

The Translator's Net: The World as Word in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*¹

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Abstract

Drawing from the notion that Joyce's first novel is a text concerned with language and largely about language, the essay enquires into the challenges that the verbal plot of *Portrait* poses for translation practices. The essay focuses on those aspects of *Portrait* that expressly defy one of the main premises of translation: that is possible to find equivalences between linguistic systems. Selected examples from the 1926 Spanish translation of *Portrait* offer comparison of individual passages and words and illustrate to what extent the translator's choices become repository of the tensions and instabilities which the language of *Portrait* exhibits.

Keywords: *James Joyce, translation, language, politics*

James Joyce's self-declared obsession with language has doubtless kept critics busy for nearly a century. Whereas the writer's immortality has been assured for a long time now on the different fronts of the manifold and ever-expanding world of Joyce criticism, most scholarly attention has focused on the exploration of Joyce's language. Both a constraint and a possibility, language is seen by modernist writers as separate and autonomous from the world it might represent. Joyce is no exception: language is at the centre of his attention as he ponders and explores the gap between words and the world. As a champion of modernism, Joyce demonstrates that language is an inherently inadequate medium for representation and provides only a limited access to reality. In *Ulysses*, Joyce's use of parody draws unprecedented attention to previous forms of representation through the subversive appropriation of styles which, as in the case of his mocking revision of the Homeric myth, are now deprived of their heroic dimensions. In this respect, *Ulysses* is primarily a parody of language. The panoramic one-day journey through Dublin is rendered through a display of discourses, registers, speeches, idioms and styles which make *language* impossible to ignore.

Yet, Joyce's preoccupation with self-reflexivity of language is by no means a mere aesthetic gesture or a symptom of intellectual elitism. Stylistic diversity and the juxtaposition of heterogeneous forms, as well as the inclusion of reflexive commentaries on language, function as frames for the outward reality. Joyce's writing constantly calls attention to its language thus making it explicit that the *world* is inescapably framed by the *word*. Ultimately, we could argue that for Joyce, one's engagement with reality must necessarily be carried out through a continuous exploration of the forms which make the real intelligible.

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Early on, Joyce told his brother: "Don't talk to me about politics. I'm only interested in style"², as if endorsing the claim of Gabriel Conroy, the aspiring writer in "The Dead", during the argument with his nationalist dance partner, Miss Ivors. Joyce's youthful declaration of artistic independence is ironically undermined through a writing which insists on problematizing the questions of representation and communication in the Irish context precisely through careful choices of language and style. In "The Dead", Gabriel, who defends himself by saying that "literature was above politics",³ extricates his decisions about language, subject matter and form from the extra-textual context in which the (English) books he reviews are inscribed. Ironically, as the story unfolds, we discover that "The Dead", like the rest of the stories in *Dubliners*, is firmly grounded on the idea that "in Ireland, the problem of being a writer was in a very specific sense a linguistic problem. But it was also a political problem".⁴

This tension between language and politics dominates Joyce's fiction to the extent that all of his works can be read as variations of the writer's investigation of this connection.⁵ As Laurent Milesi has aptly suggested in reference to the trajectory of Joyce's linguistic experiment, "it is more helpful to see the whole Joycean output as a discrete continuum in which apparently new departures in fact redeployed in earlier narrative-linguistic habits in a different guise".⁶ For Milesi "the early selective epiphanic treatment of linguistic material and plot, which had presided over the composition of *Dubliners* and the reworkings of the verbose *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait*, was extended to the beginning of *Ulysses*" and, likewise, "one may even still register something of the former epiphany in the multi-layered portmanteau of the word and the syntactic-rhythmic modulations" of language in *Finnegans Wake*.⁷ As Milesi acknowledges, from the early years of his writing career, Joyce was already conscious of the limits of language, limits which he attempts to transcend in his own writing.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*⁸, language becomes Stephen's way of negotiating his relation to a world which, in turn, reaches him through linguistic experiences. At work here is Joyce's belief (fully developed in *Ulysses*) that language, history and politics are intricately connected, that efforts to develop one's individual identity are always grounded in the language derived from public discourses.⁹ Since Stephen's evolving consciousness is clearly exposed to the pressures of Irish life, the different narrative episodes mirror his own evolution against the inescapable background of his culture. Given that Stephen's mind dictates the story, the narrative is modulated

² Quoted by Richard Ellmann in *Stanislaus Joyce, My Brother's Keeper* (London: Faber, 1982), 23.

