

# FROM TRANSLATION MODELS AND MODEL TRANSLATIONS TO TRANSLATION AS A MODEL: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSLATION STUDIES AND TEACHING\*

By Brian Mallet

El recién desarrollo de las ciencias de la traducción ha conferido una nueva identidad a esta disciplina: ya no se concibe como un producto sino más bien como un proceso. Las consecuencias de esta nueva concepción deben de tenerse en cuenta al elaborar programas de formación en traducción tanto en el ámbito curricular como en el metodológico. Así mismo, la calidad de la enseñanza de la traducción se ve transformada al considerar la traducción, por una parte, como metáfora y modelo en sí, y por otra, como un proceso abierto, democrático y creativo.

Palabras claves: historia de la traducción, traducción como proceso, enseñanza de la traducción, traducción postcolonial.

Avec le développement des sciences de la traduction, cette discipline a récemment acquis une nouvelle identité: c'est un processus et non plus un produit. Les conséquences de cette nouvelle conception doivent être prises en compte dans l'élaboration de programmes de formation en traduction, tant au niveau des cursus qu'au niveau méthodologique. De plus, en la considérant d'une part métaphore et modèle à part entière, et d'autre part processus infini, démocratique et créatif, la qualité de son enseignement ne peut qu'en être enrichie.

Mots-clés: histoire de la traduction, traduction comme processus, enseignement de la traduction, traduction postcoloniale.

The development of translation studies in recent years has allowed the discipline to acquire a new sense of identity. The focus has shifted away from the translation "product" to the translation "process". The implications of these developments and trends need to be taken into account at curricular and methodological levels in the establishment of university programmes in translation studies. The quality of translation teaching can be enhanced by seeing translation as a metaphor and model of its own right and as an open-ended process which is democratic, participatory and creative.

Key words: history of translation, translation as a process, translation teaching, post-colonial translation.



## TRANSLATIONS HISTORIES

Perhaps one of the most useful results of the dramatic development of translation studies in recent years is that we now have a much better knowledge and understanding of the history of translation at various levels of complexity. There is now a consensus among translators and theorists that “translating” means different things at different periods and in different cultures. We also have a greater awareness that this “history” is in fact plural and can be discussed from various perspectives at the diachronic or synchronic levels. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere<sup>(1)</sup> have defined the main historical ingredients of the Western tradition of translation in terms of three emblematic models: the so-called Jerome model, which has at its centre the idea of fidelity to the original based on interlinear transfer, with the latter being reduced to an essentially linguistic process. St. Jerome’s translation of the Vulgate set the standards of much translation in the West up until about 200 years ago. The second ingredient, which historically predates the Jerome paradigm, is the Horace model, in which the translator, or more exactly the “interpreter”, was engaged in a process of negotiation not only between two languages, but between two clients. In this model, although the interests of those customers took precedence over

any predetermined idea of the “sacredness” of the text, the negotiation between the parties was not one of full equality: Latin remained the privileged language, much like the role of English in today’s globalised market, with the translation being slanted to take account of its superior interests.

The third, more recent ingredient in the Western tradition was codified by Friedrich Scheleiermacher in his essay *On the different ways of translating*<sup>(2)</sup>. Scheleiermacher emphasised the need for the translator to “foreignise” translation in a process which denied any privileged treatment of the target language and which sought to preserve the alterity of the source language or culture.

The relative importance of these three ingredients – which have in a sense always been there, albeit implicitly or unconsciously – has varied over time in accordance with prevailing conditions and needs, and has formed the basis of a number of recent “histories” of specific facets of the translation process, with biblical translation and the medieval period receiving increasing attention. Thus Jeannette Beer<sup>(3)</sup>, in her study of medieval translators, emphasises how structural equivalence between source and translation was not a primary criterion in the Middle Ages. Far more important was the appropriateness of the transla-

tion to its target audience, so that “a treatise properly could become poetry, epic became romance, and sermons drama – or vice versa”. Similarly, in his analysis of translation activity in medieval Ireland, Michael Cronin<sup>(4)</sup> points out that “changes, omissions, bold adaptations of source material to the cultural tastes and linguistic habits of the target audience were not automatically signs of linguistic incompetence but a natural response to a translation paradigm of the period”.

Another perspective which is now acquiring its own history is that of gender in particular as regards the share in translation production of texts originally written by women, as well as translations by women<sup>(5)</sup>. Other scholars have focused on so-called watershed periods in the Western tradition, such as the shift from epic to romance in the twelfth century, the development of vernacular literatures and the decline of Latin in the Renaissance, the emergence of new nations in Central and Eastern Europe in the late eighteenth century or the post-colonial legacy in Latin America and Africa.

We know about the virtual absence of translation into Greek during the classical period (a situation curiously echoed in the case of present-day Chinese), which contrasts with the enormous bursts of

translation activity characterising other periods of great literary creativity, as in Elizabethan England, and we now have a much better picture, for example, of the critical role played by the translation of Greek scientific texts, through Arabic, in the development of the scientific revolution in Western Europe which followed the *Voyages of Discovery*.

Other “histories” include the systematic study of observations about translation made by writers, linguistics and translators themselves at various periods and places – from the casual remarks of Cicero and Horace, through the letters of St. Jerome and Luther down to full-blown essays and books on the subject, such as those of Dolet (1540) and Tyler (1790), as well as changing views on the role and status of the translator in society at large. Attention has also been given to the tendency to refer to translation through metaphor or simile, with certain images seeming to characterise specific periods or writers (such as the descriptions of translation as a “mirror” or “portrait” in the eighteenth century, in terms of property in the nineteenth century and more recently, as a “woman”, with the act of translating being compared to an “orgasm” (*jouissance* in Canadian feminism) or an act of penetration and breaking of the hymen (Derrida). One of the most interesting of these images has been developed by



Brazilian writers and theorists, in the wake of the *modernista* movement, in which translation is seen as an act of cannibalism, where the translator devours the source and digests only those parts which can help nurture the growth of something new and original. This revalorization of the cannibalistic concept contrasts strongly with the earlier Eurocentric definition of the term.

