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Nancy Alonso's collection of Cuban short stories starts with a quote from Oscar Wilde: "El mundo se ha reído siempre de sus propias tragedias como único medio de soportarlas" (Alonso 7). What should a literary translator do when faced with transplanting Alonso's stories into English with a quote from Oscar Wilde? Obviously there is an original English text of this quote. Since the Spanish version is a translation of the original, it makes sense to cite the original as the "translation." In essence, then, the translation involves a search rather than a re-translation. Instead of trying to approximate what Wilde had written, the translator uses the words he actually wrote: "The world has always laughed at its own tragedies, that being the only way in which it has been able to bear them" (Wilde 72). This real-life example points to two central issues about translating translations: How important is it to recognize that something written in a foreign language is a translation? And secondly: How important is it to locate the source for a translation?

This article describes how examining translations of translations can provide a useful pedagogical tool in translation courses and classes with translated texts. Those who teach literary works that have been translated into English must deal with the reality that students read translated texts as if they had been written in English. Acknowledgment of the source for a translation is therefore important, and professors should alert students to the problems that can arise when translations are made from translations rather than from originals. Examining examples of "doubling back"—translations of translations—can also be instructive in teaching about literary interests and influences.

One of the obvious lessons to emerge from such an approach is the literary language exercise it can provide to students. *Comparative Stylistics of French and English* refers to "backtranslation" as a strategy for learning and for assessing stylistic variations and states that "If the text contains a stylistic variant, a supplementation, a compensation etc., it is likely that a backtranslation will not fully reproduce the original"

(Vinay and Darbelnet 205). Since translators, especially those engaged in literary translation, may choose from a wide spectrum of expressions without altering the global meaning of a passage, a retranslating of a text can reveal cultural and geographical differences. The authors of *Comparative Stylistics* note: “A French Canadian translation may differ slightly from a French or Belgian one in its choice of synonyms, variants or regionalisms” (Vinay and Darbelnet 205).

Students of literature may find that a comparison of translations of translations reveals literary origins as well as delicate differences. As a brief assignment with a focus on style, a professor might ask students in a class of French or World literature in translation to read two distinct English renderings of a passage from Victor Hugo and then ask either groups or individuals to compare these translations with doubled-back versions (English to French and then back to English) created for the purpose of the exercise. The backtranslated and then retranslated examples might need to be provided by the professor, but need not be extensive. Questions raised by such a comparison include: What are the global or inherent aspects of the selected portion? And what variations and possible errors are brought to light? A similar exercise could be done with translations of *Don Quixote* examining language and style over centuries. How would a backtranslation followed by retranslation into English of a portion of Shelton’s 1612 English version of the first part of *Don Quixote* compare with a backtranslation and retranslation of the same portion of Edith Grossman’s new *Quixote*? Or to use examples from the Hispanic literature of the United States: how would one backtranslate a two-language poem like Gustavo Pérez Firmat’s “Bilingual Blues” (*Triple Crown* 164), and what can be gleaned from a contrast of the quite different two translations into Spanish of Cristina García’s Cuban American novels, *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*—one done in the Spanish of Spain and one with a more distinctively Cuban flavor? How would portions of these novels read when translated from Spanish back to English? What happens to slang, to sound, to meter, to rhyme, and to the musical effects of verse when translated and then again when doubled back (Frame 71)? While the examples described above all require the assistance and/or intervention of language -proficient individuals who are willing to retranslate, the results can be valuable in instilling respect for a close reading of text. In a very real sense, translating a translation provides a distinctive look at

the essential qualities of literature.

Gregory Rabassa, surely one of the most acclaimed masters of Latin American literary translation, describes a retranslation experience he had when working on José Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*, a complex novel that presents many challenges to a translator. In *Paradiso*, Rabassa had found several lines from the American poets Walt Whitman and Hart Crane that Lezama had translated into Spanish. Rabassa explains: "At the moment I did not have a text of the originals at hand and in order to facilitate the process of translation I rendered the lines back into English. When I finally did get hold of the original versions I found that I had missed by only a couple of words in both cases" (9). Rabassa attributes his success in retranslation to Lezama Lima's success in the initial translation, something that may vary from case to case but that certainly merits a study of similar examples.

