

## Translating Virginia Woolf

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# Table of Contents

Introduction: Virginia Woolf in Many Languages .....	7
ORIANA PALUSCI	
Anna Banti Translates <i>Jacob's Room</i> .....	15
VITA FORTUNATI	
Point of View and the Danish Translation of <i>Jacob's Room</i> .....	27
ALESSIA OPPIZZI	
The Challenge of Free Indirect Speech in <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> .....	39
PAOLA FAINI	
A Strange Case: The Reception and Translation of Virginia Woolf in the Netherlands .....	49
FRANCO PARIS	
Translating Virginia Woolf's Music.....	63
PIERPAOLO MARTINO	
Carmen Martín Gaité Translates <i>To the Lighthouse</i> .....	75
MARIA ALESSANDRA GIOVANNINI	
Did Borges Translate <i>Orlando</i> ? .....	85
PAOLA LAURA GORLA	
East and West Germany Battle with <i>Orlando</i> .....	97
IVONNE DEFANT	
A Systemic Functional Approach to Translating Point of View Shift in <i>Flush</i> .....	109
MIRKO CASAGRANDA	

Translating Male and Female Discourses in <i>Between the Acts</i> .....	121
LOVRO ŠKOPLJANAC	
‘The weight of every word’: Virginia Woolf’s <i>A Haunted House</i> and Three Italian Translations .....	133
ANNA MARIA CIMITILE	
‘Acting like a Thief’: Fāṭimah Nā‘ūt Translates Virginia Woolf in Egypt .....	145
PAOLA VIVIANI	
<i>The Common Reader</i> Translated and Re-edited: Woolf and the Question of a “Lecture Féminine” .....	157
LADA ČALE FELDMAN	
<i>A Room of One’s Own</i> in Spanish: from Borges to a Feminist Translation .....	167
JOSÉ SANTAEMILIA	
The Fatal Loss: Virginia Woolf’s ‘One’ and its Destiny in Croatian, Serbian and Italian Translations .....	181
IVA GRGIĆ MAROEVIĆ	
A Thousand Libraries: Swedish Readings of <i>A Room of One’s Own</i> .....	191
LISBETH LARSSON	
Virginia Woolf’s <i>storia parallela</i> : Translating <i>Three Guineas</i> into Italian .....	199
ORIANA PALUSCI	
Translating Feminist Discourses in Virginia Woolf’s “Anon” .....	215
ELEONORA FEDERICI	
Notes on Contributors .....	227
Index .....	233

MARIA ALESSANDRA GIOVANNINI

## Carmen Martín Gaité Translates *To the Lighthouse*

It is a well-known fact that the spread and the fortune of a writer's work outside her geographical and linguistic boundaries depends essentially on the circulation of her works in translation, so that the foreign writer's work can easily be introduced to a higher number of readers – in their own different languages.

The case of Virginia Woolf's novels in Castellan translations followed the peculiar political and cultural history of Spain – from the 1930s to the end of the 1970s. Such a difficult period did not allow a homogeneous spread of Woolf's work within the various Spanish-speaking countries. This paper aims at illustrating an emblematic example such as the story of the Castellan translation of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The novel, published in 1927, has been translated four times into Spanish, each version corresponding to different ideas of translation.

In 1938 Antonio Marichal translated the English novel for Sudamericana S.A. publisher, Buenos Aires; new editions of the same translation were published in 1978 and 1982, while in 1984 the Barcelona-based publisher Seix-Barral published the first edition of Marichal's first translation which was later followed by other two re-editions in 1995 and 1996.

The Spanish writer Carmen Martín Gaité translated *To the Lighthouse* in 1978. Several editions of this second Spanish translation, published by Edhasa, followed in 1986, 1988, 1995, 1996, 2002 and 2003.