³ James Joyce, "The Dead," in *Dubliners*, ed. Terence Brown, (London: Penguin, 1992), 188-192.

⁴ Seamus Deane, "Joyce the Irishman," in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35.

⁵ Numerous scholars have insisted on this question from varied and often competing perspectives. See, for example, Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Trevor Williams, *Reading Joyce Politically* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997).

⁶ Laurent Milesi, "Introduction: Languages with a Difference," in *James Joyce and the Difference of Language*, ed. Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

⁷ Milesi, "Introduction", 2.

⁸ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism and Notes*, ed. Chester G. Anderson (New York: Viking, 1968). All future quotations will be documented parenthetically.

⁹ On this point see M. Keith Booker, *Joyce, Bakhtin and the Literary Tradition* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995). For a detailed study of Joyce's productive use of popular culture see Brandon Kershner, *Joyce and Popular Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996). See also, Cheryl Herr, *Joyce's Anatomy of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

by the relationship with the language he inherits as he struggles to understand the words that define and shape his reality. As Seamus Deane explains: “To make the world conform to words is a characteristic aspiration of a culture which has found it for so long impossible to make its words conform to the world”.¹⁰

Significantly, at the beginning of the novel the first thing we read is the story that Stephen hears from his father: “Once upon a time”. Through his father’s narrative the child protagonist is thus simultaneously inscribed within a tradition and a language—“his father told him that story” (*P* 7)—which will subsequently determine his growth into adulthood. In this respect, as Deane has suggested, the opening pages appropriately thematize Joyce’s concerns and methods:

Quotation is one of the structural principles of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen collects words and quotations with increasing eagerness until the novel finally becomes a quotation from Stephen’s own writings. We are to presume that the world which gave itself to him in words has now become junior to his own word-world.¹¹

As has been remarked, in *Portrait* Joyce ironically depicts the construction of Stephen’s personality through moments of crisis in which the character is presented as struggling to ground his identity in language.¹² His constant sense of failure and frustration is thus dramatised in episodes which consistently reveal Stephen’s linguistic anxieties. The protagonist’s estrangement from a sense of common experience and his painful attempts at self-identification, symptomatically reflected in his obsession with language, need to be interpreted in the larger context of Irish history. *Portrait* shows that quite early in his writing career Joyce was concerned with a self-conscious type of writing beyond the purview of mere literary experiment. From the opening pages, the protagonist’s problems of definition are accordingly transposed to the reader who is asked to define “Stephen’s relationship to a world of words by contrasting the fantasies that he uses to define the mysterious words, phrases, and songs with the more complex meanings and associations that Stephen does not yet understand”.¹³ Since the character’s relationship with language functions as the ultimate key to understanding his evolution, the reader can know him only through words: the words Stephen overhears and learns, the words he misinterprets, the words he appropriates, the words that please him, and the words he abhors.

Joyce’s foregrounding of the materiality of language in *Portrait* acquires different forms as it evolves from young Stephen’s language games, which rely on the physical suggestiveness of words: *suck*, *belt*, *kiss*, etc. Language becomes the measuring stick for the protagonist’s evolution through a process characterized by the fundamentally linguistic nature of his growing awareness of the world. In this respect, *Portrait* undermines the presupposition that “signifieds” can be isolated and separated from their signifiers, a subversive procedure which will be radicalized in *Finnegans Wake*. Most significantly then, Joyce’s first novel relies on what could be termed as an essentially

¹⁰ Deane, “Joyce the Irishman,” 43.

¹¹ Deane, “Joyce the Irishman,” 43.

¹² See Weldon Thornton, *The Antimodernism of Joyce’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994). Thornton convincingly argues that Joyce regards his character ironically, depicting his quest for self-determination and simultaneously revealing that Stephen’s selfhood and the various images and allusions he uses to construct it has a public, cultural aspect beyond the reach of his own understanding.

¹³ Vicki Mahaffey, *Reauthorizing Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 73.

linguistic plot: language does not simply narrate but *performs* the story. As Deane points out, the plot in *Portrait* is designed so that it is “aggressively verbal, insisting on the linkages of words rather than that of events”.¹⁴

Different critics have written and spoken about the notion that, for Joyce, content cannot be dissociated from its linguistic form thus echoing Samuel Beckett's emblematic statement: “his writing is not *about* something, it *is* that something itself”.¹⁵ Consistent with his claim that language constitutes reality, in *Portrait* Joyce makes the two indistinguishable through the fusion of narrative materials and narrative voice, and the blending of content and form.

