o lo haga en el grado menor posible: de tal manera, en cualquier caso, que ese significado original o inicial, tras la fabulosa modificación que supone su paso de una lengua a otra, siga siendo, empero y paradójicamente, el mismo; siga siendo, por expresarlo así, reconocible. (1993a, pp. 187-188)

[...] an operation consisting of transferring one given signifier into another without the former being lost or changed, or does so to the least degree possible: in such a way, in any case, that this original or initial signifier, after the fabulous modification it undergoes in passing from one language to another, continues, however, and paradoxically so, to be the same; to put it in a certain way, it goes on being *recognisable*.] (1993a, pp. 187-188)

Although Marías does not go so far as to argue conclusively that translation and creation are one and the same thing, his whole reasoning tends towards rejection of those arguments which imply that they are not. Thus, he first of all questions the generally held affirmation that in the translated text no “discovery” or “revelation” takes place. Indeed, in his opinion, if from the standpoint of inspiration translation is tributary, the supposed original creation meets the same criterion. Secondly, Marías contradicts those who state that translation owes itself to a presence (that of the original), by stating that what takes priority in translation is precisely its absence: what is important for the translator is “la ausencia de ese texto en su lengua, en la llamada lengua receptora, y por ende, en el sistema de pensamiento

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to that of transmuting a text from one language into another” (1992, p. 116). (See also Barnstone, 1993, p. 19.)

de dica lingua" ["the absence of that text in his language, in the so-called target language and, by extension, in the thought system of that language"] (1993a, p. 191). What the translator does is to give expression in his language to what in his head (and not in another text) is found in another language. This is the same as saying that translation is an activity of the memory, which means that recovered memory can never be the original text itself. The successive versions of a particular text can never, in this way, be measured in terms of greater or lesser faithfulness, because they will all be more or less faithful to a similar degree with regard to the memory that this text has imposed on its translators. In this way Marías introduces a genuinely anti-normative bias, in line with the presuppositions of the descriptive paradigm of modern Translation Studies. Moreover, we might well say that he shares in a post-Structuralist theoretical construct when he suggests, as Borges would also have done, that the originals establish a genuinely dialectal relationship with the translations, making the former even dependent on the latter for their survival. Only from this perspective can his reference to "Las versiones homéricas" ["The Homeric Versions"] be understood, in which the Argentinean writer explained that the *Odyssey* is as much by Homer as by Chapman, Morris, Lang, Bérard, Pope, Buckley, Cowper or Butler.

In "La traducción como fingimiento y representación" ["Translation as Artifice and Representation"] (1993b), starting from the unquestionable premise that an original text and a translation are not—and never can be—the same thing, Marías wonders how it is possible for us to act as if they were. This is corroborated by the fact that originals and translations seem to merge completely in our reading experience (we do not establish clear-cut divisions between having read a literary work in the original language or in translation), despite the fact that a change has taken place in the linguistic code, which is the element that essentially characterises the literary act. According to Marías, the mechanism by which the reading of a translation becomes productive would be similar to that activated, by tradition or conviction, when we go to a play in the theatre or to a film in the cinema: while we know we are not face to face with reality, we assume it as such, ignoring the artifice (provoking a suspension

of disbelief). In similar fashion, when Spanish readers read, for example, Dickens in Spanish, they usually act as if Dickens wrote this language. All of this, in fact, would not be possible merely with the assumption of a convention, but a “will to conviction” also becomes necessary, which would only be possible when favourable conditions are met, brought about by careful representation on the part of whoever is performing it. To quote Marías:

Quizás la convención consiste exactamente en la predisposición del ánimo del espectador a dejarse engañar *siempre y cuando se intente engañarle o se aparente engañarle o se aparente intentarlo*, siempre y cuando se le ofrezca una apariencia o pretensión de verosimilitud. (1993b, p. 199, italics in the original)

[Perhaps the convention consists precisely in the spectator’s predisposition of spirit to allow himself be deceived *provided that the attempt to deceive him is made or the pretence of trying to do so is made*, provided that an appearance or pretension to verisimilitude is offered to him.] (1993b, p. 199, italics in the original)

In the specific field of translation, if we assume that a particular degree of resemblance to the original is a given, the difficulty arises as to how the reader is able to judge this resemblance with regard to the fact represented (the original text) if all he has access to is its representation (its translation). In fact, we might add that on a good number of occasions he turns to the translation because he has no means of accessing the original, as it is codified in a language that he does not know.

