

# Perspectives

## Studies in Translatology

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## Traduttore, Traditore? Javier Marias' Interpreting Scene

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The well known interpreting scene in Javier Marias' novel *A Heart So White* (*Corazón tan blanco*) is examined from the point of view of different translation theories: while older translation theories simply cannot cope with this significant episode, new functionalist theories could be seen to provide an unqualified positive interpretation. This interpretation is questioned on the basis of another scene, viz. an anecdote about media translation in the context of the Bosnian War, which leads to a differentiated evaluation in the light of translation ethics.

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### The Interpreting Scene in Javier Marias' Novel *A Heart So White*

In the Spanish novel *A Heart So White* (2000) (*Corazón tan blanco*, 1992) by Javier Marias, there is a fascinating description of an interpreting situation which sheds light on some problems in interpreting and which can serve as a basis for a discussion of translation theories.<sup>1</sup>

The scene describes interpreting at the highest diplomatic level, within the type which is often described as 'liaison interpreting' (Gentile *et al.*, 1996; Pöchhacker, 1998b, 1998c, 2004: 14). Such prestigious interpreting is typically left to professional conference interpreters, which – as we shall see – may not always imply that the contents are hard to render. In the case in question, the interpreted rendition is consecutive, that is, after the interlocutors have finished their speeches, and the 'time lag' is important.<sup>2</sup>

The interpreter is also the narrator and is sensitive to gestures and movements (see further Grünberg, 1998; Pöchhacker, 1998a), and from a scholarly perspective we may argue that we are dealing with a 'think-aloud' protocol (see, for example, Kalina 1998; Kohn & Kalina, 1996; Krings, 1986), in this case a delightful insight into what Krings termed 'What happens in the heads of translators'.<sup>3</sup>

Before continuing the discussion, we will present the interpreting scene as it appears in the published English translation.

**Javier Marías: *A Heart So White***

(*Corazón tan blanco*)

Translated from the Spanish by Margaret Jull Costa  
New York: New Directions, 2000, pp. 54–63.

That was how I met Luisa, who, for some reason, was considered more responsible, trustworthy and loyal than I and was chosen as supervisory interpreter (security interpreters they're called, or safety-net interpreters, so that they end up being called the 'net', very ugly) to ratify or repudiate my words during the extremely high-level private meetings held in our country about two years ago between our representatives and those of the United Kingdom.

Such scrupulousness doesn't really make much sense, in fact, since the more high-ranking the politicians, the less important is what they say amongst themselves and the less serious any error or transgression on our part. [...] What they say to each other [...] is of minimal importance and, what is even more embarrassing, they often have absolutely nothing to say to each other. [...]

On that occasion the high-ranking Spanish politician was male and the high-ranking British politician was female and it was, presumably, considered appropriate that the first interpreter should in turn be male and the second, the 'net', should be female, in order to create an atmosphere of complicity and sexual balance. I sat perched on my purgatorial chair between the two leaders and Luisa sat on her equally penitential chair a little to my right, [...] a little behind me [...].

However, just what form our intervention would take was not immediately apparent since, as soon as the journalists had been ushered out ('That's enough now,' our high-ranking politician had said, raising one hand, the hand he wore his wedding ring on), and a chamberlain or factotum had gone out closing the door behind him and leaving the four of us alone ready for lofty conversation, I with my notebook and Luisa with hers on her lap, an abrupt silence fell, completely unexpected and extremely awkward. [...]

[A]fter a while [...] I realized [...] that the thirty to forty-five minutes we were to spend there, as if in the ante-room of a tax inspector or a notary, might well be spent simply waiting for the time to pass and for the office boy or the servant to open the door for us again, like a university porter announcing apathetically: 'Time!' or a nurse shouting out in a grating voice: 'Next!' I again turned round to Luisa, this time to say something under my breath to her (I think I was planning to matter something like: 'What a drag!'), but I found that she was smiling back at me, her index finger firmly to her lips which she tapped several times, indicating to me that I should remain silent. I know that I'll never forget those smiling lips crossed by that index finger which, nevertheless, failed to conceal her smile. I think it was at that moment [...] that I first thought it would be a good idea to get to know that woman, younger than me and extremely well shod. I think it was also the conjunction of her lips and her index finger (her open lips and the index finger sealing

them, her curved lips and the straight line of the index finger dividing them) that gave me the courage to abandon accuracy altogether when I translated the next question that our extremely high-ranking politician finally asked, once he'd removed from his pocket a heavy keyring loaded with keys, which he started jingling in the most unseemly manner:

'Would you like me to order you some tea?' he said.

And I didn't translate, I mean that the English I put into his mouth was not his polite question (which it must be recognized was as trite as it was tardy), but this other question:

'Tell me, do the people in your country love you?'

I could feel Luisa's astonishment behind me, more than that, I noticed that she immediately uncrossed her startled legs (the long legs that were never out of my sight, like the expensive new Prada shoes, she certainly knew how to spend her money, unless someone else had given them to her), and for a few long seconds (I felt the back of my neck pierced by her sense of shock), I waited for her to intervene and denounce me, to correct or reprimand me, or rather for her, the 'net', to take over from me at once, that's what she was there for. But those few seconds passed (one, two, three, four) and she said nothing, perhaps (I thought then) because the high-ranking British politician didn't seem in the least offended and replied at once, with a kind of contained vehemence:

'I often wonder the same thing myself,' she said, and for the first time she crossed her legs, forgetting about her sensible skirt and revealing two very square, white knees. 'The people vote for one, indeed they do so more than once. One is elected, again more than once. And yet, it's odd, one still doesn't have the feeling of being loved.'