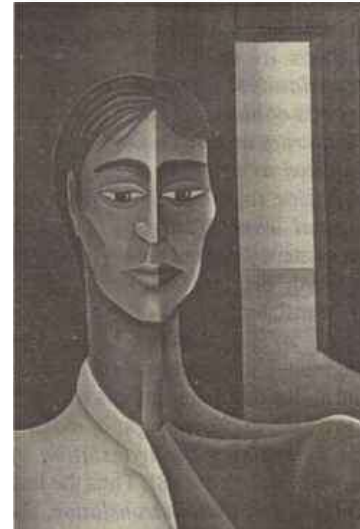
The heightened awareness of the history of translation in the West has also been accompanied by an interest in the way translation has functioned in other cultures. André Lefevere has done some pioneering work in this field, in particular as regards the nature and role of translation activity in China. Although in both the Western and Chinese traditions translation activity seems to have begun with the interpretation of spoken, rather than the translation of written texts, the Chinese tradition of translation has on the whole remained closer to the interpreting situation, with less importance being attached to the concept of "fidelity" that became the cornerstone of Western thinking on the subject. Chinese translators translated with a certain audience in mind and rhetorically adapted their translations to that audience, which once again reminds us of the practice in medieval Europe<sup>(6)</sup>.

The picture has been further enriched by

the growing amount of statistical data being collated on the volume and type of translated material, including the date and place of publication of the original text and its translation(s), language combination, authorship, etc. Richard Jacquemond<sup>(7)</sup> has shown that only 1-2 per cent of works translated into western or northern languages are from languages used in eastern or southern countries, while 98-99 per cent of works translated into eastern or southern languages are from languages used in the north or west. In a recent article published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, J. Abboushi Dallal<sup>(8)</sup> reports how international publishing practices can sometimes actually encourage foreign, and in particular non-Western authors, to write in ways which are likely to appeal to foreign audiences as a means of increasing their chances of being translated. She mentions in particular the case of the recent "novelistic" tradition in the Arab countries, where (with the exception of the works of Mahfouz), the novel has never been a popular form of literature. Similarly, a highly successful translation of any kind of "novel" will often be followed by the publication of translations of similar kinds of works (as occurred following the success of *The Name of the Rose*).

As regards specific facts and figures, Lawrence Venuti<sup>(9)</sup> has noted that while

ESCINDIDO 7. Serie "Escindido"  
(1993. Óleo. 70 x 50 cm.).  
Marta Elena Arango P.



British and United States book production increased fourfold into English in those countries remained at approximately 2% and 4% of the total respectively. In France, the share of translated books in total book production fluctuated at between 8% and 12% during the period, while in Italy, the figure was around 25% (with more than half of the translations being made from English). If we include periodicals, newspapers and other miscellaneous kinds of materials, the figures are substantially higher. In Brazil, where

translation has always been of paramount importance, in the 1990s 80% of all material printed in the country, from user manuals to literary works, has been translated<sup>(10)</sup>. Similarly, data differentiated by country or author also reveal some interesting perspectives on the questions of who or what is being translated by whom and why. In a paper presented to the 29<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the American Translators' Association in 1988, Michael Scott Doyle reported that out of a list of 190 "Hispanic" writers represented by 140 titles in English translation in the United States, 9 authors (Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Jose Donoso, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Marquez, Juan Goytisolo, Manuel Puig and Mario Vargas Llosa) accounted for 77 of the 140 titles in English. Nine from a list of 190 writers (4.7%) constituted 55% of the translations into English<sup>(11)</sup>. In the case of book reviews of translations, Margaret Sayers Peden, in a 1992 survey of translation reception, noted that the number of reviews between 1965 and 1988 of works by Mario Vargas Llosa form an inverted pyramid, from 1 in 1965 to 26 in 1987-88.

*"Vargas Llosa exploded in English-language consciousness in 1986; prior to that year, 49 reviews appeared in the sources I consulted; 43 reviews were published in 1986 alone"*<sup>(12)</sup>.



Nicholas Shakespeare, in an article published in *The Daily Telegraph* (London) last year, declared that Garcia Marquez was the world's most important living novelist – an extravagant claim, no doubt, even by someone with the name of the bard. But the fact remains that the books of Garcia Marquez are regular best-sellers in England. To whom or to what should we ascribe the immense success of these stories in England (or elsewhere in the non-Spanish speaking world)? To the literary skills and human qualities to the original author? To those of his editors and translators? To the marketing flair of his agent in Barcelona or the carefully orchestrated publicity and campaigns elsewhere? To our own stereotypes about Latin American reality and our largely created needs for role models and success stories, for brilliant exceptions which also serve to confirm the general rule and comfort our egos? The list of questions is potentially endless. But these are questions which must necessarily engage the interest of the translator, since they will determine in one way or another the way translations are carried out.

Lawrence Venuti has also come up with some interesting data on the current legal status of translated texts, based on a careful reading of copyright law which places strict limitations on a translator's control of the translated text, and ensures

that translation projects are driven by publishers rather than translators<sup>(13)</sup>. The Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, as revised in Paris in 1971, stipulates that "*translations, adaptations, arrangements of music or other alteration of a literary or artistic work, shall be protected as original works without prejudice to the copyright of the original work*" (article 2(3)). The inconsistency evident here in the use of the word "*original*" allows the text to give translators protection in respect of their "*original work*", but the "*originality*" here is clearly not of the same kind as that of foreign authors who still enjoy "*the exclusive right of making and authorising the translation of their works*" (article 8). Thus the law "*curtails creativity in translation, the invention of translation projects and methods, as well as the creativity in literature that is inspired by the availability of foreign works in inventive translations*"<sup>(14)</sup>.

### TRANSLATION MODELS AND MODEL TRANSLATIONS

Latin made a distinction between *translatio linguarum*, the translation of language, *translatio studii*, the translation of knowledge, and *translatio imperii*, the translation of empire. Until

recently, almost all discussion of "translation" in the West has focused on the first of these three kinds, i.e. on language, with the ability to translate being seen as a developed form of the ability to understand and read a foreign language. It was in the 1930s, in the wake of Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, that studies on translation began to move increasingly towards linguistics<sup>(15)</sup>. The first period of linguistic-based translation thinking – with its focus on equivalence and the primacy of the world as a unit of translation – is

associated with the work of Eugene Nida in the United States (*Toward a science of translation* (1964) and Andrei V. Fedorov in the Soviet Union.