José Luis López Muñoz worked on the third translation of the English novel, published in 1993 by Alianza Editorial. A second edition was published in 2003, thus overlapping with Martín Gaité's latest edition. Finally, Dámaso López translated the Woolfian novel in 1999. The translation was published by Cátedra which printed a sec-

ond edition in 2003, the same year of Martín Gaité's and López Muñoz' last editions. The title of all four Spanish translations is the same: *Al faro*.

Marichal's translation presents neither introduction nor other supplementary material – not a single annotation by the translator whose name is only mentioned in the colophon.

The second translation instead is by a well-known woman writer:<sup>1</sup> the name of Carmen Martín Gaité appears, in fact, in capital letters under the title of the novel, right after the name of the novelist. A short note on the author, together with a general discussion of the novel's collocation in Virginia Woolf's bibliography, can be read on the back cover. The translator's notes have been cut to the bones, they can only be found under the classical format '*N de T*'.

The translation by López Muñoz presents a short introduction on the author and her work on the back cover; footnotes expand on some bibliographic references referring to the original text.

The fourth translation includes a substantial introduction to the author and her work, and a complete bibliography. Moreover, it mentions the previous translations of the novel in Castellan. The introduction contains photographic material on the writer and on her family entourage with the purpose of facilitating the readers' approach to the novel. The many footnotes exemplify the several bibliographical references of the introduction, intertextual references and the English culture-bound aspects within the novel.

Before going into a further analysis of the differences among the four Castellan translations of Woolf's novel, it is noteworthy that the last three have been re-edited in recent times (2003), since they can be

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1 For a critical perspective on the writer, see, among others: Maria Vittoria Calvi, *Dialogo e conversazione nella narrativa di Carmen Martín Gaité*, Milano, Arcipelago, 1990; José Jurado Morales, *La trayectoria narrativa de Carmen Martín Gaité*, Madrid, Grados, 2003; Emilie L. Bergmann, "Narrative Theory in the Mother Tongue. Carmen Martín Gaité's *Desde la ventana* and *El cuento de nunca acabar*", in Kathleen M. Glenn, Mercedes Mazquiarán de Rodríguez eds, *Spanish Women Writers and the Essay: Gender, Politics, and the Self*, Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1998; David González Couso, "Carmen Martín Gaité y su geografía literaria", *Espéculo. Revista de Estudios Literarios*, 41 (2009).



considered still suitable for an appreciation of a more contemporary readership of the novel.

These preliminary remarks on the editorial history of the novel in Castellán is – in my view – instrumental in order to draw attention to the main aspect of my paper, i.e., a dialectic confrontation between two writers such as Virginia Woolf and Carmen Martín Gaité by means of their writing, the only possible way to set up a dialogue beyond the boundaries of geographical space and time.

If we consider the publishing date of Marichal's version, we must notice that in Argentina Woolf's novel could be read in translation just eleven years after its first appearance in English. We must underline that the novel in its Castellán version did not circulate in Spain until the writer Martín Gaité translated it during the first years of the restored democracy, at the time of the development of feminism and feminist literature. It is worth mentioning that on the one hand Marichal translated the novel of an almost contemporary writer for the Spanish-speaking readers in Argentina; on the other hand, the Spanish translation by Martín Gaité seemed to want to "unearth" the text. As a matter of fact, she believed that the themes of the novel and the novelist's sensibility on questions of gender made the text a suitable product for that new form of culture which was being sketched out during the first years of the Spanish *transición*.

A fertile and versatile writer, Carmen Martín Gaité shifted from her novel, essay, and poem writing to the activity of translating from several languages such as English, French, Italian and Portuguese.<sup>2</sup> Her literary beginning coincided with the Neorealist period emerging on the Spanish literary scene in the 1950s. In 1955, she published a

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2 From the mid-1940s onwards and for long periods during her whole life, the writer had the opportunity to live abroad. Thanks to a scholarship from the University of Coimbra, she grew an interest for Portuguese literature. In 1948 she stayed in Paris, where she was to return in the 1960s. She lived in Rome for a long period around the mid-1950s, where she underwent the literary influence of Cesare Pavese and Italo Svevo, authors whom she would later translate, along with Primo Levi, Ignazio Silone and Natalia Ginzburg. On the other hand, the mid-1970s were characterised by an intense and constant travelling to the USA, a period coinciding with her translation of English writers, i.e., Virginia Woolf and the Brontë sisters.