I translated very precisely, only leaving out part of the first phrase in my Spanish version so that her words would appear to our high-ranking politician to be the product of some spontaneous thought which, it must be said, seemed to please him as a subject of conversation, since he looked at the woman with very little surprise and a great deal more sympathy and replied, gaily jingling his many keys:

'You're quite right. Votes don't give you any reassurance on that score, however much we need them. Do you know what I think? I think that dictators, rulers in countries where there are no democratic elections, are more loved than we are. And more hated too, of course, but they're still more intensely loved by those who do love them, whose numbers, moreover, are always on the increase.' [...]

[T]he Englishwoman was continuing her lament [...]:

'Couldn't they acclaim us, just once? I wonder, do we never do anything right? I'm only acclaimed by the people in my party and, of course, I can't entirely believe in their sincerity. The only time we get any support is when we go to war, I don't know if you know that, it's only when we send the country to war that...'

The British leader remained thoughtful, leaving the sentence dangling, as if she were remembering the cheers of yesteryear that would never again return. [...] I duly translated everything the woman had

said except for her final mention of war (I didn't want our politician to get any ideas), and in their place I put the following plea in her mouth:

'Would you mind very much putting away those keys? I'm terribly sensitive to noise lately. I'd be so grateful.'

Luisa's legs didn't change position, and so, once our politician had apologized, blushing slightly, and returned the large bunch of keys to his jacket pocket (they must have been making a hole in it; they were so heavy), I decided to betray him yet again, for he said:

'But, naturally, if we do something well nobody organizes a demonstration to show us how pleased they are.'

I decided on the contrary to lead him into more personal territory, which seemed to me less dangerous and also more interesting, and I made him say in crystal-clear English:

'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?'

Prior to any interpretation from the point of view of translation science, we should digress into literature studies to examine this scene based on gender dynamics. The remark that a kind of gender balance was desired with the interpreters as well as the protagonists should probably be considered to be tongue in cheek; it is not coincidental that the female interpreter is simply a 'co-interpreter', with an important, but still silent role. Also for the two high-ranking politicians, it is the man who believes he has to take the initiative; the woman is not comfortable, but does not act herself. On a literary level, the two pairs are built up to contrast with each other, the one apparently so important in *public*, and the other so important in the *novel*; the one who has the say but is unable to do anything with it, and the other who takes the initiative from a previously secondary role and then determines the momentum of the situation. The scene is satiric by nature and is reminiscent in its combination of persons of classical comedies with their antagonisms between master and servant, with the first-person narrator resembling a kind of Figaro. The scene as a whole serves to introduce the main characters and some of the main themes; it is definitely one of the most original scenes involving getting acquainted in world literature.

### Our Episode in the Light of Traditional Translation Theories

From the point of view of translation studies, the first thing that comes to mind has to be the dictum of the interpreter as a traitor (*traduttore – traditore*), a problem discussed today under the headline of 'fidelity' or 'accuracy',<sup>4</sup> but which, as we shall see, is to be taken in its literal sense in the novel we are talking about.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from this link with the old stereotype of treachery implied in translation, there seems however to be very little to say about our episode from a translational point of view. The point is, the conventional translation theories, which aim mainly at equivalence in terms of content, find it difficult to interpret such a scene. If anything, they can find that simply no equivalence

is created at all. The interpreter commits an error, or worse: an arbitrary act. Where 'tea' is translated as 'love', any search for a tertium comparationis, for a common deep structure (Bierwisch, 1970; Katz & Fodor, 1970), or for language-independent semantic characteristics (Geckeler, 1971, 1973, 1978; Hilly, 1971) is irrelevant. Neither is it possible to apply translational compensation procedures for interlingual structural differences, as it would be done, for example, in language-pair-related translation studies (Newmark, 1988) or in the 'stylistique comparée' tradition (Bausch, 1968; Malblanc, 1968; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958), nor can we – following the Paris school and the 'théorie du sens' (García-Landa, 1978, 1981; Seleskovitch, 1968, 1975, 1981) – stick to the mentally constituted sense of the statement. Interestingly, with reference to our scene, translation-sceptical approaches such as the 'language specific world view',<sup>6</sup> i.e. the principle of linguistic relativity (Humboldt, 1949; Wandruszka, 1969; Weisgerber, 1950; Whorf, 1963) encounter extremely optimistic views such as Koschmieder's (1965a, 1965b) belief in absolute translatability. The point is, we are not dealing with general translatability, but with translating/interpreting as an activity, and any theory which clings to language, to its system or its content, simply does not go far enough. If translation is viewed as change of coding within a classic information-theoretical model of communication, as does, for example, the Leipzig school (Jäger, 1977; Kade, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1981), then the only possible interpretation of our scene is that no translation at all occurs (but only, at best, what Kade refers to as 'language intermediation' ('Sprachmittlung')).<sup>7</sup> Nida (1964) and Nida and Taber (1969), who refer to 'dynamic equivalence' but still postulate the absolute primacy of the message, or Koller (1979) with his 'normative equivalence requirements' ('normative Äquivalenzforderungen') would probably have bluntly rejected the original solution of our protagonist. And even an approach which – like that of Vannerem and Snell-Hornby (1986) – compares above all Fillmore's (1977) 'scenes and frames', i.e. the cognitive knowledge structure evoked by source and target text, would not have had anything positive to say about it. Not even the interdisciplinary combination of various methods and the multidimensional approach to the text, as suggested by Snell-Hornby (1986, 1988), seem very promising here. Similarly, it cannot be stated clearly whether the solution fulfils the criterion of 'consistency' ('Stimmigkeit') between source text and target text used by Stolze (1992) in order to replace the equivalence requirement.