In this respect, *Portrait*, like the rest of Joyce's fiction, expressly challenges the fundamental premise of translation: the notion that it is possible to transfer meaning and find equivalences between linguistic systems, the idea that other words can be used to substitute for what the original words stand for. The transgressive nature of Joyce's fiction overtly defies translation and its claim that a translation must reproduce the meaning of the original or that, in order to “make sense”, the translated text must relate the same experiences of the original text in *another* language. If to translate presupposes that meaning can be not only established independently from its form but also appropriately transferred into another linguistic system, then, with Joyce, this becomes an impossible task.¹⁶ Assuming that there is such a thing as the ideal translated text, it would function as a perfect replica, reproducing an experience identical to that of the original evoked in a different language. The problem is that, whereas translation relies on the principle that content can be detached from its linguistic form, in *Portrait* Joyce foregrounds the inextricable relationship between the two. Thus, the question is: can the verbal plot of *Portrait*, which is founded on the linkage of words rather than on causality of events, be evoked in translation? And can Stephen's relationship to a world of words be rendered in another language?

Fritz Senn, one of the most prolific and lucid commentators on Joyce's language, has argued for over forty years now, that because of Joyce's peculiar “handling of language”, “the translator can certainly consider himself grappling with difficulties that he never experienced before”.¹⁷ As Senn has demonstrated in his many essays and books, the difficulty for translators lies precisely in the fact that in Joyce's fiction language and story are intertwined in a reciprocal way. Thus, Senn has claimed that Joyce's linguistic peculiarities become the ultimate challenge for the translator: “the function of words, phrases, metaphors and all the rest are multiple and complex [. . .] Joyce's style is characterized by an ‘overdetermination’ that translators can hardly emulate”.¹⁸

Other scholars have discussed the problems of making Joyce's texts available to readers through translation in similar terms. Jolanta Wawrzycka has thus argued that

¹⁴ Seamus Deane, “Joyce and Nationalism,” in *James Joyce: New Perspectives*, ed. Colin MacCabe (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), 173.

¹⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (London: Faber, 1972), 15.

¹⁶ I explore the problematics of translating Joyce in the context of the modernist text's concern with the indeterminacy of meaning and the materiality of language in my “The Untranslatability of Modernism,” in *Modernism*, ed. Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007), 676-93.

¹⁷ Fritz Senn, “Joycean Translatitudes: Aspects of Translation,” in *Litters from Aloft*, ed. Roland Bates and Harry J. Pollock, (Tulsa: University of Tulsa Press, 1971), 27.

¹⁸ Senn, “Joycean Translatitudes,” 29.

ideally, translating Joyce would entail what she has termed “trans-semantification”, a sort of “re-linguaging” which “in spite of replacing lexical surface of a literary work, manages to attend to sound, rhythm and the semantic coloration of words, phrases, and syntactical units as well as to take cognizance of cultural references embedded in lexical structures”.¹⁹ Likewise, Patrick O’Neill has pointed that the major difficulties in translating Joyce arise from a multiplicity of combinations of aspects such as: pervasive indeterminacy, verbal networks, paranomasia, witticism, word play, pervasive allusiveness to a specific cultural matrix, noise and irrelevance, linguistic and inter-linguistic nuances and textual experiments.²⁰

Certainly, *Portrait* is saturated with puns, songs, rhymes, riddles and observations about words which offer an obvious resistance to be transferred into other languages. The main challenge for the translator of *Portrait* is to render simultaneously the surface narrative of the *künstlerroman* and the meaning that depends on the peculiarities of Joyce’s style, specifically the implications derived from the several levels of interdependence between different words in the text and between words and their external contexts. In his commentary on the idiosyncratic language patterns in *Portrait* Deane states:

In *Portrait*, Stephen Dedalus is, so to speak, quoted in existence by nursery rhymes, political squabbles, church doctrine, literature. Then, he responds by quoting on his own initiative—Aquinas, the villanelle, the diary. Possessed by language, he comes to possess it. Pateresque cadences and the vocabulary of Irish nationalism and of Irish Catholicism combine to form a new pattern, Stephen’s, not reducible to these component parts, yet certainly including them.²¹

Ultimately, the question remains whether it is possible for a translation to evoke Stephen’s meaningful linguistic patterns, in particular in relation to his anxiety about “nationality, language and religion” (*P* 203) which Joyce himself evoked through his persistent foregrounding of style and linguistic suggestiveness. Thus, my choice of specific passages from the 1926 Spanish translation of *Portrait* does not aim at offering an exhaustive study of the translation of the novel in the Spanish language, or at providing an evaluation of the translated text in order to discuss “deficiencies”. Rather, my intention is to analyze, through the comparison of individual passages and words, to what extent the translator’s choices can aspire to become repository of the tensions and instabilities which the language of *Portrait* exhibits.