Nida developed the technique of "componential analysis" to gauge the degree of equivalence between words and to ensure their correct translation, with words being split up into their components. The classic example is that of "bachelor = male + unmarried". As Lefevere points out, the componential technique is one of the few linguistics-based concepts of continuing immediate use to practising translators. In the Nida model, the transfer from source language to target language involves a process of

source language analysis and target language restructuring, although the apparent simplicity of the model is belied, as Susan Bassnett has noted, by the complexities posed at the analysis and restructuring stages by even such apparently straightforward terms such as "yes" and "hello" in translation between Indo-European languages<sup>(16)</sup>.

Nida was mainly concerned with the establishment of rules. Other linguistics-based analysis, like John C. Catford, turned their attention to the concept of

"translatability", with translation being seen as a "substitution" rather than "transference" of target language meanings for source language meanings.

Within the field of contrastive linguistics, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) and Peter Newmark (1987) focused on a series of equivalent grammatical structures between specific languages – French and English in the case of the former and French, German and English in the case of the latter – as well as lexical procedures such as transference, literal translation, calque, modulation and adaptation<sup>(17)</sup>. But it was the realisation that a sentence is always more than just a string of words, and a text is always more than a string of

*But a theory of translation, in order to acquire the scientific status and authority of say the law of gravity, must itself be dependent on the formulation of a comprehensive theory of language, which in turn requires the construction of a theory of meaning. And it is the "meaning" of a text which is without doubt a translator's most difficult challenge.*

translation being seen as a "substitution" rather than "transference" of target language meanings for source language meanings.

Within the field of contrastive linguistics, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) and Peter Newmark (1987) focused on a series of equivalent grammatical structures between specific languages – French and English in the case of the former and French, German and English in the case of the latter – as well as lexical procedures such as transference, literal translation, calque, modulation and adaptation<sup>(17)</sup>. But it was the realisation that a sentence is always more than just a string of words, and a text is always more than a string of



equivalent sentences, which led to the second stage of the linguistic-based translation model; text linguistics. Here the unit of translation was not the sentence wrenched from its context, but the text as a whole, not an isolated verbal construct, but "as an attempt at communication that functions in a certain way in a certain situation or culture and may not work with the same degree of success in another situation or culture"<sup>(18)</sup>. Although this model provided a useful functional input to the study of translation, it tended to be accompanied by the establishment of text typologies and a separation between "literary" and "non-literary" texts. In other words, it emphasised the functional element involved in translation production, but refused to abandon the concept of equivalence: it wanted a translation to "function" as the "equivalent" of its source text in a different culture or situation.

As Venuti has emphatically pointed out in his recent study of *The scandals of translation*, the basic assumption of all linguistics-oriented approaches to translation is that language is an instrument of communication which is used according to a system of rules, with the most worrisome feature of such approaches being their attempt to establish a "scientific" theory or model of translation<sup>(19)</sup>. But a theory of

translation, in order to acquire the scientific status and authority of say the law of gravity, must itself be dependent on the formulation of a comprehensive theory of language, which in turn requires the construction of a theory of meaning. And it is the "meaning" of a text which is without doubt a translator's most difficult challenge, with the negotiation of any of the other remaining hurdles (such as decisions about "how to translate closely" and "how closely to translate") being dependent on the translator's "understanding" of what the text "means".

Paradoxically, the linguistics-based approach to translation theory and practice may also have helped marginalise the activity even further by its insistence on value-free translation and its reluctance to acknowledge the difficulties of separating facts from values. In this respect, even the conceptualisation of translation activity into theories and models may itself be said to be an attempt to control the behaviour of others, since formulations are always interpretations, and nothing can ever be said to be merely a "matter of fact".

Alternatives to the linguistics-based models (or to the hermeneutic approach to translation advocated by George Steiner, for whom translation is famously an "exact art") began to emerge in the

1970s, with the 1976 Louvain Colloquium on Literature and Translation being generally accepted as marking the foundation of "translation studies". Theory in this recent period can be schematically divided into three main successive but confluent currents: the rise of polysystems theory (or descriptive translation studies/manipulation theory) in the Benelux countries and Israel in the late 1970s *skopos/Handlung* theory in Germany in the mid-1980s and the subsequent emergence in the early 1990s of post-colonial theory, particularly in the United States<sup>(20)</sup>. Polysystems theory is interested in large cultural systems, in the target text circulating in a polysystem of cultural standards and resources, in the description and explanation of the domestic "acceptability" of a translation and the ways in which various shifts constitute a type of equivalence which conforms to domestic values at a given historical time. *Skopos* theory emphasises the social functions and interactions of translation activity in real situations, rather than in the abstract terms of text-based equivalence, and highlights the "deductions" resulting from a translator's practical experience. Post-

colonial theory, which is in the process of becoming a veritable industry in the United States, focuses on the complexities of intercultural exchange, barriers and conflicts, and follows on from various theoretical developments and radical changes in literary and cultural studies related to post-structuralism, feminism, marxism and psychoanalysis.

Thus the "histories" of translation also include the history of the various translation models and typologies which have been put forward at different times to explain what translation is, how it functions and how best to "do" it, many of which continue to generate interest in the field of translation studies. However, this interest has, to some extent, migrated away from the models themselves towards the pattern of their cumulative

*this interest has, to some extent, migrated away from the models themselves towards the pattern of their cumulative effects, one of which has been the realisation that we have in a sense been both putting the cart before the horse and looking a gift horse in the mouth by focusing so much attention on the construction of translation models, when so much more might be gained from viewing translation itself as a model in its own right.*

effects, one of which has been the realisation that we have in a sense been both putting the cart before the horse and looking a gift horse in the mouth by focusing so much attention on the construction

of translation models, when so much more might be gained from viewing translation itself as a model in its own right.



Although much remains to be done in documenting the various histories of translation activity, we are now familiar with some of the key components and determining factors

of those histories; more importantly, perhaps, we are also more conscious of the need for and value of such documentation. History, like culture, is an essential ingredient in our sense of identity, and there is no doubt that the discipline of "translation studies" has now acquired an identity of its own. Translation activity is no longer seen as a marginalised sub-category of comparative literature or applied linguistics, but as something which is capable of serving as a model in its own right for exploring a broad range of transfers of a para-linguistic kind. How can we define this sense of acquired identity and what practical consequences does it have for the teaching of translation?