### 3. Marías as Translator<sup>19</sup>

Most worthy of note in his facet as a translator are *The Withered Arm and Other Stories* by Thomas Hardy (1974), *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (together with *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*) by Laurence Sterne (1978), *Back from the Sea* by R.L. Stevenson (1980) (a poetry anthology), *The Mirror*

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19 For a full treatment of this topic see Wood (2012). Unfortunately, I have not been able to incorporate his findings into this article, since his work was published after I submitted my article to *TTR*.

*of the Sea* by Joseph Conrad (1981), *Ehrengard* by Isaak Dinesen (1984), *The Celtic Twilight* by W.B. Yeats (1985), *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* by John Ashbery (1985-1986), *Religio medici: Hydriotaphia* by Thomas Browne (1986), *Notes towards a Supreme Fiction* by Wallace Stevens (1996) and *Mist and other Stories* by Richmal Crompton (2000), in addition to several poems and short stories by authors such as W.H. Auden, Joseph Brodsky, Keith Douglas, William Faulkner, Seamus Heaney, Edith B. Holden, Thomas Lovell, Vladimir Nabokov, Frank O'Hara, and J.D. Salinger.<sup>20</sup>

Of all these translations, probably one of the most demanding—together with *Religio Medici*—was, beyond any doubt, *Tristram Shandy*, which won him the Spanish National Translation Prize in 1979. We would do well to remember that in an article by Marias published in *Diario 16* in 1989, the writer stated in what was at one period a regular section in this newspaper entitled “Mi libro favorito” [“My Favourite Book”] that his favourite book was his own translation of *Tristram Shandy*, because:

De todos los libros que he escrito o traducido, y que por tanto sé que en un sentido o en otro he sido capaz de hacer, *Tristram Shandy* es el único que, pese a saber que lo he hecho, hoy en día me siento capaz de hacer [...]. Por así expresarlo, no concibo cómo alguien puede verter o haber vertido al castellano, de manera aceptable, todas y cada una de las páginas de este libro, y no acierto a explicarme cómo quien fui lo hizo una vez. El que hoy soy, creo, no sería capaz. (1993e, p. 212)

[Of all the books I have written or translated, and which I know therefore in one way or another that I succeeded in doing, *Tristram Shandy* is the only one that, despite knowing I did it, I believe I would be incapable of doing today. [...] To put it this way, I can't imagine how anyone can, or could, turn into acceptable Spanish each and every one of the pages of this book and for the life of me I can't explain how it was me who did it. The man that I am today, I think, would be incapable.] (1993, p. 212)

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20 For a full description, see the appendix.

According to Marías, two favourable circumstances prompted him to choose his translation of *Tristram Shandy* as his favourite book: on the one hand, the literary quality of the work itself (“es a un mismo tiempo, la novela clásica más cercana al Quijote y la más cercana a la novela de mi propio siglo”) [(“it is, at one and the same time, the classical novel closest to *Don Quijote* and the one closest to the novel in my own century”)]; on the other, the fact that he had to subject the book not only to a close, detailed and demanding reading but also to a genuine exercise of re-writing, which at the time he wrote the newspaper article he fancied it would be impossible to repeat:

Mi admiración es absoluta en la medida en que lo veo como algo que no está a mi alcance. Pese a saber que, además de leerlo—lo que con suerte podré seguir siempre haciendo—hubo un día en que lo volví a escribir. (1993e, p. 212)