Of course, one could also move away from the equivalence requirement, be it in terms of content or style, and postulate the primacy of the text genre like Jumpelt (1961), or that of the situational context like Catford (1965). In the sense of a translation-relevant text typology (as suggested by Reiß, 1971, 1976, or Koller, 1992), one could, in a second step, make the cynical statement that we are obviously dealing with the text genre of small talk, where the specific content does not matter at all, anyway. After all, our interpreter seems to adopt precisely this perverted extreme position. He acts quite brilliantly here, by the way; he never loses sight of his role, he maintains tone and style, and not least length of the statements, except for the minor detail of the content, of course. Thus, he fulfils all secondary criteria (cf. e.g. the AIIIC criteria in Kurz, 1998b:

392) to the point; he only manages to ignore most elegantly the primary criterion, that of content equivalence.

### A Showcase Model for Functional Theories?

Functional translation theories, in particular the skopos theory and the theory of translational action (Holz-Mänttari, 1984, 1986; Reiß & Vermeer, 1984; cf. also Ammann, 1990; Dizdar, 1998; Kaindl, 1998; Risku, 1998), are far better suited to deal with our scene. 'To what extent the data gathered from analyzing the source text are relevant', writes Holz-Mänttari (1986: 362), 'depends on the objective of the new situation of cooperation. [...] Knowing the function of the target text makes it possible to design a model for the target text which can fulfil its function and meet its objective in the anticipated situation of reception.'<sup>8</sup> Thus, we have to establish the purpose of the described encounter of the two heads of state and the function of the statement by the Spanish statesman. The narrator does not prove too helpful in this respect, as the only thing he claims to be important is the fact that the encounter takes place at all. All the real issues are discussed by the diplomats in their own, separate meetings. The only thing the heads of government have to do is to be present and represent their countries. And the interpreter has no other task than to document the importance of this encounter by his (double) presence. But maybe in such a situation, (almost) anything goes? Just think of the position adopted by the manipulation school (e.g. Hermans, 1985; Toury, 1980, 1985, 1989) and other postmodern movements that – mostly in a literary context, however – completely subordinate evaluation to description and thus generally accept as the translation of a text anything that is said to be such a translation.

However, this is not all that helpful either, as it does not specify the demands on translation activities, but grants them a dangerous arbitrariness. Therefore, we should focus on the microstructure and ask the following: what are the function, the skopos and the illocution of the utterance 'Would you like me to order you some tea?' On the surface, it is a question, from a speech act perspective, an offer, and – from the point of view of conversation analysis – in both interpretations, it is the first element of an 'adjacency pair'; a first element requiring a second one, an answer in the sense of acceptance or rejection of the offer made. However, the Spanish politician cannot be too serious about this, as he forgoes such a reaction without as much as shrugging his shoulders. What is the real purpose of his question? Well, given the embarrassing silence<sup>9</sup> which has already lasted a few minutes, the main issue seems to be to say anything at all. Just remember the title of a well known monograph: 'Say something! Phatic language use' ('Säg öppis! Phatische Sprachverwendung'<sup>10</sup>) (Züger, 1998). The intention is probably to start a conversation. And if we accept this intention, this purpose, then we must admit that the interpreter's audacious, brazen question is a thousand times more suited for this than the incredibly trite and clumsy attempt of the Spanish statesman. The translation fulfils the conversational function of the source text perfectly. This is clearly shown by the conversation which actually develops based on this question and which, in its philosophical and human

dimension, goes far beyond simple small talk.<sup>11</sup> The interpreter thus primarily overcomes an embarrassing and boring situation and, almost *en passant*, creates a situation in which his interpreting skills, his professional know-how, are actually required.

Thus, one might really view this episode in a way that the first and fundamental lack of fidelity on behalf of the interpreter should not be seen as such after all, but as an ingenious performance of its basic function, as intermediation in the true sense of the word, facilitating communication where it appears difficult (not only because of the language barrier). The interpreter thus turns into an acting figure, he exceeds his role, or rather only now performs this function as a specialist for intercultural communication. Based on a primary act in the source text, he decides in his expert capacity, 'if, what, and how to act on (translate/interpret)'<sup>12</sup> (Reiß & Vermeer, 1984: 95). Following Kußmaul (1993, 1999, 2000), he can and should use all his creativity; he can – in the sense of a change in function – even choose to apply the translation to a skopos other than the one of the source text.