### TRANSLATION TEACHING

The teaching of translation – the subject of this international seminar – is a thorny and complex area for a number of reasons, beginning with the role which

translation has traditionally played in the teaching of foreign languages. In this context, "translation" has a very precise and narrow pedagogical function. A

*The teaching of foreign languages is not the same thing as the teaching of the techniques of translation, and a study of the latter is not the same thing as an examination of the nature and function of translation activity in the production and evolution of a culture. Thus the way we view translation activity will necessarily affect the way we see the relationship between foreign language learning and teaching and "translation studies".*

student learning a foreign language is given a text to translate, but the exercise is mainly used to assess the student's knowledge of the source language (lexical, syntactical and other features) as reflected in the ability to transpose them into the target language. At no point in this traditional system was any emphasis placed on the transposition activity itself. And it is precisely because translation was (and sometimes still is) an intrinsic part of foreign language learning and teaching that it was rarely studied for its own sake.

A second related factor contributing to this subordinate role of translation is the way educational (and other) systems have come to make increasing use of translated texts in the teaching process. The Greek and Latin authors (currently undergoing a revival in the Anglo-Saxon publishing industry) are almost exclusively read in translation, as are the classics of Russian and other literatures, including many theatre texts (Ibsen, Brecht and so on). Here in Colombia,

for example, Cavafy is a well-known and highly respected poet: but who reads Cavafy in the "original"? Indeed, what readers are even conscious of the existence of an "original"?

The implications of all this are enormous as regards both the way we view translation activity and the role of "translation studies" in the university and society as a whole. The teaching of foreign languages is not the same thing as the teaching of the techniques of translation, and a study of the latter is not the same thing as an examination of the nature and function of translation activity in the production and evolution of a culture. Thus the way we view translation activity will necessarily affect the way we see the relationship between foreign language learning and teaching and "translation studies". For example, although translations has been a traditional exercise in the learning of foreign languages, should the teaching of foreign languages be one of the functions of a translation studies programme? There are of course programmes set up for the specific purpose of teaching the "tricks of the trade" and the fact that translation activity has been pursued over the centuries and in different cultures in a relatively "successful" manner suggests that translation techniques do exist and can be acquired. At a preliminary stage, perhaps for one or

two semesters, the teaching of such techniques could therefore be used as a useful yardstick for measuring and improving a student's linguistic proficiency. But the proficiency required applies of course to both source language and target language, and account must be taken of this fact in the teaching programme.

Should translation be studied at the undergraduate or postgraduate level? In much of continental Europe, including the Translation and Interpretation School (ETI) in Geneva, the former is the case; in the United Kingdom, on the other hand, preference has been given to a graduate-oriented approach, with universities offering a one year M.A. programme in translation studies. A related, although more specific question concerns the language "direction" in which students are required to translate. It can be very useful for students learning foreign languages to practice translation in both directions, i.e. from a foreign language into their mother tongue and vice versa. This is also a very helpful exercise for a student on a translation studies course. But the operative words here are "practice" and "exercise", since the objective of the professional translator should be to translate into his or her native tongue(s), except perhaps in exceptional and very specific circumstances. But once again, the



operative word here is “should”: in a country like Colombia, many translators – for a variety of reasons – work into languages which are not their native ones.

The way we view translation activity will also determine the role to be given to the teaching of “theory” in the translation programme. Translation is a discipline firmly rooted in practical application and practising translators have often questioned – or dismissed outright – the usefulness of theory in their day-to-day professional activity. As Jonathan Culler has pointed out, theory is often intimidating, a seemingly “*unbounded corpus of writings which is always being augmented (by)... the young and the restless*”<sup>(21)</sup>. But it is also important to distinguish between “theory”, as the static form and content of specific theories, and “theorizing”, which Douglas Robinson defines as the complex processes by which a person organizes loosely related insights into a pattern and then into a rule<sup>(22)</sup>. In this sense we all make use of theory every day of our lives, although we are for the most part unconscious of the process. It is in this connection that theory also has a more active and positive function, as a means of helping us to become more aware of things we are already doing unconsciously. A good example is Robinson’s own theory of the subliminal activity involved in the translation

process, as set forth in his very useful guide to *Becoming a translator*. According to Robinson, “professional translators shuttle back and forth between “subliminal” translation, which is fast and largely unconscious, and alert, analytical translation, which is slow and highly conscious. The former mode is made up of lots of experiences of the latter mode: every time you solve a problem slowly, painstakingly, analytically, it becomes easier to solve similar problems in the future, because you turn the analytical process into a subliminal one. Also, one of the things you “sublimate” is the sense that certain types of textual features cannot be handled subliminally: they set off “alarm bells” that bring you out of the “fast” mode and initiate the “slow” one.”<sup>(23)</sup>

Every translator will be familiar with the to-and-fro movement described by Robinson, the fact that some parts of a text seem almost to translate themselves without more ado, whilst others require and yet stubbornly resist intricate and detailed analysis. The model rightly emphasises the intuitive element involved in the translation process, and in particular, the fact that the instinctive identification of a potential pitfall is as least as important to the translator as its successful negotiation in a given situation.

Instinct is a word which crops up

frequently in the context of language and translation studies, as Stephen Pinker admirably demonstrated in a recent book<sup>(24)</sup>. For Charles Peirce, the American philosopher and founder of semiotics, instinct was the first element in a process completed by “experience” and “habit”, with instinct being defined as a general and unfocused sense of readiness. Another triad used by Peirce was that of abduction, induction and deduction, with the term “abduction”, which Peirce coined, referring to the act of an intuitive leap from unexplained data to a given hypothesis. Although we can assume that all the students on our translation programme have started out in life with a stock of basic instincts, many of which will have been subsequently developed, inductively and deductively, through experience and become habits, how do we know that they have what it takes to become professional translators? In other words, at what point does an instinct become what used to be called a “gift”, a special ability for a certain kind of activity? How can it be developed and brought to fruition?

To the first question is, of course, a simple though not very satisfactory answer: we do not know, although the fact that the students have joined our course in the first place might be a positive sign of some sorts, in so far as wanting to do

something is already a step towards actually doing it. To the other question there are a number of more substantial answers available, although their acceptance will depend once again on how we view the translation process in general and the purpose of translation programmes at the university level in particular.