[My admiration is absolute to the extent that I look on it as something that is not within my capacity. Despite knowing, as well as reading it—which luckily I shall always be able to continue to do—that there was a time when I wrote it again.] (1993e, p. 212)

Marías confesses that, had it not been for this exercise in re-writing, he might have chosen *Don Quixote* as his favourite book, or *Madame Bovary* or *Heart of Darkness* or *Adolphe* or the poetry of Baudelaire, yet he has not subjected them to as committed a reading as *Tristram Shandy*:

Ninguno me obligó a escribir o redactar o componer alrededor de un millar de folios, cada folio hecho y rehecho numerosas veces; ninguno me exigió encontrar o inventar más de mil notas; ninguno, por último, se apoderó de mi prosa, me hizo ponerme literalmente en la piel del autor, del otro, pensar como él, hablar como él, decir lo que él como lo dijo él. (1993e, pp. 210-211)

[None of these forced me to write or draft or compose around one thousand sheets, each sheet done and re-done several times; none forced me to find or invent over one thousand notes; none ultimately took over my own prose, or put me literally in the author's shoes, the other man's shoes, to think like him, to say what he said in the way he said it.] (1993e, pp. 210-211)

A clear search for identification with the original author can be appreciated here, first through reading and later through re-writing. It is likely that it is this latter effort that makes him prefer his own version to the original (strictly in terms of personal preference, dictated by his personal circumstances and not for objective reasons of intrinsic quality):

Mi libro favorito es mi *Tristram Shandy*, es decir, *Tristram Shandy* en mi versión o según ella, que necesariamente es distinta de la de Sterne (aunque también sea necesariamente la misma, esa es una de las paradojas irresolubles de la traducción, de toda traducción, buena o mala. [...]) Esto no quiere decir precisamente que considere mi versión de la novela de Sterne superior a la propia novela de Sterne, sino algo más sencillo y menos competitivo: sé el porqué de cada opción, de cada línea, el porque de cada elección de cada palabra de mi versión de Sterne según Marías, mientras que lo ignoro en Sterne según Sterne. (1993e, p. 211)

[My favourite book is my *Tristram Shandy*, that is, *Tristram Shandy* in my version or according to it, which is necessarily different from that of Sterne (although necessarily the same, which is one of the unsolvable paradoxes of translation, all translation, good or bad). [...]) This does not mean precisely that I consider my version of Sterne's novel superior to Sterne's novel itself, but something simpler and less competitive: I know the whys and wherefores of each option, each line, the whys and wherefores of each choice of each word in my version, Sterne according to Marías, whereas I am unaware of it in Sterne according to Sterne.] (1993e, p. 211)

It is this authorship that enables him to subject his (re)writing of Sterne to new (re)writings:

Por eso mismo podría corregir aún esta versión mía, podría seguir trabajando en ella, mejorándola según lo que considero mis mejores criterios, aptitudes y entendimiento actuales [...], cosa que no podría ni querría hacer con el texto inglés, que, a diferencia del español, en modo alguno me pertenece. (1993e, p. 211)

[For that same reason I could correct my version even more, go on working on it, improving it in accordance with what I

consider to be my best current criteria, attitudes and awareness [...], something that I could not, nor would wish to do with the English text, which, unlike the Spanish, in no way belongs to me.] (1993e, p. 211)

The translation norms followed by Marías when translating this work into Spanish involve the observation of extreme literalness, which leads him to adopt a marked “foreignizing” tone in the text and makes his involvement as translator clearly obvious.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in the “note on the text” he states:

He procurado seguir el original con la mayor fidelidad posible, tratando de conservar hasta el límite de lo inteligible la estructuración y la puntuación de Sterne, caóticas e ininteligibles, en un principio, para el lector español del siglo XX. De ello se desprende, pues, que la mayor fidelidad posible no ha sido nunca excesiva, aun cuando las más de las veces haya preferido forzar al máximo la sintaxis y la puntuación castellanas (en pro de facilitar la adivinación del texto inglés por parte del lector español) a seguir la lamentable y generalizada tendencia de los traductores a castellanizar los textos extranjeros, de tal forma que cualquier vestigio de su condición de obra inglesa o francesa, o alemana, queda borrado por completo o barrido por inoportunos castizismos. (1978, p. xliii)

[I have tried to follow the original with the greatest possible faithfulness, trying to retain to the limit of the comprehensible Sterne’s structuring and punctuation, which are in principle chaotic and unintelligible for the twentieth-century Spanish

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21 I am using the concept of “norms” in a purely descriptive way. More in particular, I am referring here to what Toury calls “initial norm.” According to him, “a translator may subject him-/herself either to the target original text, with the norms it has realized, or to the norms active in the target culture [...]. If the first stance is adopted, the translation will tend to subscribe to the norms of the source text, and through them also to the norms of the source language and culture. This tendency, which has often been characterized as the pursuit of adequate translation, may well entail certain incompatibilities with target norms and practices, especially those lying beyond the mere linguistic ones. If, on the other hand, the second stance is adopted, norm systems of the target culture are triggered and set into motion” (1995, p. 56). Marías’s explicit adherence to source norms determine the “adequacy” of his translation.



reader. It can be gauged from this, then, that the greatest possible faithfulness has never proved excessive, even when on most occasions I have preferred to drive the Spanish syntax and punctuation to the limits (to assist the Spanish reader in “guessing” the English text) than to follow the deplorable, widespread tendency on the part of translators to Hispanicize foreign texts, so that any vestige of their condition as an English, French or German work is completely erased or swept away by inappropriate purist language.] (1978, p. xliii)

By following this poetics of translation, Marías is giving expressive form to the concept of literalness advocated by theorists before him such as Schleiermacher in *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* [*On the Different Methods of Translating*] (1838) or Ortega y Gasset in *Miseria y esplendor de traducción* [*The Misery and the Splendor of Translation*] (1937) and which, in more recent times, others were subsequently to follow, such as Berman in *L'épreuve de l'étranger* (1984) or Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995). Ortega, the faithful follower in Schleiermacher's wake, must necessarily have been well known to Marías, as his father, the philosopher Julián Marías, was one of Ortega's disciples. In a fragment from his essay we actually find a statement that appears to have been clearly inspired by the opinion that we have just cited:

What is imperative is that in translating, we try to leave our language and go to the other—and not the other way round, which is what usually happens. [...] It is clear that a country's reading public do not appreciate a translation made in the style of their own language. For this they have more than enough authors. What is appreciated is the inverse: carrying the possibilities of their language to the extreme of the intelligible so that the ways of speaking appropriate to the translated author seem to cross into theirs. (1992, p. 112)

This would not be the only occasion on which Marías was to employ a translation tactic conducive to encourage the reader to identify more greatly with and understand the original text, instead of searching for stylistic models provided by the target language. Thus, for instance, in the preliminary “translator's note” to his translation of *Religio Medici* by Thomas Browne, he informs us:

La única manera de traducir a semejante autor es atreverse a tanto como él [...], procurar olvidarse de la existencia de un Quevedo en nuestra lengua. Por eso he respetado al máximo las arbitrariedades, el rebuscado léxico, la violentada sintaxis, la pompa, las piruetas, la dispersión, las incongruencias e incluso algunas de las incorrecciones de la prosa de Sir Thomas Browne, en la confianza de que una cierta dilación por parte del lector en el acostumbramiento a ese extravagante estilo pueda quedar compensada por una más cabal transmisión de su arte perfeccionado. (Marías, 1986, p. ii)