If Holz-Mänttari (1984: 20) postulates that 'it is essential to drop the thought that in translational activities texts or parts of texts, or even languages, are "translated"',<sup>13</sup> if Reiß and Vermeer (1984: 113) write that 'what has to be judged first of all is the translated product per se',<sup>14</sup> if Risku (1998: 108) says that 'the original question is not *how I say something in a different language*, but rather, *what is or can be said and done in the target situation and culture at all*',<sup>15</sup> if Dizdar (1998): 105, following Vermeer, (1978) states that 'it is the translator's task to facilitate the desired communication. As an acting person, he has to make decisions at every level of the translational process',<sup>16</sup> or if Ladmiral (1993: 291) writes 'condemned to be free, the translator is a decision maker',<sup>17</sup> then the protagonist in our scene has finally managed to transcend conventional translating and broken through to translational acting, and he has completed the 'liberation of translational acting',<sup>18</sup> as proclaimed by Vermeer (1996: 10), promoting himself from a mere instrument in the communication process to an equal actor.<sup>19</sup> An actor, that is, who pursues his own goals besides those of his clients. 'An act is considered "successful" if it can be deemed situationally adequate (meaningful)',<sup>20</sup> and if (in the sense of the purely 'diagnostic' approach to errors, cf. Hönig, 1987, 1995, 1998) none of the two parties concerned files a 'protest', at least according to Reiß and Vermeer (1984: 99). Thus, the translational act of our protagonist has to be considered perfectly successful.

Recent translation theories are thus far better suited to deal with our scene than the traditional ones, as they allow a positive interpretation and evaluation of what happens in this significant episode, an appreciation of the interpreter's performance as a creative, interlingual and intercultural instigator of communication.

### There Is Still More To It: The Question of Professional Ethics

Yet this cannot be all. Actually, *one* aspect of the episode has not even been mentioned so far: the divided reference to the addressee, i.e. the dual address of the translational act, which is directed not only at the two heads of state, but

also – and above all – to the co-interpreter in the background. She is the only one to see through the brazenness of the translation, and therefore she is also indirectly, but without a doubt, primarily addressed by this translation.<sup>21</sup> It is her gesture which inspires the interpreter to come up with his first creative reply, and her non-verbal reactions – or, rather, her non-reactions – which encourage and even provoke him to keep up his strange translation style, while actually, her task should have been to monitor the accuracy of his translations.

However, as she joins in the game, a kind of complicity<sup>22</sup> arises between the supervisor and the supervised, a complicity which throws the two – who have not even talked to each other yet – into a very intimate form of a relationship. This complicity is the objective of the protagonist, as it embodies the original, if not entirely risk-free form of flirting which is presented to us. (The two engage in their very own and personal Wittgenstein-type language game, she as the recipient, he as the sender, a metalanguage game at that, as they do not communicate directly verbally, but indirectly via their behaviour vis-à-vis the others.) It goes without saying that the two start a relationship which later on evolves into marriage.

This complicity with the young woman, on the one hand, is important from a narratological perspective, as the novel ultimately is about the fact that the narrator's father confesses to this very woman – his daughter-in-law – a murder which happened many decades ago (and the fact that by a clever ploy the narrator becomes a secret witness to this confession, a confession which is the only way to shed light on the mystery of his birth).

On the other hand, this complicity is also an indicator of what happens on a translational level, as such a complicity can only arise as a result of the transgression of rules and the ignoring of boundaries. Therefore, what the 'co'-interpreter approves silently here is more than just a somewhat eccentric translation approach: it is, in fact, a breach of the rules.<sup>23</sup> That is at least the way the interpreters involved see it, as – in accordance with their professional ethics – they obviously do consider accuracy and factual equivalence essential; all those features that are demanded in relevant publications (Gile, 1991: 198; Jones, 1998: 5; Pöchhacker, 1998c: 61; Schweda Nicholson, 1994: 86) using such adjectives as 'faithful', 'exact' and 'accurate', as part of the 'special responsibility [of the translator] in terms of the source text as well as vis-à-vis the recipients'<sup>24</sup> (Stolze, 1994: 196) – that triple loyalty (to author, initiator and addressee) which, according to Nord (1998: 143), puts the skopos principle into perspective.

The mere fact that our interpreter initiates communication between the two heads of state perfectly would not be sufficient to explain the creation of this secret and close bond with the young woman. The essential question is *how* he instigates this communication, namely by nonchalantly throwing overboard the rules of accurate and reliable interpreting, be it – in the case of the keys – for reasons of personal convenience, be it – in not mentioning the war – for reasons of 'politically correct' censorship, be it finally to lead the conversation down a personal avenue, to use it for his very personal courting strategy.

Maybe this is the aspect to which we can pin the questionable character of his actions in terms of professional ethos. According to Pöchhacker (1998c):

56), it is the interpreter's task to 'speak for others', 'whose intended message [he] has to make his own and turn into reality'.<sup>25</sup> Even the functionalist Holz-Mänttari (1993: 303) writes that 'the text designer' should not pursue 'his own communicative goal when creating design texts'.<sup>26</sup> However, our hero's translation skopos, i.e. (following Vermeer, 1978), the goal intended by the translator, is only on the surface the instigation of communication, while his real skopos is self-serving and has to do with avoiding boredom, the desire for professional distinction, and – above all, of course – the young woman sitting behind him.