collection of short stories, *El balneario* which won the Café Gijón Prize. In 1957, the novel *Entre visillos* won the Nadal prize: it is the story of a little town in the Castellan Province, with its narrow-minded and hypocritical inhabitants. The new arrival in town of a young teacher of German, Pablo Klein, jeopardizes the inhabitants' ways of living. By means of a direct and realist style Martín Gaité is able to draw a precise picture of the Spanish post-war era marked by disillusion and by the impossibility of radical change. In the following years, the writer was engaged in several activities, from literary creations (the novels *Ritmo lento* in 1963; *Retahílas* in 1974; *Fragmentos de interior* in 1976), to essay writing (*Usos amorosos del dieciocho en España* in 1972, *La búsqueda de interlocutor y otras búsquedas* in 1973), to translation (in 1968, she translated *Pane e vino* by Ignazio Silone; in 1970 *Corto viaggio sentimentale* by Italo Svevo;<sup>3</sup> in 1972 *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society* by Eva Fíges; in 1974 *O Mistério da Estrada de Sintra* by Eça de Queiroz and Ramalho Ortigao).

1978 is a central year in Martín Gaité's production: she translated Virginia Woolf and published the novel *El cuarto de atrás*, (*The Back Room*) which marked a turning point in her writing. As José María Izquierdo states:

En general su literatura condensará las preocupaciones de los autores de su generación – comunicación, existencia, duración, soledad y memoria – uniéndolas con las de los novelistas de los años setenta – metaliteratura, recepción, narratividad –, siendo en *El cuarto de atrás* donde se concrete un replanteamiento general de todos estos temas desde la perspectiva marcada por el modelo de sistema comunicativo barthiano que se utilizaba por aquellos días en el que el interlocutor y la recepción del texto eran considerados como fundamentales.<sup>4</sup>

The plot can be briefly summarised: during a stormy night, the sleepless protagonist Carmen Martín Gaité had a visit from a mysterious *hombre de negro*, a journalist, an expert of the writer's work. Their

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3 See María Mercedes González de Sande, "La Narrativa de Carmen Martín Gaité en Italia: 'Nubilosidad variable' y la problemática y metodología de su traducción al italiano", *Destiempos*, 4:19 (2009).

4 José María Izquierdo, "Carmen Martín Gaité + Tzvetan Todorov = *El cuarto de atrás* (1978)", in Inger Enkvist and José María Izquierdo eds, *Simposio internacional sobre la obra de Tzvetan Todorov*, Lund, Lund University, 2004, p. 58.

conversation gives birth to the story interspersing with the author's Salamanca childhood memories, in the house where "el cuarto de atrás" was the family room, a metaphorical space representing the author's inner place created by memory.

It is within this work, so far from her Neorealist aesthetics of the beginning, that the progressive and original synthesis between diverse but overlapping instances becomes manifest. This work stages the necessary search for an interlocutor in the text-making process as a "dialogic object", it is a contemplation on women's literature in search for a more genuine voice. It was not a coincidence that in those years Martín Gaité had devoted herself to different studies on gender literature, which in 1987 were collected in the volume *Desde la ventana*. Moreover, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was discovered by Martín Gaité right in that period and it became a very influential essay for her studies. The title of her work expresses her will to state the connection between the narrating voice in the novel and the feminist discourse embarked by Woolf. "El cuarto de atrás" becomes, thus, the *elsewhere* that Luce Irigaray (in her essay "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine")<sup>5</sup> defines as the space where a woman can authorise an alternative voice.

At the end of the 1970s, Spain was progressively trying to get back a democratic identity, to set itself free from the rhetoric of the regime. Martín Gaité's discourse offered an option: memory, the dream, the unconscious were all feminine territories where the truth could be explored and where everyone could be recognised as its subject. It is the writing won back by the author which gives voice to a new idea of being a woman in Spain, just after the Phalangist rhetoric which indoctrinated young women forcing them to become fundamentally wives and model mothers.

