

Gender-related Issues in the English Translations of Esther Tusquets and Rosa Montero: Discrepancies between Critical and Translational Figurations

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes some of the existing translations into English of two key writers of Spanish feminist narratives, Esther Tusquets and Rosa Montero, in the light of the vast critical coverage of their work articulated by Anglo-American academia. Specifically, the paper aims to show that the texts' feminist value, which is customarily underscored by critics in the secondary literature, is substantially neutralized in the translations by dint of a variety of strategies, here disclosed through an exercise of textual juxtaposition. Of central concern to the article is the foregrounding of translational analysis in the study of critical trends, with a view to problematizing the apparent transparency implicit in the international movement of cultural goods.

KEYWORDS: boom of Spanish women writers, *écriture féminine*, translating sexuality, translation and literary criticism.

Introduction

The so-called literary boom of Spanish women-authored narratives in the late seventies and eighties has been granted extensive critical coverage in the past decades, especially within Anglo-American scholarly circles. The very critical process that accompanied it, itself an academic 'boom' of duration and dimensions comparable to the creative one, has been, however, generally overlooked as an object of study and has only been addressed by the emerging metacritical impetus detectable in a number of recent publications within Hispanism (Johnson 2003; Pope 2003). By way of introduction, I want to propose a brief delineation of the motifs and patterns characterizing this critical phenomenon, as the translations analyzed in this article are but a direct corollary of the critics' international interest in the original works.

The Anglo-American critical coverage of women-authored literature coming from Spain rapidly unfolded as a response to a highly localized phenomenon, namely the burgeoning of names and works suddenly available for scrutiny in peninsular letters. Indeed, if Monserrat Lunati speaks of a "mushrooming of names in the 1980s and 1990s" (Lunati 1997:4) when referring to the emergence to prominence of new women authors, one could likewise apply the same expression to the rippling of Anglo-American publications (monographic periodical issues, articles, and book-length volumes) that was to accompany this phenomenon. The year 1987 is a good example of this fast and furious stage of critical activity surrounding peninsular women writers, as it saw the appearance of both the monographic issue of *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea* and the journal *Catalan Review*'s homage to Mercè Rodoreda. Both publications are in many ways exemplary indices of the main focal points and lines of argument that were to characterize the critical debate around women writers in Hispanic letters. Among the most prominent point of critical dissension was the question of the validity of the label 'feminist' when applied to authors that openly repudiate it. This problem still lies at the epicentre of contemporary debates.

A second distinct feature of the Anglo-American critical coverage of the Spanish boom in women-authored narratives - and possibly of any critical coverage of a fast developing process - is that despite aiming to illuminate as large a number as possible of emerging names and works, this critical body created its own shady areas. To put it differently, as scholarly activity developed apace, a process of selection unfolded in parallel. This gave preference to a privileged few while being decidedly remiss about others. The rationale behind these options is a difficult one to detect but could be related to the developments in feminist theory occurring at the time. Anglo-American critical commitment to Spanish women authors emerged, not fortuitously, at a time when powerful theoretical constructs about the notion and plausibility of a feminine writing style were fully in vogue. The sixties and seventies saw an unprecedented production of mainly notional writing around the twentieth-century 'woman question', best epitomized by the now seminal works of such authors as Mary Daly or Adrienne Rich in the U.S., centred around women's social presence, and those of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray in France, who were more concerned with women's textual presence. The eighties, and to a lesser degree the nineties, witnessed a critical activity particularly preoccupied with the discovery of literary practitioners of those epistemic orientations within international feminism. Among the theoretical notions put forward by feminist theory, the stylistic concept of *écriture féminine* significantly monopolized scholarly attention and yielded an enormous volume of work, even though more recent contestations have proposed an understanding of such a concept and of the larger category of 'French Feminisms' as ideologically inflected fabrications of Anglo-American academia (Moses 1998; Delphy 2000)¹. Much of what was written about Spanish women authors during the eighties revolved round the issue of *écriture féminine* and, specifically, about the degree to which certain writers could be said to incorporate in their works the maxims of a gender-marked style as theorized about by French feminist philosophers. Unsurprisingly, those authors whose literary project was seemingly unconcerned with the theoretical apparatus implemented, received significantly scantier attention.