This translator is a traitor, which is what he wants to be, and his betrayal and the fact that this betrayal is covered by his 'co-interpreter' are the essence of our scene.<sup>27</sup>

This is exactly why it is necessary to raise the question whether it is really desirable for a translation theory to consider such an episode as normal or maybe even turn it into a showcase model.<sup>28</sup> This again adds significance to this scene, as it makes it possible to question a misled or misunderstood functionalism and complement it by a professional ethics of free translational acting.

'What is deemed ethical behavior in each interpreting incident, cannot be [...] derived solely from ideal norms, but requires case-by-case analyses',<sup>29</sup> writes Pöchhacker (1998c: 66, with reference to Zimman, 1994 and Tate & Turner, 1997). Therefore our scene should be compared with a second one which is similar in many respects, but completely different in others. It was related by Bjelić at the International Pragmatics Conference 2000 in Budapest. He described his activities as an interpreter for refugees arriving in the USA during the Bosnia war. Suddenly, microphones and cameras were trained on the refugee woman he was assigned to, who was asked what she had to say about the situation. The interpreter translated the question and waited for her answer, but that answer did not come. The world had its cameras on her, and that Bosnian woman said nothing at all. All of a sudden, Bjelić realized what he had to do, and he translated: 'We Bosnian refugees are deeply moved and grateful for the helpfulness we encounter here, and we lack the words to express our gratitude' (Bjelić, 2000).

This example is clearly marked by the presence of the media,<sup>30</sup> and it obviously resembles 'community interpreting' as described in Bowen (1998), Gentile *et al.* (1996) and, above all, Pöchhacker (1998c). The interpreter feels responsible for the people he has been entrusted with, he feels he is their advocate and representative to the world at large, and therefore he takes an active part – following Risku (1998: 109) – in the communication process, by trying to remedy what, in accordance with Thomas (1983), might be considered a 'sociopragmatic failure'. Indeed, there are situational contexts that clearly state what has to be said, and here the interpreter merely fills the gap with the required speech act, i.e. saying thanks, which is fully in line with the intention of the people he is entrusted with; in a situation where they themselves – for whatever reason – do not have the presence of mind to do what is required.

Let us compare that to our scene. In both cases, we see an interpreter who acts of his own accord, and in both cases he contributes a message where the

communication partners have (almost) nothing to say. The interpreter endorses his role of an acting party, as an instigator of communication in instances where the actual protagonists are not capable of doing so. This fits in nicely with the role of the community interpreter, who sees the communicating parties as his *protégés*, for whom he is responsible as a result of his linguistic and cultural advantage in the target culture.

Part of the comical character of the Marias episode is the fact that our hero acts in a very similar fashion as in the Bosnian scene, even though his clients are no less than the heads of state of Great Britain and Spain.<sup>31</sup> The reversal of power and dependence as a result of the linguistic imbalance is a danger that is obviously taken for real,<sup>32</sup> as there would be no other reason to put the 'co' by the interpreter's side; but as that 'co' prefers to side with her counterpart, we experience a delightful impish scene in which the powerless has those in power act at his bidding without them realising in the least what is going on.<sup>33</sup>

However, whether the interpreter really acts in line with the intention of his clients, as Dušan Bječić did in the refugee episode, is a completely different question. An important one at that if one is to judge whether his actions are to be considered betrayal. Well, at least he does not cause any harm to his clients, and – thanks to his intervention – these boring 45 minutes are loosened up by an interesting conversation. One could even go so far as to say that he acts in the interest of the two countries, which must benefit from a good personal relationship between their heads of state. This may be the actual purpose of the meeting, and this goal is fulfilled only thanks to the interpreter's arbitrary actions.

On the other hand, the two heads of state are responsible adults who are able to take charge of their own communication processes themselves. They rely on the interpreter to convey their thoughts and intentions to the other party accurately and without arbitrary changes. (Being no translators, they fairly trust the traditional translation norms of our current translation culture about content equivalence and accuracy without questioning them.)<sup>34</sup> They are deceived in this scene, maybe not betrayed, but deceived in any case, as the interpreter does not make his *skopos* explicit. Therefore one has to take their view when looking at the events from a professional-ethical perspective. What would they think, for example, if they were able to read this description?

Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered unambiguously, as it depends on the sense of humour of the parties involved.<sup>35</sup> Depending on character or mood, they might consider the interpreter's actions creative assistance in one case, but pure betrayal in another. It is this precise and undeniable ambivalence which makes our scene so interesting.

### Towards Literary Translation

Finally, we should bear in mind that we are not talking about a real incident, but a literary episode, and that the text quoted above is the English translation of a Spanish original. For this reason, the scene may become the subject of translation studies in its nature as a literary translation. Questioning the equivalence requirement, the notion of function as the prime criterion, the translator as acting party and the translator's creativity: all these factors which

made it possible to analyse important aspects of the interpreting scene in the first place have to be put into perspective again in evaluating a literary translation. What does 'accuracy' mean in a literary translation? Where does creativity end, and where does transgression begin? This, however, would be a totally new article. If the reader should feel inclined to write it: the appendix contains the original Spanish text.