[The only way to translate such a writer is to dare to go where he did himself [...], to try to forget the existence of a Quevedo in our language. For that reason I have respected to the utmost the arbitrariness, the obscure lexis, the awkward syntax, the pomp, pirouettes, dispersion, inconsistencies and even some of the incorrectness of Sir Thomas Browne's prose, confident in the fact that a certain delay on the reader's part in familiarizing himself with this eccentric style may be made worthwhile through a fuller transmission of his perfected art.] (Marías, 1986, p. ii)

Constraints of space prevent a closer analysis of Marías's translation procedures in this novel, yet it would still be pertinent to devote some minimum attention to them. The translator's aim is not to reproduce models that exist in the target system; to the contrary, he will be encouraged to transgress the literary and/or linguistic conventions of that system, in order to faithfully reproduce the textual relationships that exist in the original. His purpose is to achieve an "adequate translation" (Toury, 1995, p. 60). As Toury points out, when the principle of "adequacy" is adopted, the translation is not undertaken into the target language but into a "model language," which in the best case is partly the target language and in the worst, an artificial one. It is, indeed, significant that Marías has been accused of employing an "English" tone in his first works. It can be seen that Marías is always prepared to transmit the exact contextual meaning of the original text as faithfully as the target language will allow him, getting his deviations from the stylistic norms of the original language to be reflected to the same degree in a deviation from the norms of the target language. In that sense, Marías avoids adapting the text to the target receiver in such a way that the reading of the translation requires no effort. This is an issue

of particular importance here, as it is well known that Sterne demanded active participation from his readers that involved a genuine exercise of re-writing the work. In this novel, the syntax, which drives the rhythm, is as important as the lexical choices. To do this Marías subjects it to minimum transformations that do not endanger the adequacy pole. The length of the clauses and the position and integration of their constituent parts are respected as far as possible. Even the punctuation marks are maintained, although they do not meet the conventions of the target language. This occurs, in a very marked way with Sterne's continual use of the dash to indicate conversational rhythm and rhetorical pauses, making it longer or shorter according to rhetorical requirements (we cannot forget, Marías says, that Sterne was a preacher). In his own words:

Aunque esta insólita utilización [del guion] puede desconcertar en principio al lector español (acostumbrado por lo general a que el guión equivale a un inciso) creo que poco a poco se irá habituando a ello y que no le resultará molesto. Por esta razón, porque los mencionados guiones en cierto modo fueron también sorpresa para el lector británico del siglo XVIII, y porque el aspecto físico de un texto de Sterne (que él cuidaba mucho) lo requiere para no verse traicionado, he respetado esta puntuación tan característica en su totalidad. (Marías, 1978, pp. xliii-xliv)

[Although this unexpected use (of the dash) may initially disconcert the Spanish reader (accustomed generally to the dash representing a digression); I think that he will gradually get used to it and that it will not prove irksome. For this reason, because the abovementioned dashes to a certain extent were also a surprise for the 18<sup>th</sup> century English reader, and because the physical appearance of a text by Sterne (over which he took great pains) required them in order not to be compromised, I have respected this characteristic punctuation mark in its entirety.] (Marías, 1978, pp. xliii-xliv).

His eagerness to keep strictly to the original is revealed in all the decisions that Marías makes. For instance, in the translation of the numerous proverbs and set phrases, the adoption of equivalent formulations or the application of cultural filters is avoided, with the aim of transmitting as faithfully as possible the form and meaning of the original text. The translation of the puns, often

based on a polysemy that is impossible to render in Spanish, is also symptomatic. Thus we see, for instance, that instead of moving towards a reduction of their semantic field, Marías opts for including explanatory footnotes, or even presents the two meanings of the term juxtaposed, although his version proves less natural as a result. Thus it occurs, for instance, when we encounter a comic misunderstanding between the characters as a result of the homophony between the words *asse* (*ass*) and *arse*: “Well, dear brother Toby, said my father, and how goes it with your ASSE? [...] My A-e, quoth my uncle Toby, is much better” (Sterne 1991, p. 132), which Javier Marías translates as: “¿Cómo va tu Asno/Culo? [...] Mi C-o / A-o, dijo mi tío Toby, está ya mucho mejor” (Sterne 1978, p. 521). Evidently, involvement like this only serves to emphasize the translator’s visibility, presenting what we might consider a “foreignizing translation” (Venuti 1995)<sup>22</sup> or an “overt translation” (House 1997).<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