It could be argued that two of the net beneficiaries in Hispanic letters of these new critical trends were Esther Tusquets and Rosa Montero. Critical work on their writings was initiated in the early eighties as a result of the favourable theoretical framework available and continues to be fostered to the present day. Apart from the numerous articles devoted to Esther Tusquets' work, with the last one being published as recently as 2004 (Marr 2004), her work has been the subject of four book-length volumes (Molinero 1991; Vázquez 1991; Ichiishi 1994; Dolgin-Casado 2002). Rosa Montero has likewise been a fixture in Anglo-American Hispanist periodicals. Four books have been devoted to her novelistic production (Amell 1994; Davies 1994; Knights 1999; Harges 2000), with the last article I could locate on her work published in 2003 (Briones-Barco 2003). Another gauge for these authors' exceptional status within Anglo-American critical circles is the fact that several of their novels are today available in English translation. The works of Esther Tusquets and Rosa Montero have been translated by a wide range of names. In the case of Tusquets, her novels have been translated by both Tusquetsian experts working within academic institutions, as is the case of Margaret E. W. Jones and her prize-winning *The Same Sea as Every Summer* (1990) and Barbara F. Ichiishi's *Never to Return* (1999), as well as by translators as a one-off, probably commissioned task, arguably the case of Bruce Penman's *Love is a Solitary Game* (1985) and Susan E. Clark's *Stranded* (1991). The translation of Montero's *Crónica del desamor* into English as *Absent Love: A Chronicle* (1991a), and that of *La función Delta* as *The Delta Function* (1991b), were carried out by two pairs of translators, Cristina de la Torre (an academic, though not, to the best of my knowledge, a Rosa Montero specialist) and Diana

Glad in the first case, and Kari Easton and Yolanda Molina Gavilán in the second. In comparison with the more meager and, at any rate, more recent heed paid to other peninsular women writers such as Carme Riera or Ana María Moix in English translation, the translations of Tusquets and Montero stand out as complex landmarks for the study of these authors' reception across an English-speaking readership which has not to date been explored.

In this paper, I will provide evidence for an appraisal of some of these translations as replete with significant misconceptions and distortions of the original novels' feminist literary identity, which scholarly work has taken pains to emphasize. My main aim in this respect will be to evince the substantial gap between academic work on these novels and the English translations available, which in many ways have overlooked, misrepresented, or plainly cut out this characteristic of the originals. Ultimately, I would like to emphasize the convenience of the proposed translational analysis in the study of metacritical trends. The paper's methodology relies upon the conviction that an examination of the translated texts constitutes a decisive litmus test for the claims and stakes recurrently adduced in the criticism. Put differently, exploring the translations in the light of the critical figurations helps shed further light on the complex grid of expectations, selections, and restraints on which cultural currents necessarily rely. This analytical procedure goes beyond recent approaches to the study of translations as another valid form of literary criticism. Such belief, deftly encapsulated in Scottish poet Christopher Whyte's assertion that "There is no better form of criticism than translation" (Whyte 2002:69), is the central premise of studies such as Marilyn Gaddis Rose's *Translation and Literary Criticism: Translation as Analysis* (1997) or Tim Parks' *Translating Style* (1998). Beyond their explicitation of the study of translations as a most useful (and unexploited) way of reading literature, however, I propose an approach to translations as also appropriate tools in the study of criticism. In other words, the analysis of translations will further illuminate the routes of reception charted by critical texts, proving (or disproving) the extent to which critical figurations have crystallized or dissolved, or have been integrated or shunned by translators in their capacity as non-neutral interpreters of cultural goods.

Esther Tusquets: Criticism and Translations

The work of the Catalan writer Esther Tusquets has been studied for more than two decades now, an ongoing enterprise that continues to be promoted mainly by Anglo-American criticism. Due to the subject matter tackled in most of her novels, the subversive potential in all her female characters' identity crises, and her distinctive style, Tusquets's work has been customarily examined in direct relation to feminist premises. Further, it has been frequently put forward as the closest rendering in Spanish contemporary literary production to what has been elsewhere classified as *écriture féminine* (see for example Gascón Vera 1992:70; Hart 1991, 1992:71; Tsuchiya 1992; Jones 1992:61; Ichiishi 1994:20; Sobejano-Morán 1994:52), and also as containing references to the plausibility of a female return to, or indeed, discovery, of a pre-verbal, semiotic state of language, as advanced by the French theorist and writer Julia Kristeva (Servodidio 1987:164).