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### Notes

1. Apart from myself there are two more researchers that have accounted for this scene – and for the whole novel – from a translational viewpoint: Andres (2007) and Viaggio (2005). The latter reports the great impact of the book among interpreters and the discussions about professional ethics it gave rise to. The former is the outcry of a practising conference interpreter who aims to defend the whole profession against the wrong image which, in his view, is given by Marias. See Andres (2007: 319): 'Unlike in simultaneous interpreting, the interpreter in consecutive (conversational) interpreting has [...] more freedom of formulation. This freedom is used by the interpreter as a literary character in order to bring in his ego taking away, adding or modifying text segments, which is how he may influence the content of what is said.'
2. This is the title of Krings' 1986 book: *Was in den Köpfen von Übersetzern vorgeht*.
3. In fact we find the latter term in the very text, when the narrator explains how he found the courage 'to abandon accuracy in his translation.'
4. It is a novel about betrayal, says also Andres (2007: 187). In fact, towards the end of our text, the narrator himself admits: 'I decided to betray him yet again'. This corresponds to a general tendency in literature: that of picturing translators according to the traditional stereotype of a person of scarce reliability; see Andres (2007: 318): 'In literature what dominates is the stereotype known from historiography, i.e. that the interpreter is a betrayer and a traitor, or at least a person whose trustworthiness is to be questioned, as he deals with power in a wrathless and selfish way.'
5. 'muttersprachliches Weltbild'
6. It is interesting to see, however, that Fahrazad (2003) could show through an experimental setting that translators tend to manipulate the contents of texts for ideological reasons, whether they are aware of it or not.
7. 'Wie weit die durch die Ausgangstextanalyse gewonnenen Daten für die Zieltextproduktion relevant sind, hängt vom Zweck der neuen Kooperationsituation ab. [...] Mit Kenntnis der Zieltext-Funktion ist es möglich, ein Modell für einen Zieltext zu entwerfen, der in der antizipierten Rezeptionssituation seiner Funktion, seinem Zweck, gerecht werden kann.'



- See also Pöchhacker 2004: 76: "[T]he *skopos* (Greek for 'aim', 'function' or 'purpose') for which a target text was commissioned constitutes the controlling principle of translational activity, over and above such traditional criteria of source-target correspondence as equivalence, invariance, or fidelity".
9. On the issue of silence, cf. the volume edited by Jaworski (1997), in particular the contribution by Sifianou (1997).
  10. The first part of the title is in Swiss German dialect.
  11. Andres (2007: 183): 'Paradoxically, through alienation of the language Juan accedes to the truth.' ('Paradoxerweise dringt Juan durch Verformung der Sprache zur Wahrheit vor.') See also Andres (2007: 313–314): 'He [Mariás] makes the interpreter, who by his profession should guarantee the truth of the translated words, accede to truth by conscious non-truthfulness, as due to the wrong translation both politicians drop the dead pseudo-words and the meaningless slogans and get through to "real" communication.' ('Er [Mariás] lässt den Dolmetscher, der von Berufs wegen Garant für den Wahrheitsgehalt der übermittelten Worte ist, durch bewusste Unwahrheit von Sprache zu Wahrheit vordringen, denn durch die verfälschte Verdolmetschung lassen beide Politiker die toten Worthülsen und leeren Phrasen fallen und es kommt zu "wahrer" Kommunikation.')
    12. 'ob, was und wie weitergehandelt (übersetzt/gedolmetscht) werden soll'
    13. 'Für "translatorisches Handeln" ist es wesentlich, den Gedanken fallen zu lassen, daß Texte oder Teile davon oder gar Sprachen "übersetzt" werden.'
    14. 'Zu beurteilen ist [...] in erster Linie [...] das Translat per se.'
    15. 'Die Frage kann also zunächst nicht sein, wie ich dies oder jenes in einer anderen Sprache sage, sondern vielmehr, uns überhaupt in der Zielsituation und -kultur getan und gesagt wird oder werden kann.'
    16. 'Aufgabe des Translators ist es, die gewünschte Kommunikation zu ermöglichen. Als Handelnder muß er auf jeder Ebene des Prozesses Entscheidungen treffen.'
    17. 'condamné à être libre, le traducteur est un décideur.'
    18. 'Befreiung des translatorischen Handelns.'
    19. The interpreter thus overcomes the anonymous and degrading role as a prestige accessory of important people (see Andres, 2007) assigned to him by the protocol (see the passage about the uncomfortable seats: 'I sat perched on my purgatorial chair between the two leaders and Luisa sat on her equally penitential chair a little to my right').
    20. 'Eine Handlung ist dann "geglückt", wenn sie als situationsadäquat (sinnvoll) erklärt werden kann.'
    21. In this I disagree with Andres (2007: 183), who claims the communication between the two interpreters is only nonverbal. This is true for the woman, but not for the man, who addresses her indirectly, but verbally, though his untruthful translation (and thus demonstrates once more the power of words, see endnote 33).
    22. The very term accomplice ('Komplizin') is also used by Andres (2007: 183 and passim), to describe the situation. It is a complicity not through action but through speech (and silence), like in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* – as alluded to in the title of the novel.
    23. Andres (2007: 185): 'She becomes the accomplice of a wrong interpretation' ('Sie wird zur Komplizin einer falschen Verdolmetschung').
    24. 'besondere Verantwortung [des Translators] gegenüber dem Ausgangstext wie gegenüber den Empfängern'.
    25. 'Sprechen für andere', deren Mitteilungsabsichten [er] sich zu eigen macht und verwirklichen muß'.
    26. 'der Textdesigner [soll] bei der Herstellung von Designtexten kein eigenes Verständigungsziel [verfolgen]'.
    27. See Andres (2007: 325), who refers to an earlier version of this very paper and who, in her final statement about Mariás's novel, confirms my view: 'The dictum quoted by Lavric at the beginning of her text, that translators are traitors, is indeed a