Joyce’s aesthetic innovations were discussed enthusiastically throughout the twenties and thirties in the pages of renowned journals edited in Madrid and the geographic periphery as well, particularly in the aftermath of the publication of *Ulysses* in Paris in 1922.²² Nevertheless, the Irish writer seems to have been approached with a cautious reticence, mainly because of his “questionable morality” in the face of certain conservative Spanish sensibilities of the time. This is at least what one may conclude from the fact that the 1926 translation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, first

¹⁹ Jolanta W. Wawrzycka, “‘Tell Us in Plain Words’: Textual Implications of Re-Linguaging Joyce,” in *Joyce and/in Translation*, ed. Rosa M. Bolletieri Bosinelli and Ira Torresi (Roma: Bulzoni, 2007), 34.

²⁰ Patrick O’Neill, *Polyglot Joyce: Fictions of Translation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 70-71.

²¹ Deane, “Joyce and Nationalism,” 179.

²² See Alberto Lázaro, “A Survey of the Spanish Critical Response to James Joyce,” in *The Reception of James Joyce in Europe* vol. 2, ed. Geert Lernout and Wim Van Mierlo (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), 422-433.

published as *El artista adolescente (retrato)*²³ and translated by the poet Dámaso Alonso, appeared under the pseudonym of Alfonso Donado.²⁴ The original edition of the translation (incidentally the first translation of a complete work by Joyce into Spanish) also included a prologue written by the critic Antonio Marichalar, based on his own *James Joyce en su laberinto*, which had first appeared in 1924 in the emblematic journal *Revista de Occidente*.²⁵

Both Alonso's translation and Marichalar's prologue represented not only a pioneering approach to Joyce's early novel in the Peninsula but also functioned as an authoritative reading that was to exert an important influence on subsequent generations of readers. Although the prologue includes references to Joyce's biography, addresses his anti-traditionalism and his modern sensibility against the inescapable background of *Ulysses* (with numerous passages devoted to an extended discussion of the innovative use of the interior monologue in *Portrait*), it is nevertheless the concern with the novel's treatment of Catholicism that dominates most of the introduction. Marichalar proffers a portrait of the novel as a representation of a world irreverently "grotesque" yet, in his view, essentially "Christian" at heart.²⁶

The obsession with absolving *Portrait* on the basis of its being a religious novel seems to have turned into a major concern for Marichalar. Significantly, Stephen Deadalus' *non serviam* has been consistently read as illustrative of Joyce's own sense of disenchantment with the Catholic church in Ireland ("the portrait of the renegade Catholic artist as hero"²⁷). Likewise, the early reviewers in Britain, Ireland and the US hailed the work as original though burdened with "coarseness" and "vulgarity", and they explicitly condemned Joyce's irreverent treatment of religion²⁸. However, in the context of church-dominated Spain in the 1920s, the critical response to Joyce's novel remained tributary to the ideology of Catholicism. In this respect, the Spanish introduction contributes to the "rewriting" of *A Portrait* as a "catholic" novel and puts into practice an interest strategy of domestication/manipulation: by making Joyce's

²³ This translation has been reprinted numerous times under a different title. The initial version, which eventually became *Retrato del artista adolescente*, has canonized Joyce's novel in the Spanish-speaking world as "Portrait of the adolescent artist", thus missing the effect of the qualification "as a young man" on which Joyce insisted. See David Pierce, "Titles, Translation and Orientation: The Case of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*," in *Joyce and/in Translation*, ed. Rosa M^a Bolletieri Bosinelli and Ira Torresi (Roma: Bulzoni, 2007), 17. Joyce himself objected to the title in his letter of reply to the translator. See Alan M. Cohn, "The Spanish Translation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*," *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 36 (1963): 407.