One of the scholars that supports this link is Barbara Ichiishi, also the translator of one of her books. In Ichiishi's (1994) critical work, a connection is made between a woman's sense of corporeal overflow and Tusquets's long, meandering sentences, which certainly defy prescribed notions of syntactic limitations. Similarly, her style is likened to a sort of pleasurable recreation, a kind of liberating linguistic play, akin to female multilayered sexuality. In Ichiishi's (1994:82) words:

The interminable sentences, within larger periods, consist of unending chains of signifiers expressing the metonymic flow of desire which seeks to fuse mother and daughter, past and present in one great wave of love. The movement of the text is not a forward linear progression, but rather a continual doubling back on itself which expresses the pleasure in prolonged appetite and arousal characteristic of female libidinal life.

In general, Ichiishi (1994:20, 39, 81) advances an analysis of Tusquets's novels as fully compliant with the maxims of *écriture féminine* both at the level of content, with Tusquets's thematic engagement with issues of female sexuality and the motherly bond, and at the formal level, with Tusquets's style as a creative embodiment of female nature, transformed into a spontaneous, instinctual outpouring of forms which serve simultaneously to liberate the narrative voice and help women out of the historical silence, or, rather, limited modes of self-expression, to which they have been relegated.

In the following examples, what I will try to demonstrate is that while the quotation above is representative of a widespread critical interpretation of Tusquets's works, Bruce Penman's translation of her second novel into English, *Love is a Solitary Game*, remains completely at odds with it. For this purpose, I will offer a number of examples of how his translation relayed Tusquets's textuality and her treatment of women's sexuality. It is important to note at this point that the examples reproduced in this section, as in the subsequent analysis of the translations of Rosa Montero's novels into English, are but a selection of the many encountered.

Formally, the novels of Esther Tusquets seem to evoke the idea of a ball of wool unravelling endlessly. Her stories unfold in the form of prolonged stretches of language that flow virtually unfragmented. In the translation, however, this very specific syntactical feature of Tusquets's style is significantly changed. For the sake of anticipated communication and narrative functionality, the translator frequently obviates purposeful repetitions or changes the punctuation, usually by substituting commas with full stops, inserting paragraph breaks, etc. A very particular tendency in Penman's translation is to introduce explanatory tags or formulaic turns of phrase such as "on the one hand" and "on the other hand", which help apportion the text into shorter, more easily readable units. The added material has been highlighted in Example 1.²

EXAMPLE 1

[...] o como si toda la vida de Elia no hubiera sido otra cosa que unos breves paréntesis de inútil lucha por cambiar de droga o por abolirla, paréntesis engarzados por la continuidad implacable del abandono de cualquier intento, y, ante la imposibilidad de aprender a vivir sin ella, la lucha al cualquier precio por conseguirla. (AJS:65)

It is as if Elia's life **consisted of just two elements: on the one hand**, a series of brief attempts to give up or change the drug, which always come to grief because of her chronic inability to carry out her intentions; **on the other hand**, longer periods when she faces the impossibility of learning to live without the drug and devotes herself to the struggle to obtain further supplies, at any cost. (LSG:61)

EXAMPLE 2

[...] puede aparecer aquí la Little Queen of the Cats, y verlos, y detener entre la manada de gatos salvajes su carruaje blanco –¿será por eso que no huyen de inmediato, cuando aparece un coche con los faros encendidos, en medio de la noche, será para cerciorarse antes de que no es el coche de la pequeña reina, y será por eso que su fuga final es siempre más airada, o más decepcionada?-,

y abrir la portezuela -la mirada brillante, la boca risueña, sedosos los cabellos de oro entre las pieles blancas, [...] (AJS:81)

[...] she will stop her snow-white coach in the middle of the horde of half-wild cats... perhaps, thinks Clara, that's why they don't run away at once when they see a car with its headlights on coming towards them in the middle of the night; perhaps they want to make sure that it isn't the Little Queen's coach; and perhaps it's disappointment that makes them so angry when they do finally run away. **Anyway, to continue with the legend of the cats**, the Queen will open the door of her coach, and appear to them in her white fur coat, with her golden hair, smiling mouth and shining eyes [...] (LSG:76)