How can doubling back and retranslation prove instructive in very concrete examples? Poe provides many possible approaches as one of the most taught and most translated of writers. However, the name that almost immediately springs to mind in considering Poe and translation is Charles Baudelaire, because the French author translated *about* Poe and translated both prose and poetry *by* Poe, and because numerous studies deal with translations of Poe by Baudelaire: for example, the discovery in 1952 that much of Baudelaire's lengthy 1852 essay on Poe was essentially a translation of (or at least largely based upon) articles written after Poe's death and published in an American journal. However, this raises challenging questions for a translator who seeks to transfer that part of Baudelaire's *oeuvre* into English (Hyslop 14–15). Should he/she simply translate freely into English or take into account the source? And Baudelaire is not the only Poe fan. Many Spanish Americans have tried their hand at putting Poe's verses into Spanish, and the Argentine author Julio Cortázar translated two volumes of Poe's short stories into Spanish.

A Poe tale such as "The Pit and the Pendulum" provides concrete examples. In Baudelaire's translation, the Latin quatrain which precedes Poe's story remains in Latin. In Cortázar's Spanish version, the same is true. But in the 1991 translation into French by Henri Justin in a bilingual text format (English/French), the Latin verses are given in French—so that if someone were re-translating the Justin version of Poe, the Latin quatrain would end up in English. A comparison of several versions of

the first line of the story offers a basis for comparing the qualities of both the original and the translation. Poe wrote: “I was sick—sick unto death with that long agony and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me” (*The Black Cat* 184). Baudelaire translated: “J’étais brisé,—brisé jusqu’à la mort par cette longue agonie; et quand en fin ils me délièrent et qu’il me fut permis de m’asseoir, je sentis que mes sens m’abandonnaient” (*Nouvelles* 157). Justin put “Mon coeur se révoltait — se révoltait à en mourir, au terme de ce long supplice; et quand on défit mes liens et qu’il me fut permis de m’asseoir, je sentis mes sens m’abandonner” (*The Black Cat* 185). Cortázar, who worked as a translator in Paris, produced a version similar to the one by Baudelaire: “Sentía náuseas, náuseas de muerte después de tan larga agonía; y cuando por fin me desataron y me permitieron sentarme, comprendí que mis sentidos me abandonaron” (*Cuentos* 174). When I asked colleagues in French and Spanish to retranslate informally the Baudelaire and Cortázar versions, respectively, the results were instructive. The retranslation of Poe from French turned out to be “when they at length unbound me,” in comparison to “when finally they untied me,” and the Spanish retranslation read: “when they finally untied me.” The retranlations were similar to each other but different from Poe. The word that seems most difficult to convey is “unbound.”

Taking a page of Poe translated by Baudelaire and the same page translated by Cortázar and then turning the selections back into English allows students to contrast not only how the “doubled back” versions compare to Poe but also to each other. How would “unto,” “with,” and “at length” turn out in retranslated texts? Which types of words flow back and forth between the original document, the translation(s), and the backtranslation(s) with most ease? What components become scrambled in the exercise? Does Poe become at all less quirky in re-anglicized versions of his work? As a variation or extension of the Baudelaire/Cortázar contrast, students could compare retranlations to English of the Baudelaire and Justin versions of “The Pit and the Pendulum” or of the Cortázar and Gómez de la Serna (Spanish) translations of “The Gold Bug.” Analysis of the retranslated passages might be done by individuals or by small groups or could be pursued during general class discussions.

Another text that provides an unusual set of circumstances for translation and re-translation is the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the Maya Quiché of Guatemala. This work is often part of courses in Latin

American literature and culture. Allan Burns has called it “one of the great books of world literature...[with] sections on the origin of the world, mythological battles, and Maya history up through the conquest” (Montejo 23). Robert J. Sharer gives this description: “A brilliant poem of over 9,000 lines, the *Popol Vuh* preserves a coherent cosmogony, mythology, and traditional history of the Quiché [...]. The elegance of both the language and the literary style of the *Popol Vuh* emphasizes the loss we and the Quiché have suffered in the annihilation of the Quiché learning during the colonial period” (596).