²⁴ Critics have suggested that Alonso, who translated the novel during his academic period at Cambridge when he was twenty eight years old, wished to relegate his translation work to a secondary role in order not to handicap his chosen career as a writer. It has also been suggested that the translator might have opted for anonymity wishing not to offend those, including his own mother, who would have abhorred the fact that he could lend his name to the propagation of certain unorthodox moral ideas. See Lázaro, "A Survey," 426.

²⁵ See James Joyce, *Retrato del Artista Adolescente. Gente de Dublín*, prólogo de Antonio Marichalar, trad. Alfonso Donado (*sic*) (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1998).

²⁶ Certainly, his approach often becomes an obvious attempt to account for the work's "obscenity" and "heresy" before a primarily Catholic readership. See Antonio Marichalar, "Prologo." In *James Joyce, Retrato del Artista Adolescente. Gente de Dublín*, prólogo de Antonio Marichalar, trad. Alfonso Donado (*sic*) (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1998), xiv-xxiv.

²⁷ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 148.

²⁸ See "The Early Response to *A Portrait of the Artist: Comments and Reviews*," in *James Joyce: Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Morris Beja (London: Macmillan, 1973), 74-80.

image fit in with the dominant ideology of the receiving culture, the introduction to the translation makes a clear attempt to negotiate the “safe” inscription of a novel intended for a (mainly) Catholic readership.²⁹

When we first meet Stephen in *Portrait*, we see him reacting to the prescriptive norms of the Irish Catholic church, whose authority he attempts to escape from imaginatively, by concentrating on the sounds and words of his mother’s and Dante’s threat. Paradoxically, the imposing language of the warning (his mother’s words, “-O, Stephen will apologise” and Dante’s “-O, if not the eagles will come and pull out his eyes,”) inspire Stephen’s first artistic creation:

*Pull out his eyes,
Apologise,
Apologise,
Pull out his eyes.*

*Apologise,
Pull out his eyes,
Pull out his eyes.
Apologise. (8)*

The basic principle at work here is the appropriation and repetition of words in a simple structure that playfully echoes and quotes the religious vocabulary of his elders. Yet, more importantly, in the larger context of the novel, the child’s symmetrical arrangement of words, the foregrounding of sound and the imaginative borrowing of language announce the protagonist’s incipient artistic method. Stephen repossesses language: by quoting, he combines the old words to form new patterns. The main challenge for the translator here is not only to render simultaneously the sound, rhythm and the semantic range of Stephen’s language games, but also be mindful that, since language in *Portrait* always performs a specific function and meaning arises from the interdependence between words themselves and words and their contexts, any minor or seemingly insignificant change may result in a substantial alteration of the verbal plot.

In this particular case, Stephen’s first poetic lines invoke the language that identifies him within the Irish Catholic context and simultaneously foreshadow his future attempts to become an artist through “forgery”. Derek Attridge has noted that in Stephen’s lines “words are progressively emptied of their meaning, through repetition, rhyming, and rhythmicization”, and that the utterance reveals “the speech of the linguistic community rather than of a single individual exploiting the possibilities of language”.³⁰

²⁹ I am invoking here André Lefevere’s notion of translation as a pivotal mechanism in the transference of ideology. For Lefevere, the translation of literature, whether inspired by an ideological or an aesthetic program or produced as a reaction against political or stylistic constraints, always functions as a type of rewriting. See André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). I am also indebted to Lawrence Venuti’s notion of “domestication”, the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist in the target language. See Lawrence Venuti, “Translation, Community, Utopia,” *The Translation Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 468-488.

³⁰ Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 69.

In Spanish, Alonso's rendering of Stephen's poetic arrangement is interesting, considering that the translator was himself at the time a young man and an incipient poet.³¹

*Le sacarán los ojos.
Pide perdón,
Pide perdón
de hinojos.*

*Le sacarán el corazón.
Pide perdón.
Pide perdón.*³²

These lines show that Alonso was particularly concerned with preserving sound and rhyme at the expense of other Joycean elements. Thus, he introduces words like *hinojos* and *corazón* which further reinforce the rhythmic patterns of end lines, yet these are lexical choices absent from Stephen's composition. The main problem lies in the fact that whereas Stephen meaningfully employs pre-existent verbal material and transforms it through creative repetition, the Spanish version of the poem does not encourage the recognition of derivation as a compositional principle, mainly because new words and syntax are introduced. An added problem is that the unusual expression *de hinojos*, meaning "to be on one's knees", denotes a highly formal use of language, unlikely to be used by a child. And likewise, *le sacarán el corazón* ("they will pull out his heart") is a free departure from the words Stephen hears and transforms; thus in Spanish, the dramatic aspect of the warning is diluted by the absence of the powerful reference to "eyes" repeated four times in the original.