The question of the extent to which a translation studies programme should or might also include foreign language teaching has already been noted. A more radical question is whether a translation programme should focus only or mainly on teaching students “how to translate”, or whether it might also attempt to do something else. For example, to convince students that translation is more about people than words. More radically still, we might also examine the relationship between the two and ask whether achieving the former necessarily means addressing the latter. Such questions lead us in turn to the translator’s “profile”.

## THE TRANSLATOR POPULATION

What sort of people become translators? What do they do when they are not translating, or what did they do before they began to translate? What skills do they possess – technical, theatrical or



otherwise – which allow them to transform themselves, if only vicariously and for short periods of time, into doctors and engineers, physicists or poets?

Lawrence Venuti<sup>(25)</sup> has written eloquently about the translator's traditional "invisibility", itself the result of the cultural and political paradigms which determine the business of translation and the translation business. But little sociological research has yet been done on the translator population and the absence of such data makes any generalisations extremely problematic. What is clear, however, is that there is no single identikit picture of our "model" translator, just as there is no single theory which can account for all the different kinds of transfers and transactions engaged in the translation process. A translator working within a large international organisation, for example the United Nations or its specialised agencies, will acquire quite different work experiences and habits, linguistic and otherwise, from those of a university professor who translates lesser known works of literature for personal pleasure and professional profit. The UN translator works as a member of a team. A text, which is often a compendium, combination or clutter of earlier texts on the same subject, sometimes written in a language which is not the native tongue of the author, is divided up between the

different translators, who must also make their translated segments conform to certain linguistic, cultural and political criteria. The UN translator would seem to come very close to Venuti's "invisible" translator, and indeed, in this specific case, the "invisibility" acquires a diplomatic importance which is at least equal to the translator's linguistic excellence. Such a translator is hardly likely to follow the example of the Québécoise feminist translator Susanne Lotbinière Harwood, who a few years ago said that she would no longer translate works by men, since the pressure was too great to adopt a male voice, which she refused to accept.

Most UN translators were not trained as translators (although this is of course partly due to generational factors and to the relatively recent nature of many translation training programmes), and many outstanding translators in the literary and other fields have never received any so-called formal training. Many have also worked or work simultaneously in other activities, as creative writers and journalists, critics and artists, but also in fields totally unrelated to "linguistic" work in the strict sense of the term, such as insurance and banking and the physical sciences.

This situation might help explain the way in which translation is often perceived

from the outside: as something which can, if necessary, be "picked up" by anyone with a reasonably good knowledge of a foreign language and carried out with the use of a dictionary, something which is not really serious enough to require full-time dedication or merit life-long employment, or any real respect in social or economic terms. Paradoxically, it is this secondary and derivative status of translation which is at the same time often used to keep translators in their second-rate prisons: for example, in the UN system,

translators are widely perceived as a rather expensive kind of support staff and are rarely able, through promotion or transfer, to move into other spheres of activity or to occupy posts other than those directly related to linguistic or editorial activities.

But the diversified backgrounds and extra-curricular activities of many outstanding translators may also be viewed in a much more positive light, as a source of untold richness in itself and as a possible explanation of why such persons became translators in the first place. It is here perhaps that recent developments in translation studies have had some of their most beneficial effects, by broadening the concept of translation activity to include considerations a social, cultural and ideological kind and, in the process, radically modifying our conception of what a translator is or does. Since translation is now seen belonging to semiotics as well as linguistics, involving the construction, use and exploitation of essentially political paradigms, it is clear that we are all translators in one way or another, although some many be able to "translate" more "languages" than others.

A translator of course transfers texts from one language to another and is interested in comparing different possible target language versions of a single source language text. The first three

ROSTRO I. Serie "Rostros"  
(1995. Óleo-espátula. 48 x 38 cm.).  
Marta Elena Arango P.





quotations cited in the appendix, are translations into English of an extract from *The Master and Margarita*, a satirical novel by Mikhail Bulgakov which caused a sensation in the Soviet literary world on its publication in 1966-67. The work was rapidly, perhaps even hastily, translated into English by Michael Glenny, and published in a version which is still available today (Harvill). The first quotation (a) is from this translation. The second and third quotations ((b) and (c)) are recent translations, with (b) by Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor (Picador) and (c) by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Penguin). The source language text in this case posed several challenges, including the fact that Bulgakov is a master of different styles who makes use of breathtaking changes in tone and effect, and the status of Russian as an inflected language, which means that the English language translator constantly has to flesh out the sentences, with the English version having sometimes up to two and a half times as many words as the Russian original. In the past, a detailed analysis of the different solutions adopted by translators of the same source text would have been deemed an essential exercise for students on a translation programme and of course in some respects this is still the case today. But a modern-day student might well be more interested in the fact that we have three

different versions of the same text, including two which are very recent and done on a collaborative basis, rather than in any so-called niceties or blemishes of the English renderings in themselves.

The fourth and fifth quotations ((d) and (e)), however, take us a step further: quotation (d) is taken from an enthusiastic review in the prestigious *Times Literary Supplement* of a novel by F. Andahazi recently translated into English, stressing both the literary and historical excellence of the original and the skill with which it has been rendered into English. Quotation (e) appeared in the same literary journal two weeks later, and consists of a sharply worded rebuttal of the earlier eulogistic review, a condemnation, at various levels, of the quality of the original and an affirmation of the clear superiority of the English language version (the translator was "diligent", whereas (f) uses the word "skilfully"). The implications raised by these two conflicting opinions - the fact that both critics apparently had access to the original language and were (it is assumed) equipped to make well-informed judgements about the exactitude of the translation, even though they reached diametrically opposed conclusions, the collaborative efforts involved in the English language version, the "correcting" of "errors" in the Spanish language original, the use of such remarks

as the "superiority from every point of view" of the English language translation, the larger context of Latin American/Anglo-Saxon relations, the reasons why the book was translated/reviewed in the first place, the role translation reviews play in promoting the reading of such texts and the production of further translations, the name itself of the translator (Alberto Manguel -bilingual? multicultural?), etc. - would all nowadays provide equally valid material for discussion in a translation studies programme.