The *Popol Vuh* was written in the sixteenth century in the Mayan language with Roman letters and was discovered in 1701 by a Spanish priest, Francisco Ximénez, who preserved the transcribed Mayan version and created a translation into Spanish. In 1854 the manuscript was rediscovered by a French cleric (Brasseur) who translated it into French (*Popol Vuh: Libro Sagrado de los Mayas* 7). The “bilingual” manuscript is now housed in Chicago’s Newberry Library and could be an obvious source to which one could backtranslate. But would the backtranslation be to Spanish, to the transcribed Mayan, to both, or to something else? Curiously, the version of the *Popol Vuh* produced in Spanish by the Guatemalan author Miguel Ángel Asturias in collaboration with a Mexican historian was based on a French version by Georges Raynaud, with whom Asturias had studied in Paris (Chang Rodríguez, *Voces* 365). Victor Montejo, a Mayan anthropologist, translated selections into Spanish for children and young adults together with a brief glossary of names and special terms. In addition, as Castro Klarén indicates in her article for the *ADFL Bulletin*, Dennis Tedlock produced a “masterful translation” in English with “an invaluable interdisciplinary introduction and an ethnohistorical glossary and notes...[that] has no equivalent in Spanish” (18). An intriguing aspect of Tedlock’s translation, on which he spent nine years, was his decision to take the text of the *Popol Vuh* to Mayan-speaking communities, where oral narratives together with comments of a native Quiché reader facilitated the translator’s work—in essence a harkening back to the cultural context of the work (*Popol Vuh*, Trans. Tedlock 13–18).

When the *Popol Vuh* is taught in an undergraduate setting, usually just a segment or portion is included. Selections in English translation are often found in classes on Latin American culture and civilization, and such courses may be offered by a Foreign Language Department but

delivered in English. And here fresh questions arise. As Castro-Klarén notes, Departments of Romance Languages and Departments of Spanish have a propensity to insist on Spanish as a source for the reading in courses dealing with Spanish America, even if the origin of a text is in another language and even if, as in this case, the language imposed is that of the conqueror/colonizer (17). It will not typically be feasible to double back to a bilingual colonial era manuscript (Quiché Maya transcribed in Latin letters and Spanish) to illustrate how retranslation can inform an analysis of text. Nonetheless, guiding students back to the source under the banner of backtranslation will help them discover the suppression and destruction of pre-Columbian works. Furthermore, students will reveal the possibility of multiple backtranslation options for a single work.

Finally, examples abound in the immense space that José Martí occupies in Latin American literature, the Hispanic literature of the United States and the global reach of his poetry through the music of “Guantanamera” (Fountain, *Versos Sencillos* 12). The topic of translation and backtranslation in Martí is manifested in many ways. The Cuban patriot’s life in the United States as a political exile from 1880 to 1895 provides the framework for many of his major works and offers connections with U.S. literature. Martí was a prodigious translator, creating verse versions of the poems by American writers and volumes of chronicles with extensive paraphrasing and translations. Often the paraphrases and translations are either indicated by quotation marks or are made obvious through other means. But many times they are not. This is where backtranslation or doubling back can prove useful to both research scholars and graduate and undergraduate students.

The ties between Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Cuban writer in exile are well documented. Martí mentioned Emerson frequently: in articles composed for Latin American newspapers, in private notes, in correspondence, and in his four-volume magazine for children, *La Edad de Oro* (The Golden Age) (Fountain, *José Martí* 46). Taking two unidentified stanzas of verse from Martí’s notes and retranslating the stanzas into English reveals that the lines are in fact a translation of fragments from Emerson’s “Blight” (Fountain, *José Martí* 42). Here is how the first section of the translated lines appear in Martí’s notes:

Dadme verdades:
 Muy cansado estoy ya de superficies:
 Muero de inanición.—Si yo supiera
 Sólo— las yerbas de la selva y simples
 De la tierra común arrancan jugos
 Desconocidos: si decir supiera
 Su fragancia, y con dulces parentescos
 Su química aplicar al cuerpo humano
 (Martí, *Obras* 22:328)

Here is what Martí took from Emerson (part of the first 11 lines of “Blight”):

Give me truths;
 For I am weary of the surfaces,
 And die of inanition. If I knew
 Only the herbs and simples of the wood,
 Rue, cinquefoil, gill, vervain and agrimony,
 Blue-vetch and trillium, hawkweed, sassafras,
 Milkweeds and murky brakes, quaint pipes and sun-dew,
 And rare and virtuous roots, which in these woods
 Draw untold juices from the common earth,
 Untold, unknown, and I could surely spell
 Their fragrance, and their chemistry apply
 By sweet affinities to human flesh,
 (Emerson 139)

In this case, recognizing Emerson’s first four lines in Martí’s verses functioned primarily to indicate a literary link that was not discovered until 1973. The partial or simplified translation in Martí’s notes omits the names of the herbs and flowers (rue, cinquefoil etc.), but obviously seeks to convey Emerson’s message.