Senn has observed that the main topic of the opening section of *Portrait* is the process of learning "to master words".³³ One of the most subtle and, therefore, most difficult aspect to translate is Stephen's particular weaving of associations and correspondences between certain "first experiences" and the words that he attaches to them. The use of the adjective *nice*, for example, which he first associates with his mother—"His mother had a nicer smell than his father" (*P* 7) — is invoked later in situations which he finds positive and pleasant—"It was nice and warm to see the lights in the castle"; "It would be nice to lie on the heartrug before the fire" (*P* 10). The same word, but to different effect, is used by Dante during Christmas dinner party — "Nice language for any catholic to use" (*P* 31) — and later repeated after she hears Mr Casey's story of spitting tobacco into the eyes of a pious Irish woman—"Very nice! Ha! Very nice" (*P* 37). Ill at ease, Stephen thinks: "It was not nice about the spit in the woman's eye" (*P* 37).

The Spanish translation is not consistent in its rendition of the adjective *nice*, which is substituted by different expressions in each of the above occurrences (except in the case of Dante whose *nice* is translated as "bonito" in both occasions; (Sp *P* 34; 41). Although on the level of the surface narrative the reader can easily follow Stephen's encounter with different realities he associates and catalogues according to the

³¹ Alonso, who had already published his first volume of poems in 1921, was to become not only a distinguished scholar but also one of the most representative poets of his generation. See Alan M. Cohn, "The Spanish Translation," 406.

³² James Joyce, *Retrato del Artista Adolescente* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1978), 8. Hereafter Sp *P*

³³ Fritz Senn, *Joyce's Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 43.

impressions he receives, on the level of the verbal plot Stephen's process of learning to master words is far from being recreated. Alonso replaces Joycean repetition with synonyms, mainly because in Spanish it is virtually impossible to find an adjective which corresponds to all the different uses of *nice*. Consequently, the revelation which takes place in Joyce's *Portrait* at the level of language, both through the child's repetition of the same words and his realization that they may have contradictory meanings, is absent from the translation.

The choice of the "right" word for the translation is often not a matter of correctness but rather a question of deciding how to balance several effects. For the young Stephen words are almost material, full of physical suggestiveness: "*Suck* was a queer word [...] the dirty water went down through the hole in the basin. And when it had all gone down slowly the hole in the basin had made a sound like that: *suck*. Only louder." (*P* 11; emphasis added). For Stephen the artist, words can express his final artistic commitment but only through a subversive repossession of language: "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to *forge* in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (*P* 252-53; emphasis added).

In the first case, the Spanish translation attempts to reproduce Stephen's association of hearing in the word "suck" the very sound of the action it defines. The choice of the Spanish word "chupito"—"Tú eres el *chupito* de McGlade" (*Sp P* 12) — is justified because of the possibility it gives the translator to emulate onomatopoeically the sound of water going down the hole of the basin: "chup" (*Sp P* 12). However, this rather unusual word, certainly not easily recognizable as an insult, is far from replicating the ugliness which the implications of the sound "suck" have for Stephen: "The fellow called Simon Moonan that name [...] But the sound was ugly," (*P* 11). As Attridge has observed, "suck" possesses for the child "an aura of the forbidden, the sinful and the unclean for reasons that derive from the culture to which he is becoming assimilated".³⁴

This is but one of the numerous instances when a single word becomes the focus of Stephen's attention. The challenge for the translator is insurmountable; translation has to reproduce the protagonist's disquieting encounter with a word's peculiar physicality as he probes its multiple meanings by attaching it to different contexts. Joyce exploits here the child's acute sense of the physical properties of language as an anticipation of the idea that reverberates through the whole novel: the notion that language employs fixed signifiers which nevertheless have diverse and complex interconnections. Thus, Stephen's early experiences of disconcertment as he explores what lies behind the arbitrary use of words are later followed by his painful awareness of the artificially "acquired" nature of his "speech": "home, Christ, ale, master [...] I cannot speak these words without unrest of spirit" (*P* 189). As Senn reminds us, "[e]very translator is conscious of how many things one's own language does not care to name or even recognize".³⁵ *Portrait* makes it frustratingly obvious that, in Senn's words,

there are no equivalents ever, neither for extreme and ad hoc words like 'bullockbefriending' nor for simple everyday ones like 'home, ale, master' that Stephen Dedalus already considered to be different if said by an Irish or an English speaker.³⁶

³⁴ Attridge, *Joyce Effects*, 61.