The final two rather more schematic references ((f) and (g)) are the two different titles of the same recently published bestseller by Simon Winchester which tells the story of the compilation of the Oxford English Dictionary and the role played in that monumental enterprise by one of its most assiduous collaborators, a certain Dr. Minor, a former military surgeon and a United States citizen, who was declared criminally insane by the English courts and sentenced to life imprisonment in Broadmoor Asylum. Title (f) is that which appears on the cover of the original British edition, while title (g) is the one used for the United States edition.

Here the "translation" process occurs within the same language and is clearly motivated by the perceived profile of the

respective target publics (the British version has an air of the Gothic novel about it, as well as a pleasing sense of balance and contrast, highlighted by the use of alliteration; the United States version is not only shorter, but more schematic and theatrical, reminiscent of some Broadway musical or Hollywood movie). The change of title might therefore catch the attention of the informed and monolingual general reader as much as that of the professional translator - just as a reader of the *Times Literary Supplement* without any specialised interest in Latin American literature might well become intrigued by some of the cultural and ideological implications of the correspondence on *The Anatomist*.

More importantly, all these issues are now seen to have their place in the study and practice of translation activity. As in the past, there is of course still room and reason for a comparative linguistic study of different target language versions of the same source language text (as in (a)-(c) above). But there is also room for a comparative linguistic analysis of various target language versions both with and without reference to the source language text: in other words, we might learn as much about "translation" from a comparative linguistic study of the three English versions of the extract from the Russian novel noted above as from a



linguistic comparison between one of the texts and its source language original.

Three conclusions would seem to emerge from the preceding discussion: (a) translation activity itself can serve as a paradigm and model for other kinds of activities; (b) translators are potentially a much broader category of persons than is generally considered to be the case; (c) translation programmes at university level should be adapted accordingly to cater for students who might well not become professional translators in the strict sense of the term.

### TRANSLATION AS A "SITE"

One of the metaphors frequently used in connection with translation activity nowadays is that of the "site", as in the title and opening sentence of a recent book by Tejaswini Niranjana:

"In a post-colonial context the problematic of translation becomes a significant site for raising questions of representation, power and historicity"<sup>(26)</sup>.

The new study by Lawrence Venuti on *The Scandals of Translation* also notes that

"any language use is ... a site of power relationships", and that

"developing countries are notable sites of contest between cultural sameness and difference". Translation itself is "a potential site for variation"<sup>(27)</sup>.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a "site" is (in current usage) the situation or position of a place, town or building, especially with reference to the surrounding area, or the scene of a specific activity. The more static sense of the word as meaning simply a "place" or "position" is now obsolete.

"Site" therefore evokes two ideas simultaneously: the idea of some activity going on, and an implicit reference to some broader context. As applied to translation, the word kills two birds with one stone as it were: it presents translation as the scene of a specified activity, a place where something is "going on", but also includes an implicit reference to some wider "context". At the same time, at least in English, there is some interference from the word "sight" in the sense of "a thing seen, especially of a striking or remarkable nature", often applied to the features or objects of a place or a town worth seeing. Thus a "site" may also become one of the "sights" to see. This network of associations is of course also graphically present in the use of the term "website" (and its related construction

imagery) in connection with the Internet. The sense of situation, position and place inherent in the idea of "site", coupled with the ideas of activity and surrounding area, is continued through a related series of other metaphors currently used to describe translation activity, including the concept of "the space between" (used in the subtitle of a recent collection of essays edited by Budick and Iser)<sup>(28)</sup>, the image of "border crossings", borderlands, subjective geographies and the "mapping" of difference, travel, diaspora and the making of homes away from home.

The idea of "site" is therefore a powerful metaphor for translation activity, enabling us to see how translation itself is in turn a powerful model for dealing with what James Clifford calls the transcultural predicaments of the late twentieth century<sup>(29)</sup>. Susan Bassnett also pointed out in a recent essay that

"translation is increasingly being seen both as actual practice and as metaphor", since "the importance of what happens in the translation process lies at the heart of our understanding of the world we inhabit... Translation as a sign of fragmentation, of cultural destabilization and negotiation is a powerful image for the late twentieth century"<sup>(30)</sup>.

Translation is both a "site" which we can visit, without going any further, and a "search engine" which can propel us towards a virtually infinite number of destinations – to places where, in the haunting words of James Hutton, there is "no vestige of a beginning – no prospect of an end"<sup>(31)</sup>. These places can offer us a new vantage point for looking at and understanding who we are and what we do, and for conceiving of other ways of being and doing.

All academic disciplines – whether history, mathematics or the study of literature – in a sense provide us with models and methods of analysis of our experiences in the world. But translation distinguishes itself precisely by the exceptionally powerful potential of the model which it offers, a power which derives from a combination of three factors: (a) the central place of language in the translation process; (b) the twofold nature of translation as both a product and an activity; (c) the concept of transfer which is inherent to the process of "translating". To be an historian, you need at the very least to have read some history; the same is true of mathematics, literature and all the other academic disciplines. But to be a translator does not necessarily require you to "study" language, or even less to study "foreign" languages. In the sense that we all use



language and other semiotic devices in a host of different ways, we are all translators, even if we are unaware of the fact.

A brief glance at the titles of some recent books, essays and articles on the nature and function of translation confirms the extent to which the process has been seen as metaphor, method and model. They include *Translating Ireland*<sup>(32)</sup>, *Routes. Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*<sup>(33)</sup>, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and colonization from "The Tempest" to Tarzan*<sup>(34)</sup>, *Translation and taboo*<sup>(35)</sup>, *Translating Gods: Religion as a factor of cultural (un)translatability*<sup>(36)</sup>, *Translating space: Russian's poet in the wake of empire*<sup>(37)</sup>, *In the shadow of the father tongue: On translating the masks in J.-S. Alexis*<sup>(38)</sup>, and *Aimé Césaire's subjective geographies: Translating place and the difference it makes*<sup>(39)</sup>.

The concept of translation is being increasingly used as a methodological tool by specialists to study the processes of transfer embodied in a wide variety of fields – from history and politics to

anthropology and cultural studies. But at the same time, this use of translation as a metaphor and model in these various disciplines in turn deepens our understanding of the translation act itself, what it is and does, and may itself actively contribute to the way a given text is translated.