A more complex relationship to the concept of “doubling back” can be found in relation to Martí’s 1882 essay on Emerson, which includes twenty-three allusions to *Nature* in the form of quotations, paraphrases, and references. The essay, a paean of praise from the Cuban admirer to the American transcendentalist highlights the similarities in style between the two authors and makes finding the Emersonian underpinning

a challenge. Yet Emerson's words, as well as his thoughts, pervade the tribute and are part of what a translator faces in putting Martí—and what Martí took from Emerson—into another language. Those translating into English must decide whether to revert—double back—to Emerson's wording or at least take it into account in their rendition, and no small part of this task is identifying the Emerson "quotes" and paraphrases in the lengthy context of Martí's exuberant essay. An excellent example of success in this regard is Esther Allen's translation of the Emerson essay in the Penguin edition of Martí's *Selected Writings*.

Because there are at least three published translations of Martí's Emerson essay in English, students in translation or language and literature classes can compare the various translations and analyze how Emerson's concepts are conveyed in each one, and the extent to which Emerson's original wording is used. The chapter on Emerson in *José Martí and U.S. Writers* gives a complete listing of the quotes and paraphrases from Emerson that appear in Martí's essay.

Martí included in Spanish two poems by U.S. authors for *La Edad de Oro*. He included his translation of Emerson's "A Fable," calling it "Cada uno a su oficio" (To each his own), and although the Spanish version had three lines more than Emerson's poem, Martí very nearly duplicated Emerson's rhyme. Martí also gave a very free version of Helen Hunt Jackson's "The Prince is Dead," which he titled "Los dos príncipes" (The two princes). An edition in English of the entire *Edad de Oro*—an ambitious and admirable undertaking—was published in Cuba in 2001 and includes the two Martí poems in English translation. There is, however, in this edition, no return to the origin of the poems, and no acknowledgment by the translators that original poems, on which Martí based his work, exist. Students who are presented with Emerson's rhymed poem ("A Fable") and the English version translated from Martí's rhymed translation will see in the reconstituted English work a poem quite different from Emerson's. They can, in turn, appreciate the "distortion" produced by a desire to preserve rhyme (as Martí did) in the translation of poetry—especially if one wishes to get close to the literal meaning. The Helen Hunt Jackson poem is a similar case.

Not all examples of doubling back need involve lengthy examples or focus exclusively on matters of style or suggest literary influence. Sometimes doubling back can expose mistakes. A very brief example can be found in regard to *Versos sencillos*, the verses Martí composed in

the Catskill Mountains in 1890. *Versos sencillos* has forty-six numbered poems, none of which bears a title, although many are identified by a first line such as “Yo soy un hombre sincero” (I am a sincere man). Selected verses from this book, especially from the first poem, are sung in versions of the world-famous song *Guantanamera*, but Martí is not the author of the song or of a poem by that name! Popularizations and simplifications of Martí’s work have led some translators to take the title “Guantanamera” and ascribe it to Martí. Asking students to backtrack and search for the source with “Guantanamera” is an excellent way to let them discover that the “translated” title does not exist in Martí’s writing.

Conclusions

Examining translations of translated material can be a useful pedagogical tool. Instructors offering literature in translation and/or courses about translation can engage students in exercises that involve retranslation and comparison. Such exercises underscore the importance of understanding the cultural context of translated works. In many instances, using or considering backtranslation will require the professors, colleagues, graduate students, or highly proficient undergraduates to provide the retranslated examples that will be presented to students who are reading in English. Even if students are not able to double back on their own, backtranslation-based assignments can alert them to aspects inherent in reading translated literature: the difficulties translators face in translating those who’ve been translated, the significance of words that may seem unimportant, the vitality of elements of style, the evidence of mistakes and misunderstanding, and the sometimes surprising literary alliances and influences that can be revealed by doubling back.

Teaching Resources

Selected translations/editions of the *Popol Vuh*

Popol Vuh: Las antiguas historias del Quiché. 7th ed. Trans. Adrian Recinos. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952.

Popol vuh : the definitive edition of the Mayan book of the dawn of life and the glories of gods and kings. Trans. Dennis Tedlock. New York: Simon, 1985.

Popol Vuh: Libro Sagrado de los Mayas. Version by Victor Montejo. Toronto: Groundwood, 1999.

Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Mayas-Quiche. Trans. David B. Castledine.

México: Monclém, 2005.

Popol Vuh: The Creation Myth of the Maya. Prod. Patricia Amlin. Berkeley Media, 1989. DVD.

Popol Vuh: The Creation Myth of the Maya (Spanish version). Prod. Patricia Amlin. Berkeley Media, 1989. DVD.

Selected Translations of Poe

Poe, Edgar. *The Black Cat and Other Short Stories/ Le chat noir et autres nouvelles*.

Trans. Henri Justin. Paris: Le Livre de Poche. 1991.

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