- truthful description of Juan [...] ('Das anfangs von Lavric angeführte Diktum vom Dolmetscher als Verräter trifft auf Juan [...] durchaus zu').
28. As a matter of fact, Andres (2007): 324, who read an earlier version of this paper, criticises my idea that the scene be completely in line with functionalist translation theories. She points out the fact that e.g. Vermeer (1978: 101) sets the criterion of coherent transfer or of intertextual coherence between source and target text (Vermeer, 1989), which means exactly that the contents cannot be left out in translation. She claims (rightly) that this criterion is not fulfilled in the episode in question.
  29. 'Was beim Dolmetschen im Einzelfall als ethisches Verhalten gilt, läßt sich [...] nicht allein von Idealnormen ableiten, sondern erfordert fallspezifische Analysen.' On the topic of interpreting for the media cf. Kurz (1998a) and Pöchhacker (1998c): 60; 2007).
  30. In some way, the scene could therefore be seen as a satirical example of the 'bridge between [...] conference and community interpreting' ('Brücke zwischen [...] Konferenz- und Kommunal Dolmetschen' urged by Pöchhacker (2004: 15, reported in Andres, 2007: 21).
  31. Andres (2007: 318) speaks of 'the power of the translator, whose actions escape the control of the interaction partners, who on the other hand depend on him' ('die Macht des Dolmetschers, dessen Tun sich der Kontrolle der Interaktionspartner entzieht, die jedoch von ihm abhängen').
  32. Andres (2007) comments this is a striking example of the power of words (and of silence) – which she describes as being the main theme of the whole novel (see Andres, 2007: 168 and passim). She writes: 'Javier Mariás has moulded the activity of the interpreter to the core assertion of the novel, in order to illustrate his central concern – the power, but also the uncertainty and the lack of truth in language – with the example of a profession which represents the opposite, i.e. the reliability of the transferred statements.' ('Javier Mariás hat die Tätigkeit des Dolmetschers der Kernaussage des Romans angepaßt, um sein Anliegen, die Macht, aber auch die Unsicherheit und das Fehlen von Wahrheit der Sprache anhand eines Berufs zu demonstrieren, der für das Gegenteil steht, nämlich die Verlässlichkeit der übermittelten Aussagen.') (p. 190).
  33. See Andres (2007: 319): 'What is expected from the interpreter [...] is that he act as a translation medium and not as an independent party who assumes social responsibility for the content of what is said by the participants.' ('die Erwartungshaltung an den Dolmetscher [...] ist, dass er als Translationsmedium angesehen wird und nicht als eigenständige Partei, die die soziale Verantwortung für das Gesagte der Interaktionspartner übernimmt.')
  34. Andres (2007: 322) speaks of 'a successful practical joke' ('ein gelungener Streich').

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## Appendix

### The original Spanish text

Javier Mariñas: *Corazón tan blanco*  
 Barcelona: Anagrama, 1992  
 s.l.: Suma de letras, 2000, pp. 86–99.

Fue así como conocí a Luisa, que por alguna razón fue considerada más seria, fiable y leal que yo y elegida como intérprete de guardia (intérpretes de seguridad, los llaman, o intérpretes-red, con lo que se los acaba denominando „el red“ o „la red“, muy feo) para ratificar o desautorizar mis palabras durante los encuentros personales de muy alto nivel habidos en nuestro país hace unos de dos años entre nuestros representantes y los del Reino Unido de la Gran Bretaña.

Estas escrupulosidades no tienen demasiado sentido, ya que en realidad cuanto más alto sean los cargos que se reúnen a hablar, menos importancia adquiere lo que entre sí dicen y menos gravedad tendría un error o transgresión por nuestra parte. [...] Lo que entre sí se digan, por tanto, casi

nunca tiene la menor importancia, y lo que es más embarazoso, a menudo no tienen absolutamente nada que decirse.

En aquella ocasión el alto cargo español era masculino y el alto cargo británico femenino, por lo que debió de parecer apropiado que el primer intérprete fuera a su vez masculino y el segundo o „red“ femenino, para crear una atmósfera cómplice y sexualmente equilibrada. Yo quedé en mi torturadora silla en medio de los dos adalides, y Luisa en su mortificante silla un poco a mi izquierda, [...] algo postergada [...].

A decir verdad, nuestra intervención tardó [...] un rato en hacerse precisa, ya que en cuanto los periodistas fueron conminados a retirarse („Ya basta“, les dijo nuestro alto cargo levantando una mano, la del anillo), y un chambelán o factótum cerró desde fuera la puerta y nos quedamos los cuatro a solas listos para la eminente charla, yo con mi bloc de notas y Luisa con el suyo sobre el regazo, se produjo un abrupto silencio de lo más imprevisto y de lo más incómodo. [...]