The incursion of these formulaic turns of phrase, visibly alien to the general tone and configuration of Tusquets's text, may be explained as a strategy to divide her discourse into easily "absorbable" stretches of language that the reader can assimilate unproblematically. This is, in many ways, an operation of processing Tusquets's characteristically opaque and stodgy language into a transparent communication of its content. The distinctive functionality of style in Tusquets's novels is, however, subsequently lost: *Love is a Solitary Game* reads primarily as a story, as a provoking, absorbing plot where style is almost indistinctive.

As for the treatment of sexuality, *El amor es un juego solitario* is an explicitly sexual chronicle of desire. From the outset, love is significantly cut out of the scene and relegated to a virtually spectral position, from which it cannot influence the characters' lives. In this context, sex appears in all its forms as a temporary but powerful palliative. More importantly, feminine sexuality, or sexuality as seen from a woman's angle, is given precedence in this text, as in virtually all of Tusquets's novels.

EXAMPLE 3

fuelle de miel dulcísima sus pezones rosados, lisos, de muchachita, su sexo tibio, húmedo, pegajoso y fragante, su sexo flor en el pantano, **su sexo** nido, **su sexo** madriguera, en el que retroceden todos los miedos, **este sexo que es para Ricardo un punto de partida** [...] (AJS:111)

her pink nipples, smooth as a young girl's, are as sweet as honey; and then there's something warm, moist, clinging and fragrant, like a flower in the marsh where she wandered so long, like a nest, like the lair of an animal, something which takes away all fear. **For Ricardo it is a starting-point** [...] (LSG:105)

EXAMPLE 4

porque muerte y placer son una misma cosa y paradójicamente en la cima del goce la muerte ya no existe, o acaso no la vemos ya a fuerza de presente, **jugoso mar el sexo de mujer abierto a todos los caminos** (AJS:113)

Death and pleasure are one and the same; but, by a strange paradox, death ceases to exist when pleasure reaches its height –or perhaps we cannot see it because it is too close to us, **as we float in the open sea of pleasure**. (LSG:107)

Examples 3 and 4 evidence a poetic energy permeating the text when feminine sexuality is explicitly mentioned: the continuous repetition of the word "sexo" (meaning 'sexual organ') in Example 3; the rhetoric sequence of adjectives and the metaphoric description of the vagina through the recurrent symbolism of the nouns "flor", "nido", "madriguera"; the hyperbolic likening of sexual ecstasy to death and the unconventional concatenation of words and total absence of punctuation in the powerful "jugoso mar el sexo de mujer abierto a todos los caminos", all effectively turn the text into a compactly poetical and melodious description of the female sexual organ as source, origin, and cause. Rather abruptly, in Example 3 this meaningful lyricism is neutralized in the English translation through the persistent omission of the word "sexo", replaced by the elusive "something". In the second sentence in that

example, the anaphoric “it” is used where “sexo” is used in the source text, but the reader is given no clue as to its referent. In Example 4, the extended reference to the female sexual organ “jugoso mar...” [succulent sea the sex of a woman open to all paths], is obliterated altogether and replaced by the rather colourless “as we float in the open sea of pleasure”. There is, all in all, an evident determination to either diffuse or entirely efface a markedly female sexual presence from the text.

It could be suggested that these translational choices are motivated by linguistic seemliness. Such a motive would, however, be largely at variance with critical figurations of the novel, which have underscored the novel’s primarily “sexual” and “erotic” value (Dolgin-Casado 1991; Schumm 1999:107). Let us surmise that those explicitly sexual references have been obliterated with a view to toning down the intensely erotic pitch acquired by the novel at certain points. Should this be the case, then one could justifiably expect that this translational tactic would be implemented consistently whenever an intemperate sexual reference occurred, regardless of its ‘genderedness’, that is, regardless of whether the reference alludes to a woman or to a man. However, if we read a few lines further into Penman’s translation, we are provided with evidence that contradicts this hypothesis. In Example 5, the description of an act of fellatio, the text persistently maintains the focus on the woman’s perspective, to such an extent, in fact, that the sentence verges on ungrammaticality: most of the verbs used are transitive, but their object remains unstated (“agitar” [shake], “estrechar” [enfold], “oprimir” [clasp]). Penman’s insertion of an explicit reference to the male sexual organ as the object of the first verb, and the addition of the anaphoric ‘it’ after the other verbs, remains, thus, unjustifiable:

EXAMPLE 5

“Dame un punto de apoyo”, bromea ella tiernamente, canturrea ella queda, ríe ella provocativa y algo achispada tras los dos peppermints, mientras agita con cuidado entre dos dedos, estrecha luego en la palma de una mano firme y cálida, oprime entre sus pechos, resigue con los pezones erizados, se desliza en la boca –donde se ocultan, como las uñas entre las zarpas de un felino enamorado, los dientes, y donde inicia la lengua un recorrido intenso y vibrátil, que tiene tanto de travesura como de experto y aprendido– [...] (EJS:111-112)

“Give me a point of support...” Ricardo remembers her saying, in a sift, tender, laughing singsong, a little tipsy after two *crèmes de menthe*, as she flipped **his organ** gently between two fingers, squeezed it with a firm, warm hand, pressed it between her breasts, stropped it against her erected nipples, and **finally** slid it into her mouth; her teeth were like the sheathed claws of an affectionate cat, and her tongue moved in an intense, vibrant application, which owed as much to natural virtuosity as to acquired technique– [...] (LSG:106)

With its purposeful omission of any reference to the male organ, the original passage preserves its focus on the woman’s actions. Eroticism is here constructed by the constant reference to Elia’s body and to her movements, consigning her male companion to a passive position, to a mode of absence that is here both sexual and textual. The unpredictable explicitation of the recipient of Elia’s clever movements, as well as the syntactical restructuring of the whole scene, particularly through the insertion of the adverb “finally” when she resorts to her mouth, gives the passage a sense of culminating closure as would be perceived by the male focalizer, a significant change which was not envisaged in the original and which constitutes a serious intervention in the source text.

Rosa Montero: Criticism and Translations

Rosa Montero's first novel *Crónica del desamor* (1979) is usually described as a key, but largely weak, hybrid novel that verges on sensationalism on the one hand, and on the political tract on the other. As the Spanish feminist movement gained momentum during the years of Spain's transition to democracy and as different woman-centred theories developing abroad made their way into the peninsula, Rosa Montero's work became almost unquestioningly considered a literary amalgam of feminist concerns as put forward by an activist. Here and there, reviews and critical commentaries would arise that denounced the novel's alleged lack of literary status: its strong, conspicuous connections with the author's biography (Glenn 1988:95; Erens 1993:200); its formless, loose structure, and a thematic bulk that verged on the banal. While the open treatment of women's concerns was customarily dismissed as too belligerent by certain critics, the book became a best-seller overnight and continued to be reprinted in the eighties and nineties.

For more than two decades now, Rosa Montero's novelistic trajectory has been the object of critical praise and vituperation alike. A writer who for some commentators is an undeniably overrated author, for others constitutes a key figure in Spanish contemporary writing and an almost defining component of the literature of the Transition. Despite the critics' and even the author's animosity towards her first two novels, on account of their immaturity or mere propagandistic nature, they are the ones that have attracted the most attention in both Spanish and international academia. As was the case with Tusquets, several scholars have also emphasized the link between Montero's style and subject matter, and many of the premises of French feminist theorists' work. Elizabeth Ordóñez, for example, talked about Montero's second novel *La función Delta* (1981) as a literary attempt to 'write the body' (Ordóñez 1987), while Elena Gascón Vera (1987, 1992), also working within the Anglo-American critical enclave, put forward an analysis of Montero's first two novels as noticeably attuned to Cixousean theories of communication between man and woman, and sexuality. In her analysis of *La función Delta* she states:

En estas descripciones resalta también, de forma paralela al feminismo de las francesas, el afán de equiparar, en un nivel simbólico, el discurso femenino con el cuerpo femenino y su sexualidad y conseguir la eliminación del predominio logocéntrico masculino a través del intercambio de cuerpos. (Gascón Vera 1987:67)

In these descriptions, a similar zeal to that of the French feminists' is also detectable, which tries to identify feminine discourse with female body and sexuality at the same symbolic level, and to achieve the elimination of masculine logocentrism through the interchange of bodies. (my translation)

Apart from having attracted the attention of critics, Montero's first two novels are also the only ones that have been selected for translation into English. If the value of her early narratives has been so significantly questioned, even by the author herself, why do they stand as the only available referents of her work in English?