*The concept of translation is being increasingly used as a methodological tool by specialists to study the processes of transfer embodied in a wide variety of fields – from history and politics to anthropology and cultural studies. But at the same time, this use of translation as a metaphor and model in these various disciplines in turn deepens our understanding of the translation act itself, what it is and does, and may itself actively contribute to the way a given text is translated.*

Translation seen as a model in its own right clearly enhances both the functional and ontological "value" of the translation process, and it is the "value" factor which has received most attention from those

working in translation studies, as a means of understanding how complex and manipulative textual (and other) processes take place. However, it is important to distinguish between the clearly acknowledged "value" of the process itself and the much more difficult to determine "value" of the resulting product, i.e. its "quality". This distinction has resulted in the disintegration of a number of earlier concepts which were themselves seen as intrinsic to the quality of a translation, including in particular the oft-debated key concept of "equivalence". The new emphasis placed on translation as a process has also led to

attention being focused on what a translation does to its target language reader and the world at large, rather than on the source language author or on what a translation "is". This situation may explain why the question of the quality of the product resulting from the translation process – how to define that quality, how to achieve it and how to teach it – has been largely absent from the literature.

### TRANSLATION AS REPRODUCTION AND REVELATION

Venuti has some devastating things to say about the relationship between what is often considered – particularly by publishers and reviewers – to be a "good" translation and prevailing political and cultural paradigms, such as fluency, transparency, the use of linear syntax, etc.<sup>(40)</sup> He is also one of the few specialists to have proposed a definition of a "good" translation, which not surprisingly reflects his own political agenda:

"Good translation is minoritizing: it releases the remainder by cultivating a heterogeneous discourse, opening up the standard dialect and literary canons to what is foreign to themselves, to the substandard and the marginal"<sup>(41)</sup>.

From translation models and model translations...

But he immediately includes a more general interpretation: a good translation

"invents a specific unforeseen, autonomous becoming", where the reader can see the "autonomous existence of [the source text] behind (yet by means of) the assimilative process of the translation"<sup>(42)</sup>.

The act of reproduction involved in translation is – exactly like its biological counterpart – also an act of creation in which the fusion of two elements (source and target) in an assimilative process results in the emergence of an autonomous "becoming" that both reveals and yet transcends its origins. The extent to which a translator's "reproduction" of a text is also an act of "revelation" and an act of "creation" will to a large extent determine the "quality" of the translation. Good translation may be literal, faithful, exact or ambiguous, as circumstances require, and may "correct" or otherwise tamper with the original as well as transfer its content or form: but above all, a good translation will be creative in the sense and to the degree that it is an act of both reproduction and revelation. This "quality" can be recognised almost without any reference to the source language text, in the same way that we



recognise it in other pieces of creative writing. But if we choose to refer to the source language text – as the translation student or practitioner will inevitably do, but which is impossible in the case of a general familiar unfamiliar with the source language – it is the process of reproduction of the text in terms of revelation and creation that will prove more satisfactory, satisfying and serendipitous than any search for an elusive and impossible “equivalence”.

The development of translation studies over the past twenty years has brought with it a number of changes (but which may not be necessarily irreversible) in our perception of what translation is and does, and which must be properly addressed by any translation programme at the university level. History is one of the factors which have brought about these changes – the changes which have taken place in the world in recent years, and which have affected us all, but also the change in the internal history of translation studies proper and the resulting sense of identity which it has now acquired. As Bassnett and Lefevere have not tired in pointing out, translation studies has now come to mean “anything that (claims) to have anything to do with translation. Twenty years ago it meant: training translators”<sup>(43)</sup>. It also meant asking such questions as “How can translation be taught?” and “How can

translation be studied?”, and what Susan Bassnett has called “the most preposterous question”: whether translation was actually possible at all, despite the historical evidence of a practice which has existed – and functioned – for thousands of years.

A translation programme at university level must of course address the practical needs of those who wish to become professional translators and in this respect, proper emphasis must be placed on imparting the so-called “tricks of the trade”, through such exercises as the use of translation models (a wide choice is available), précis-writing, paraphrase, creative writing, as well as practice in translation itself (in both directions), with attention also being given to the development of a student’s knowledge of both foreign and native languages. But a translation programme at university level must also endeavour to reflect the direction of current thinking on the subject, the “state of the art” as it were, even if – as in the case in point – much of that thinking might well seem to call into question the very concept underlying the “translation model” and “model translation” approach. In other words, provision must be made at the curricular and didactic levels for the fact that translation activity is increasingly being seen and used as a metaphor and model in its own right.

This has a number of important consequences. Firstly, by broadening our understanding of translation to include both product and process and by recognising the role of translation as a model for para-linguistic analysis, we are also

broadening the potential scope of participation in our translation programme of students from other disciplines (many of whom might go on to do “other things”), which can only enrich the learning (and teaching) process and may actively develop our ability to translate. Secondly, this broader definition and use of translation would in turn enhance the visibility of translation activity, as well as the social, cultural and economic status of the translator. Finally, by viewing translation as a “modelo para armar”, we are in effect proposing an open-ended process in which there are no inflexible principles or prescriptive rules, a process which is essentially democratic, participatory and intrinsically creative. Translation teaching, which will be effective only to the extent that it is itself creative, is intimately linked to the way we perceive the translation process<sup>(44)</sup>. A perception based on the view of translation as a model in its own right, rather than in terms of translation models and model translations, may well

be the first step towards improving translation teaching – as well as the quality and value of the translation product.

The development of translation studies over the past twenty years has brought with it a number of changes (but which may not be necessarily irreversible) in our perception of what translation is and does, and which must be properly addressed by any translation programme at the university level.

## APPENDIX

(a) “Early in the morning on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan the procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, in a white cloak lined with blood-red, emerged with his shuffling cavalryman’s walk into the arcade connecting the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great”.

(b) “Early in the morning on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan, wearing a white cloak with a blood-red lining, and shuffling with his cavalryman’s gait into the roofed colonnade that connected the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great, walked the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate”.

(c) “In a white cloak with blood-red lining, with the shuffling gait of a cavalryman, early in the morning of the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan, there came out to the covered colonnade between the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate.”

(d) “meticulously researched, and based on historical fact... *The Anatomist* (is) beautifully written and skilfully translated...” (Ranti Williams, review of *The Anatomist* (Federico Andahazi), *Times Literary Supplement*, London, No. 4981, 18 sept. 1998, p. 27).