In her later novels (*Caperucita en Manhattan*, 1990; *Nubosidad variable*, 1992; *La Reina de las Nieves*, 1994; *Lo raro es vivir*, 1996; *Irse de casa*, 1998), the writer prolongs her journey towards self-awareness, through the memory which works to delineate her present, the surrounding society and the ways in which our self confronts it.

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5 Luce Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" in *This Sex which is not One*, Ithaca (N.Y.), Cornell University Press, 1985.

According to Martín Gaité, building a room of one's own, using one's own memory to detect the present and recognise ourselves, means also to refer back to the literary memory as the experiential and indispensable 'andamio'/scaffolding of doing literature. As emerges in *Cuadernos de todo*, more precisely in cuaderno 12, a collection of her essays from October 1974 to January 1975, she is indeed aware that traces of other authors are detectable in her works:

La transformación o conversión de Aurora Dupin me hace pensar en la influencia de las lecturas. Unas veces les opones una especie de muro, otras te bajan a los ojos y a la carne, deponen la resistencia y te penetran. Sólo las que te han penetrado se te encarnan no sabes desde cuándo y forman el humus de tus opiniones, son tu segunda naturaleza, carne de futuras narraciones. Cuando los periodistas te dicen "¿qué lecturas le han influido a usted?" nunca te atreves a hablarle de estos viejos libros que te han hecho llorar de niño y que te han hecho amar lo irracional, la magia.<sup>6</sup>

Thus we can infer the meaning of intertextuality for Martín Gaité.<sup>7</sup> Ahead of times, the writer considers the authors she read and admired as "consciousness awakers", vehicles of self-awareness. The books that leave traces in us illuminate aspects that we already have inside us as readers. For this reason it is impossible to draw a neat line between what is ours and what derives from others. In *cuaderno 14*, collecting her early-1975 writings, we find:

Los libros que "te dicen algo", son los que descubren a la luz y mediante el logos algo que tú ya habías pensado. Van contigo, dentro de tí, y a veces hablan por tí. Uno es un tejido de los diversos libros que ha leído, de los amigos que ha tenido. Hacer clasificación de lo que es tuyo y ajeno resulta afectado. Si lo asimilas bien y tejido con lo tuyo, ya es tuyo. [...]. Veo, pues, que no necesito citar y delimitar lo que he tomado de otros para el cuento de N. A. Son préstamos que

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6 Carmen Martín Gaité, *Cuadernos de todo*, Barcelona, Debolsillo, 2003, p. 256.

7 See Elisabetta Sarmati, "Tessiture intertestuali. Memorie letterarie in *Nubosidad variable* di Carmen Martín Gaité", *Rivista di Filologie e Letterature Ispaniche*, 6 (2003); Christopher Oechler, "El poder del intertexto y la construcción de *El cuarto de atrás*", *Gaceta Hispánica de Madrid*, Primavera (2006); Nuria Cruz Cámara, *El laberinto intertextual de Carmen Martín Gaité*, Newark, Juan de la Cuesta, 2008.

me rozan, que me alegran, calientan y agradezco, pero no me siento en la obligación de declararlos porque el guiso es mío.<sup>8</sup>

Intertextuality is for her a broad concept, related to her refusal to consider literary genres as watertight, clearly different one from the other.<sup>9</sup> Three factors characterise her idea of intertextuality. First of all it is related to an involuntary process, where the writer is a “patient” subject; secondly, it is a complex phenomenon involving not only her literary production, but also her life and personality; and lastly it is a textual web in which the readings of one’s youth play a special role. Martín Gaité’s intention to display the intertextual links between her literary work and that of other writers is evident in her essays.