This apparent incongruity seems to conceal an attempt to create coherence between how Montero has been approached within academia and how her work should be perceived by an English-speaking readership. It is, doubtlessly, an act of artificial and contrived coherence, for Montero's literary trajectory reveals a much ampler scope of interest than the one circumscribed by a feminist positioning. However, it is an act that responds to a will to circulate those works which most shockingly and overtly, and above all, most effectively served a feminist purpose. An exercise of selection was thus probably carried out when translating the novels of Rosa Montero into English. But as was the case with Esther Tusquets, I want to show how, while the choice of texts for translation reveals a will to

present these as eminently feminist, the translational strategies implemented within the texts themselves are at variance with this project, and ultimately, with the claims adduced in the feminist-oriented secondary literature on the author.

Again, I will offer two types of examples following from the textual juxtaposition of original and translation: first, examples that show the novels' marked cultural specificity and second, examples that deal with the treatment of sexuality. This selection is based on the premise that Montero's first two novels elicited a major response of reader identification precisely because of these two factors: that is, their cultural precision and their open treatment of female sexuality. Readers taking up Montero's chronicle at the time it was published may have felt thoroughly represented in those accounts of daily existence crammed with popular brand names, stereotypical conversational encounters, and city spots which make her novel a highly located portrayal of a specific cultural, temporal, and spatial setting. The book could in fact be interpreted as a literary exercise of self-conscious banality, not very distant in ideological and aesthetic terms from the underlying premises of pop art. Example 6 shows the type of items of everyday routine that are inserted throughout the text, and also, how they are obliterated in the translation:

EXAMPLE 6

Esta mañana se han levantado tardísimo, y con las prisas –los niños no llegaban al colegio- ha mezclado inadvertidamente **Nescafé y Nesquik** en las tres tazas, sin darse cuenta de ello hasta tomar un adormilado trago del mejunje. (CD:217)

This morning they all woke up late, and in the rush –the kids would never make it to school in time- she inadvertently mixed **coffee and chocolate** in all three cups and did not realise it until, still groggy, they had a sip of the brew. (AL:146)

The sense of cultural proximity elicited in the reader by the continual reference to easily identifiable trademarks is analogous to the effect that the artistic practice currently known as *packaging*, itself a ramification of pop art, may also call forth. In general terms, by extracting elements of a specifically commercial environment, and thus restricted to the particular aesthetic guidelines of merchandizing, and inserting them in a totally unexpected context such as plastic arts or literature, themselves guided by a set of completely disparate and self-generating aesthetic principles, the artist/writer seeks to elicit the public's sense of initial aberration and final identification with the creative assemblage. In the extract above, Montero seeks to surprise the reader through the unexpected reference to items extraneous to a literary context, namely, the highly quotidian labels *Nescafé* and *Nesquik*. Thus, her portrayals of markedly banal and ordinary scenes gain in exactitude and vividness, concomitantly eliciting the readers' total recognition of the descriptions. While it is true that translating these items may be difficult, since a counterpart in the target culture may not always be available and, even if it is, using it would involve a significant exercise of cultural transposition, the translation of those brands which are widely known and recognized internationally should not, in principle, be systematically discarded. This seems to be precisely the overrunning option in *Absent Love: A Chronicle*. In short, an economics of suppression of this manifest tendency is implemented, even when the novel is introduced in the American edition as an account "at a very close range of concrete daily incidents, the many small things that give life its flavor" (de la Torre and Glad 1991:xiii).