Throughout this article we have come to see a genuine coherence in the poetics of translation defended by Marías, both as regards his theoretical approaches (their status, function, relationship with the original writing, their formal features) and their practical implementation, as reflected by his many translations. At the same time we have emphasised the predominant role that translation plays in several of his own novels. Marías has

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22 According to Venuti, “The ‘foreign’ in foreignizing translation is not a transparent representation of the essence that resides in the foreign text and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current target-language situation. Foreignizing translation signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultures codes that prevail in the target language. In its effort to do right abroad, this translation method must do wrong at home, deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience” (1995, p. 20).

23 According to House, “An overt translation is one in which the addressees of the translated text quite “overtly” not being directly addressed; thus, an overt translation is the one which must overtly be a translation, not, as it were, a ‘second original’” (1999, p. 66).

alternated translation with his original writings, fusing them both in a creative act that blurs the traditional hierarchy between writing and re-writing. Indeed, as we have seen, the exercise of translation influences his own way of writing, to the extent that it enables him to incorporate themes and motifs and impregnates even his own style as a writer. Marías writes as he translates and translates as he writes, for his translations not only prove to be “foreignizing,” thus revealing the clear presence of a previous text belonging to another language, another culture and another literary tradition, but his own original output has also been influenced by a tone that proves to be only slightly domesticated. Inter-textual and auto-textual references in his own writings as a novelist provide a means of translation of the other and of himself. Marías is fully conscious of translation’s capacity for incorporating innovative models offering expressive renewal for the target language, the target literature and the writer himself. Moreover, a good illustration of Marías’s preoccupation with translation is the fact that he incorporates it into some of his own novels, which enables him to explore the limits of communication and the functioning of interpretative acts. Through the presence of translator protagonists, Marías succeeds in emphasising the association that exists between writing and translation as complementary forms of his own dual nature as a writer and translator.

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**ABSTRACT: The Poetics of Translation According to Javier Marías: Theory and Practice**—This article studies the activity undertaken by Javier Marías involving translation. The presence of translator protagonists in his novels is studied, together with his theoretical position on translation and his facet as a translator himself. In all three fields the following of a fully coherent poetics in his aesthetic convictions regarding translation is observed, for Marías rejects traditional stances that make of translation a secondary activity when compared with original composition, thus identifying writing with re-writing without any type of hierarchical prejudice.

**RÉSUMÉ : Poétique de la traduction chez Javier Marías : théorie et pratique** — L'objet de ce travail est l'étude de l'activité développée par Javier Marías par rapport à la traduction. On y tient compte de la présence de personnages traducteurs dans ses romans, de ses points de vue théoriques autour de la traduction et de sa propre activité en tant que traducteur. On relève dans les trois domaines l'adhésion à une poétique pleinement cohérente avec ses convictions esthétiques vis-à-vis de la traduction, puisque Marías rejette les partis pris traditionnels qui font de la traduction une activité secondaire par rapport à la création originale, en identifiant ainsi écriture et réécriture sans aucun préjugé hiérarchique.

**Keywords:** Javier Marías, novelist, translator, translation theorist

**Mots-clés :** Javier Marías, romancier, traducteur, théoricien de la traduction

**Luis Pegenaute**

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Departament de Traducció i Ciències del Llenguatge

Roc Boronat 138

E - 08018 Barcelona

[luis.pegenaute@upf.edu](mailto:luis.pegenaute@upf.edu)