[Entonces comprendí que podían pasarse los treinta o cuarenta y cinco minutos previstos como en la antesala del asesor fiscal o el notario, limitándose a esperar a que transcurriera el tiempo y el ordenanza o fámulo volviera a abrirles la puerta, como el bebed universitario que anuncia con apatía: „La hora“ o la enfermera que vocea desagradablemente: „El siguiente“. Me volví de nuevo hacia Luisa, esta vez para comentarle algo con disimulo (creo que iba a decirle „Vaya papelón“ entre dientes), pero me encontré con que, sonriendo, se llevaba el índice con firmeza a los labios y se daba unos golpecitos, indicándome que guardara silencio. Sé que no olvidaré jamás esos labios sonrientes atravesados por un dedo índice que no lograba anular la sonrisa. Creo que fue entonces [...] cuando pensé que me sería beneficioso tratar a aquella muchacha más joven que yo y tan bien calzada. Creo que fue también la conjunción de los labios y el índice (los labios abiertos y el índice que los sellaba, los labios curvados y el índice recto que los partía) lo que me dio valor para no ser nada exacto en la siguiente pregunta que por fin, tras sacar de un bolsillo un llavero sobrecargado de llaves con el que se puso a jugar de manera inconveniente, hizo nuestro muy alto cargo:

-¿Quiere que le pida un té? -dijo.

Y yo no traduje, quiero decir que lo que en inglés puse en su boca no fue su cortés pregunta (de manual y un tanto tardía, todo hay que reconocerlo), sino esta otra:

-Dígame, ¿a usted le quieren en su país?

Noté el estupor de Luisa a mis espaldas, es más, la vi descruzar de inmediato las sobresaltadas piernas (las piernas de gran altura siempre a mi vista, como los zapatos nuevos y caros de Prada, sabía gastarse el dinero o se los habría regalado alguien), y durante unos segundos que no fueron breves (sentí mi nuca atravesada por el susto) esperé su intervención y su denuncia, su rectificación y su reprimenda, o bien que se hiciera cargo de la interpretación al instante. „La red“, para eso estaba. Pero esos segundos pasaron (uno, dos, tres y cuatro) y no dijo nada, tal vez (pensé entonces) porque la adalid de Inglaterra no pareció ofendida y contestó sin demora, es más, con una especie de contenida vehemencia:

-Muchas veces me lo pregunto -dijo, y por primera vez cruzó sus piernas desentendiéndose de su precavida falda y dejando ver unas rodillas blancuzcas y muy cuadradas-. A uno lo votan, verdad, y más de una vez. Sale elegido, y más de una vez. Y sin embargo, es curioso, uno no tiene la sensación de que lo quieran por eso.

Traduje con exactitud, si acaso de modo que en la versión inglesa desapareciera el „lo“ de la primera frase y todo quedara para nuestro superior como una reflexión espontánea británica que, dicho sea de paso, pareció complacerle como tema de conversación, ya que miró a la señora con sorpresa mínima y mayor simpatía y le respondió mientras hacía entrechocar sus numerosas llaves alegremente:

-Es verdad. Los votos no dan ninguna seguridad a ese respecto, por mucho que los aprovechemos. Fijese en lo que le digo, yo creo que los dictadores, los gobernantes nunca votados ni elegidos democráticamente, son más queridos en sus países. También más odiados, desde luego, pero más intensamente queridos por los que los quieren, que además van siempre en aumento. [...]

[L]a señora inglesa prosiguió su lamento [...]:

-¿Es que no pueden nunca aclamarnos? Me pregunto: ¿nunca hacemos nada correctamente? A mí sólo me aclaman los de mi partido, y claro, no puedo creer en su sinceridad del todo. Sólo en la guerra somos apoyados, no sé si lo sabe, solamente cuando ponemos al país en guerra, entonces....

La adalid británica se quedó pensativa, con la palabra suspendida en los labios, como si estuviera recordando los vítores del pasado que ya no regresaría. [...] Traduje debidamente cuanto había dicho la señora excepto su menicón final de la guerra (no quería que se le ocurrieran ideas a nuestro alto cargo), y en su lugar puse en sus labios el siguiente ruego:

-Perdone, ¿le importaría guardar esas llaves? Todos los ruidos me afectan mucho últimamente, se lo agradezco.

La piernas de Luisa mantuvieron su postura, por lo que, una vez que nuestro adalid se hubo disculpado ruborizándose un poco y hubo devuelto al instante el voluminoso llavero al bolsillo de la chaqueta (debía de estarle agujereando con tanto peso), me atreví a traicionarle de nuevo, pues él dijo:

-Ah, desde luego, si hacemos algo bien nadie convoca una manifestación para que nos enteremos de que les ha gustado.  
Y yo, por el contrario, decidí llevarlo a un terreno más personal, que me parecía menos peligroso y también más interesante, y le hice decir en inglés meridiano:

-Si puedo preguntárselo y no es demasiado atrevimiento, usted, en su vida amorosa, ¿ha obligado a alguien a quererla?