A further, essential feature of the text in this regard is that it is significantly interspersed with indicators of what could be termed a feminine routine, a portrait of the more or less adroit ways in which women have to juggle with the paradoxes of an apparent social progress

accompanied by an ongoing discrimination in their lives. The novel mixes references to the female characters' involvement with social causes or to the tensions and intricacies of the workplace with allusions to childbearing, late-night shopping, or period pains. More specifically, there are numerous references to products of a specifically female use, with the concomitant effect of gender-marked cultural specificity that they trigger. Examples 7 and 8 are aimed at illustrating how this central aspect of Montero's first novel is articulated and the inadequate treatment it was given in the English translation:

EXAMPLE 7

[...] intenta recordar si tiene **melabones** en la caja de las viejas medicinas para neutralizar el dolor de la extracción o el de los ovarios [...] (CD:9-10)

[...] wonders if she has any **pills** for her painful tooth or ovaries [...] (AL:4)

EXAMPLE 8

Prohibiciones, prohibiciones, prohibiciones. Todos esos tabúes inútiles y necios que te obligan a pensar que “eso” es estar enferma. Y como tantas otras, aún mantiene Ana el viejo hábito y se descubre todavía hoy diciendo “estoy mala”, ahora, a sus treinta años, aún sabiendo que sí puede bañarse, que puede comer helados, que da lo mismo que se lave el pelo con **el cordón del tampax** rozándole las nalgas. (CD:57)

Restraints, restraints, restraints. All those stupid and unnecessary taboos that make you think that “that” is sickness. And, like so many others at thirty, Ana still finds herself saying “I have the curse”, still and at thirty, even though she well knows that it is perfectly fine to shower and to eat ice cream, that it makes no difference if she washes her hair with **the tampon string** dangling between her thighs. (AL:103)

In these examples, two widely known brands are mentioned that refer the reader to a woman's items of common use, namely, the all-purpose painkillers *Melabón* and the international tampon trademark *Tampax*, whose use has become so widespread that the brand name customarily stands for the product it represents in everyday language, as a result of a typically metonymic linguistic usage. There is a detectable tendency in the translation to substitute these terms with a generic reference to the items they represent, with the concomitant effect that the sense of cultural immediacy that these items provoke is obliterated *tout court*. This translational turn weakens the preponderance of a female view of ordinary life - one of the novel's central aims - and interrupts the process of (female) reader identification that the textual references to such familiar items were designed to yield.

Finally, and this is a trait that both *Crónica del desamor* and *La función Delta* show, reader identification is particularly elicited among female readers through the open and unabashed treatment of specifically female experiences and sexuality, including abortion, harassment at the workplace, and visits to the gynaecologist. This representation of women's lives through the prism of their own peripheral position in society had remained largely unaddressed in the annals of Spanish literature, especially in the kind of pungent and sarcastic tone that Montero uses. As such, this aspect of her early narrative remains a trailblazing landmark in the creation of feminist narratives in Spain. Though the novelty of its content has obviously washed out and may even seem stale or clichéd to us nowadays, the powerful sense of relief and identification that female readers must have felt at the time it was published remains a pivotal symbol of its effectiveness in urging social change. Let us have a look at another excerpt (Example 9), where a central sexual scene between Lucía, the narrator, and Miguel, her partner, is uninhibitedly narrated in *La función Delta*:

EXAMPLE 9

-Seguro- contesté con turbia y desfallecida voz. Los dedos de Miguel, alegres y aventureros, exploraban mis rincones con delicado avance.

-¿Te gusta?- musitó-. Enséñame, enséñame a quererte chiquitina.

-Sí...- suspire-. Me encanta, me encanta que me acaricies en... en la puntita de... ejem... del **clitoris**.

-Que te acaricie en la puntita de tu coño, de tu sexo prodigioso, que es como una flor de carne suave, de tu sexo que es como una fuente de agua dulce, de tu sexo de espuma de mar, de pura seda... (FD:314)

I'm sure" I answered faintly.

Miguel's fingers explored my curves with delicate progress.

"Do you like that?" he murmured, "Teach me, teach me how to love you, my little one."

"Yes" I sighed. "I love it, I love it when you caress the tip **of my... of my...**

He smiled to himself calmly.