(e) "There are many hundreds of mistakes of a historical, conceptual, grammatical, or linguistic character, including many spelling mistakes, not just in the Latin and Italian bits, but in the Spanish of the original text... A large majority, but by no means all, have been silently corrected by the novel's diligent translator, Alberto Manguel, and, one presumes, the English or American editors, who have teamed up to offer us an English or American editors, who have teamed up to offer us an English version superior from every possible point of view to the original". (Letter from Daniel Weissbein to the *Times Literary Supplement*, London, No. 4983, 2 October 1998, p.19)

(f) *The Surgeon of Crowborne. A tale of murder, madness and the love of words*, Simon Winchester, Viking, London, 1998

(g) *The Professor and the Madman*, Simon Winchester, HarperCollins, New York, 1998

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1) S. BASSNETT, A. LEFEVERE, *Constructing cultures*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, England, 1998, pp. 2-10.
- 2) "Über die verschieden Methoden des Übersetzens" (1813), reprinted in Hans Joachim Störing (ed), *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, Darmstadt, 1969.
- 3) J. BEER (ed), *Medieval translators and their craft*, Western Michigan University, Medie-

- val Institute Publications, 1989, p.2.
- 4) M. CRONIN, *Translating Ireland. Translation, languages, culture*, Cork University Press, 1996, p.6.
- 5) See in particular S. SIMON, *Gender in translation*, Routledge, London, 1996.
- 6) A. LEFEVERE, "Chinese and Western thinking on translation", in S. Bassnett, A. Lefevere, *Constructing cultures*, op. cit., pp. 12-24.
- 7) R. JACQUEMOND, "Translation and cultural hegemony: The case of French-Arabic translation", in L. Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking translation. Discourse, subjectivity, ideology*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 139-58.
- 8) J. ABOUSHI DALLAL, "The perils of occidentalism. How Arab novelists are driven to write for Western readers", *Times Literary Supplement* (London), No. 4960, 24 April 1998, pp. 8-9.
- 9) L. VENUTI (ed.), *Rethinking translation. Discourse, subjectivity, ideology*, op. cit., introduction, pp. 1-17, and *The translator's invisibility. A history of translation*, Routledge, London, 1995.
- 10) H. GONÇALVES BARBOSA, "Transalation: Brazil", in V. Smith (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, London, 1997, p. 798.
- 11) Cited by D. GERDES, "Translation: Spanish America", in V. Smith, op. cit., p. 800.
- 12) M. SAYERS PEDEN, "Mario Vargas Llosa in English translation. A survey of translator reception", *Ideas '92*, Vol.2/1, 1992, cited by D. Gerdes, in V. Smith, op. cit., p. 801.
- 13) L. VENUTI, *The scandals of translation*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 48.
- 14) Op. cit., p. 49.
- 15) A. LEFEVERE, *Translating literature. Practice and theory in a comparative literature context*, Modern Language Association of America, New York, 1992, p.7.
- 16) S. BASSNETT, *Translation studies* (revised edition), Routledge, London, 1991, p.16.

- 17) J. P. VINAY & J. DARBELNET (1958), *Stylistique comparés du français et de l'anglais: méthode de traduction*, Beauchemin, Montreal, 1977; P. NEWMARK, *A textbook of translation*, Prentice Hall, New York, 1987.
- 18) A. LEFEVERE, op. cit., p.8.
- 19) L. VENUTI, *The scandals of translation*, op. cit., p.21.
- 20) D. ROBINSON, *Becoming a translator*, Routledge, London, 1997, pp.192ff.
- 21) J. CULLER, *Literary theory. A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p.15.
- 22) D. ROBINSON, op. cit., p.81.
- 23) Ibid, p.292.
- 24) S. PINKER, *The language instinct. The new science of language and the mind*, Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, London, 1994.
- 25) L. VENUTI, *The translator's invisibility. A history of translation*, op. cit.
- 26) T. NIRANJANA, *Siting translation. History, post-structuralism and the colonial context*, University of California Press, 1992, p.1.
- 27) L. VENUTI, *The scandals of translation*, op. cit., p. 10.
- 28) S. BUDICK, W. ISER (eds.), *The translatability of cultures*, Stanford University Press, 1996.
- 29) J. CLIFFORD, *Routes. Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*, Harvard University Press, 1997.
- 30) S. BASSNETT, A. LEFEVERE, *Constructing cultures*, op. cit., p.137.
- 31) *Theory of the earth*, 1795
- 32) M. CRONIN, op. cit.
- 33) J. CLIFFORD, op. cit.
- 34) E. CHEYFITZ, expanded edition, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.
- 35) D. ROBINSON, Northern Illinois University Press, 1996.
- 36) J. ASSMANN, in S. Budick, W. Iser, *The translatability of cultures*, op. cit., pp. 25-36.
- 37) H. RAM, in A. DINGWAY, C. MAIDER (eds.), *Between languages and cultures*,

- University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995, pp. 199-222.
- 38) S. MASINGALE BELL, *ibid.*, pp. 51-74.
- 39) I. KARAMCHETI, *ibidem*, pp. 181-197.
- 40) L. VENUTI, *The translator's invisibility. A history of translation*, op. cit.
- 41) L. VENUTI, *The scandals of translation*, op. cit., p. 11. The term "remainder", taken from Lecercle, refers to the "minor variables" to a "major form" which dominates a language at a given time.
- 42) *Ibid.*, p.11.
- 43) S. BASSNETT, A. LEFEVERE, *Constructing cultures*, op. cit. P.1.
- 44) For some interesting examples, see the two important articles: C. MAIER, "Towards a theoretical practice for cross-cultural translation", and A. DINGWANEY AND C. MAIER (eds.), *Between languages and cultures*, op. cit., pp.21-38 and 303-319.

## NOTAS SOBRE EL AUTOR

Brian J. Mallet holds doctorates from the University of Oxford and the University of Paris. For many years, he was a senior translator and editor at the ILO in Geneva. Now, he lives and works in Cartagena de Indias, where he is currently preparing the English translation of "Osnabrück" by Hélène Cixous, to be published shortly by Edinburgh University Press.

\*Paper presented to the International Seminar on the Teaching of Translation, University of Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia, November 1998.



Brian Mallet



ROSTRO II. Serie "Rostros"  
(1996. Óleo-espátula. 46 x 37 cm.).  
Marta Elena Arango P.