In the article “La ingrata condición del traductor. Bailar con la más fea”, the writer defends the role of the translator, asserting the importance of the two contemporary women translators, Ester Benítez and Consuelo Bergés. Martín Gaité compares the profession of the translator with the more successful one of the writer, who has the privileged task of creating something of his own, without inventing anything new, as everything has already been said, but telling it in a way that nobody has done before:

[...] el escritor sabe que sus ojos lo han mirado de una manera distinta y que nadie va a suplirle en la transmisión de esa forma suya de haber mirado lo que no era nuevo: la mirada es lo nuevo, y dar esa versión única e inédita le tienta y embriaga.<sup>10</sup>

Carmen Martín Gaité’s readers recognise these prerequisites as elements of her works when they find them in her reviews on other writers. This sort of osmosis between her work and that of other writers is not only present in her reviews on fiction, but also in her studies on

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8 Ibid., p. 357.

9 See her two reviews in the collection of articles from 1949 to 2000 published posthumously: Carmen Martín Gaité, “Primera memoria. *La busca del jardín*, de Héctor Bianciotti” and “*Andreas o los unidos*, de Hugo von Hofmannsthal”, in Carmen Martín Gaité, *Tirando del hilo*, Madrid, Siruela, 2006, pp. 289-291 and pp. 292-294.

10 Carmen Martín Gaité, “La ingrata condición del traductor. Bailar con la más fea”, in Carmen Martín Gaité, *Tirando del hilo*, p. 260.

other genres, such as biography, essay writing or drama. In her 1977 review of Virginia Woolf's collection of essays, *The Leaning Tower*, Martín Gaité stresses what she herself or her characters have often stated, because according to her, and likewise for Woolf, literary characters are similar to "real" persons met during one's life, which could be shared by Woolf herself:

[...] se nota que para ella los personajes de ficción y los de carne y hueso no están separados por una raya demasiado neta, de todo lo que habla es como si lo hubiera visto, nos lo pone ante los ojos, nos lo cuenta.<sup>11</sup>

The strong affinity with Woolf nurtures Martín Gaité's life and hence her writing, as when she recalls her first reading of *A Room of One's Own* in New York, especially the personal condition she was experiencing and the positive effect it gave her, so much so that when she avidly finished reading it:

[...] se había disipado la inquietud que a esas horas me condenaba a recordar mi condición de extranjera entre rascacielos [...]. Las cuatro paredes de mi refugio provisional no sólo no se me caían encima, sino que me arropaban maternalmente.<sup>12</sup>

Reading, according to the writer, is an intimate personal experience, affecting both her way of writing and her life and personality. Through her long experience as a translator, which will continue until her death in 2000, Martín Gaité established an intertextual, uninterrupted dialogue, aware of the fact that her voice was the personal synthesis of heterogeneous voices that by means of translation would become voices of her own. The act of translation has always represented for her a means of contact, of interpretation, of exchange between the source text and the translated text, a way of taking possession of a specific voice, of assimilating it in order to elaborate later in her own writing.

According to Martín Gaité, translation means to recognise one's role inside a selected tradition and to later propose oneself as heir to

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11 Carmen Martín Gaité, "Procesos que se hurtan al crítico. *La torre inclinada* de Virginia Woolf", in Carmen Martín Gaité, *Tirando del hilo*, p. 196.

12 Carmen Martín Gaité, *Desde la ventana*, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1987, p. 28.

that very tradition. The works by Ignazio Silone (*Pane e vino*), Italo Svevo (she translated also *Senilità* in 1982), Primo Levi (*Storie naturali* and *Il sistema periodico*, 1988), Natalia Ginzburg (*Caro Michele*, 1989, and *Tutti i nostri ieri*, 1996), Charles Perrault (*Fairy tales*, 1980), Gustave Flaubert (*Madame Bovary*, 1983), Emily Brontë (*Wuthering Heights*, 1984) and Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*, 1999) constitute the heterogeneous material Martín Gaité seizes by means of an act of translation, and which becomes an explicit intention of constructing and proposing a personal canon where Woolf's work occupies a privileged position.