³⁵ Senn, *Joyce's Dislocations*, 26.

³⁶ Senn, *Joyce's Dislocations*, 26.

Joyce's remarks about linguistic dispossession in the Irish context and the ironic references to the role of the artist also resist translation because they point to linguistic contrasts and tensions which are peculiar to Stephen's own anxiety as an Irish speaker of English ("Is that called a funnel? Is it not a tundish?"; *P* 188) and are impossible to recreate in a different context. Furthermore, the main obstacle for the translator lies in the fact that Stephen's usage often defies transparent communication as it aims at exploiting the native reader's awareness of his own linguistic limits. Thus, whereas the verb *forge* in Stephen's final declaration expresses the paradoxical nature of art in the Irish context by simultaneously referring to both an original and derivative act, the translation disrupts such possibility. The Spanish "forjar" ("*forjar* en la fragua de mi espíritu, la conciencia increada de mi raza"; *Sp P* 288) cancels the interrelationship between the two possible meanings of English *forge*, "make" and "fake", as in Spanish it is only used to define the work of the blacksmith and implies the original act of creation.

The loss of overtones and ambiguities is inherent to the translation process, but the fact that the Spanish translation of *Portrait* cannot convey the semantic ambiguity of certain expressions results in the neutralization of the political power of Joyce's language and style; in other words, it cancels the strategies of ironical interrogation which the novel relies on as it suspends connections and associations between words. As I have tried to demonstrate, *Portrait* derives meaning precisely through a complex pattern of images and symbols that reverberate through recurrent words that translation often fails to recreate.

This happens, for instance, to the expression *unfettered freedom* in the phrase: "To discover the mode of life or of art whereby your spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom" (*P* 246). This statement significantly echoes a previous image of Stephen before the "droll statue of the national poet of Ireland" as he "was striving this way and that to free his feet from the fetters of the reformed conscience" (*P* 180). In Alonso's version, "unfettered freedom" becomes "ilimitada libertad" (*Sp P* 279), literally "unlimited freedom", a semantic choice which appropriately refers to Stephen's urges but prevents the reader from establishing the inter-textual connection with the previous lexical occurrence of "fetters", which the Spanish writer translates as *cadenas*, i.e. "chains" (*Sp P* 202). Again, whereas this choice of the word is semantically appropriate, it prevents the reader from rediscovering the significant identification between the two episodes which the original text strongly encourages.

Scholars like Deane have argued that for Joyce the relationship between literature and politics "was not mediated through a party" because, "for him the act of writing became an act of rebellion".³⁷ Thus, Joyce's investigation of how words operate in *Portrait* through Stephen's encounter with language ultimately verbalizes his own anxieties about becoming an artist within the highly politicized Irish context. Joyce, like Stephen, consistently refused the limitations imposed upon him by the Church, the Irish literary tradition, and the English language: —"You talk to me of nationality, language, religion"— which he transforms into the very forces of his writing: "I shall try to fly by those nets" (*P* 203). Paradoxically, the language that Joyce forges in his urge to express himself freely before the world becomes the translator's (imprisoning) net.

³⁷ Deane, "Joyce and Nationalism," 175.

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Plasa traducătorului: lumea drept cuvânt în *Portret al artistului la tinerețe*

Pornind de la ideea că primul roman al lui Joyce are ca principală preocupare limba și este în principal un roman despre limbă, articolul discută provocările pentru traducători lansate de intriga verbală din *Portret al artistului la tinerețe*. Eseul se concentrează asupra acelor aspecte ale *Potretului* care în mod expres se opun principalelor premise ale traducerii: anume că este posibil să se găsească echivalențe între sistemele lingvistice. Exemple selectate din traducerea spaniolă a romanului, publicată în 1926, oferă comparații între pasaje individuale și cuvinte care ilustrează în ce măsură alegerile traducătorului devin purtătoare ale tensiunilor sau instabilităților pe care limba din *Portret* le expune.