"When I stroke the tip of your wonderful sex, like a smooth flower of flesh, of pure silk..." (DF:220)

The exercise of suppression in this passage is highly detrimental to the original's subversive quality. In the source text, Lucía recalls the night she and Miguel, the man who was to be her lifelong companion, meet each other after Miguel's week out of town. Lucía, who has spent six days trying fruitlessly to devote more time to herself, but has been instead engrossed in her own anxieties over the pending premiere and her emotional dilemma between passionate love/Hipólito and companionship/Miguel, now confesses her own distress to Miguel, probably the most endearing male figure in the whole of Montero's literary production. After Lucía's unrestrained outpouring of her fears and doubts, they begin to make love, trying consciously to communicate with each other at all times and to overcome the prescribed gender roles that, they know, end up stifling human relationships. The words they exchange in this process towards sexual communion are therefore highly valuable for the understanding of the scene's truly radical quality. Further, the female protagonist's initially hesitant but finally clear enunciation of the word "clitoris", and the fact that her words are instantaneously echoed by her male companion in a surge of excitement that fluctuates freely between the poetic and the dirty, signals what appears to be the author's proposed answer to the questions posed in her first novel. The lack of communication between the sexes is provoked by the pernicious assumption that prescribed gender roles respond to some form of necessary social order. In order to overcome them, men and women alike need to welcome, embrace, and encourage each other's specificity, beginning with the mutual recognition of their own bodies.

The obliteration of the word "clitoris" in Lucía's intervention is puzzling and controversial. Similarly, Miguel's emotive verbal outburst [that I stroke the tip of your cunt, of your prodigious sex, which is like a flower of soft flesh, of your sex which is like a fountain of sweet water, of your sex of foam of the sea, of pure silk...], is visibly curtailed. This translational turn could be perhaps explained as an act of covert prudery. One is left wondering, however, what kind of tacit double standards underlie a translational practice which highlights the importance of the original work as one of the first free literary works in contemporary Spanish literature in the form of introductory material, and then resorts to

covert strategies of suppression specifically aimed at effacing the original's very signs of creative freedom, or, let us better say, liberation. This strategy is all the more baffling when we take into account the feminist editorial milieu in which they appeared, namely, the *European Women Writers Series* by The University of Nebraska Press.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show that the translational project accompanying the critical figurations of Spanish writers Esther Tusquets and Rosa Montero undermines the latter in many significant ways. As the exercise of textual juxtaposition carried out was intended to evince, a variety of the translational strategies implemented in the target texts directly antagonizes the claims adduced in the secondary literature as to why these authors deserved the attention of feminist critics in British and American universities. In the case of Tusquets, Bruce Penman's translation of *El amor es un juego solitario* overlooks both the original's stylistic flavour and the explicitly erotic detail it offers, primarily from a woman's stance. In the case of Montero, the translation, *Absent Love: A Chronicle* by De la Torre and Glad, showed little understanding of the functionality of cultural specificity in *Crónica del desamor*. While stylistic transposition was not such a decisive factor in the translation of *La función Delta*, the target text is similarly at variance with the original's value as regards the handling of female sexuality. The last textual example proposed, concerning the obliteration of the word "clitoris" in the translation by Easton and Molina Gavilán, was offered as perhaps the most startling proof of the discrepancy between critical figurations and translational discourse on these authors, and, more precisely, between the avowed (and widely perceived) significance of the translated texts as artefacts of gender-aware dissemination and the actual erasure of explicit markers of gender awareness that they inscribe.

Among the principal objectives of this case study was the foregrounding of translational analysis in the study of pathways of cultural dissemination. While this is no longer a novel methodological proposal, most certainly within the field of translation studies, I believe that the recent impetus towards metacriticism in the field of Hispanism has to date not incorporated this recognition. The acknowledgment of the convenience of such an intersection would be mutually beneficial for both fields of enquiry. For metacritical analysis, the integration of translated texts as a variant of literary criticism would considerably expand its grounds of research and facilitate inestimable insight on the more complex and unobtrusive patterns, tendencies, and tensions that characterize cultural exchanges. For translation studies, the exploration and establishment of yet another new application of its object of analysis would significantly fortify the discipline itself, as well as the interdisciplinary bonds on which it hinges for its expansion and promotion within the current network of human sciences, which have not always recognized its relevance.

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Notes

¹ The innegligible role of translation in the dissemination and reception of these theoretical constructs has been recently studied by Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva (2002, 2003).

² In all the textual examples to follow, I will be using the abbreviations AJS (*El amor es un juego solitario*), LSG (*Love is a Solitary Game*), CD (*Crónica del desamor*), AL (*Absent Love: A Chronicle*), FD (*La función Delta*) and DF (*The Delta Function*).

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