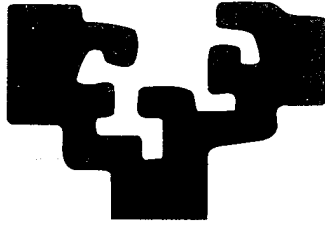


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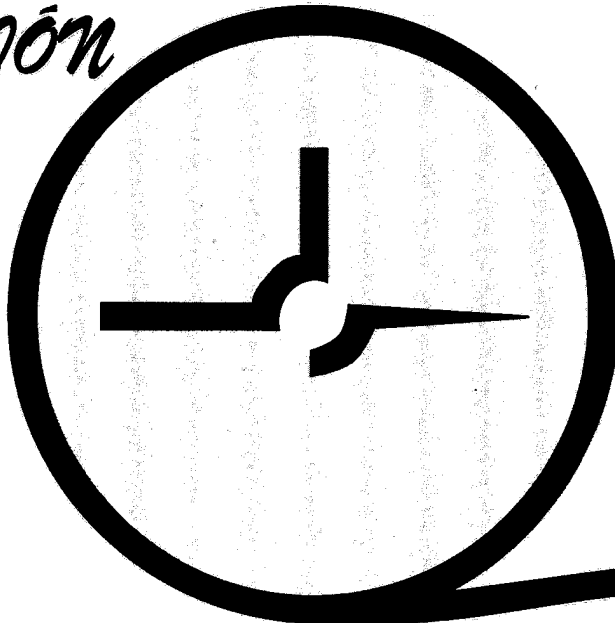
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**TRANSLATION, LITERATURE AND NATION: THE *XENERACIÓN NÓS*
AND THE APPROPRIATION OF JOYCE'S TEXTS***

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Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society.¹

In the autumn of 1920 a group of Galician intellectuals published the first number of a monthly cultural review which they called *Nós*. Until its disappearance with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the publication became the symbol and the voice of a generation of thinkers aware of their privileged role as cultural agents in a very specific time and space. Installed as they were, at the beginning of a new century and situated within the frames of a culture which, because of its marginality, had been denied a historical identity, they initially felt obliged to react against the inherited, the established, the traditional. Their search for the new began, therefore, as a rejection of their circumstances, a denial of their own history.

Previous to the publication of *Nós* and the configuration of the generation as such, each of the writers had expressed in his individual works a particular experience of alienation which they all shared: they were emotionally attached to the land and yet intellectually detached from it. They declared themselves "inadaptados" ("unadapted"), misfits, unintegrated, victims of an alienating dichotomy. They felt that their time demanded a cultural exile beyond the Pyrenees which inevitably clashed with the reality of their own identity as Galicians. Their wandering through a European culture manifestly cosmopolitan leads them initially to dissociate themselves from the ties with the land, an experience which they dismissed as provincial ruralism and yet, sensed inherently linked to the essence of their history.

In his work *Nós os Inadaptados* (We the Unadapted) Vicente Risco, one of the most representative writers and thinkers of the Generation admits the failure of the group of artists as young men: "Because of their individualism" he says, "because of their self-centeredness which I myself confess too, our group revolved around itself and each of us around himself without ever finding our identity" (72). The writer explicitly refers in his self-accusation to the other major

novelist of the group, Ramón Otero Pedrayo and his work *Arredor de Si* (Around Himself). This novel, published in 1930, portrays the evolution of a young Galician intellectual who travels throughout Europe for nine months anxiously searching to define his spiritual identity. After his pilgrimage through alien cultures he discovers that it is only in his native land that he can find the key to developing his own conscience.

The work of the Galician author exhibits an interesting thematic similarity to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Both novels tell the story of the growth of the protagonist as a man and an artist but unlike other works written in the tradition of the *künstlerroman*, in the Galician and Irish novels the individuals' personal quest for identity involves also a problematization of the national identity of their countries. Both protagonists immerse themselves in the activity of struggling for a hold on the meaning of being Galician and Irish. Stephen and Adrian share the same personal conflict of alienation: Ireland and Galicia are both seen as confinements from which one must be released in order to achieve complete individuality.

Arredor de Si and *Portrait* share the same point of departure but the conclusions which they arrive at point at different solutions: Adrian returns to Galicia in order to reencounter his own conscience whereas Stephen Dedalus leaves Ireland in order to forge his. The Galician writer's emphasis on the conciliatory presence in the land contrasts with Joyce's proposal of necessary absence from Ireland at the end of *Portrait*. And yet the underlying connections between both novels, stand as a frame which accounts for the Generation's interest in Joyce both as a contemporary European novelist and therefore a model, and most significantly, as a writer attempting to discover the true identity of his country, a man for whom nationality was also a discomfoting experience.

In this context, biographical and literary references to Joyce's life and works as well as partial translations of some of his texts are incorporated in the *Nós* journal thus becoming effective rewritings which contribute to the creation of a mythical image of the Irish author. This image is constructed to fit in with the program of the Galician writers who see themselves as representatives of a particular interpretive community.

The story of apprenticeship of Otero Pedrayo's protagonist illustrates in this sense the biography of the generation of artists to which the author belonged². His narrative account symbolizes the very process of development of the individuals in the *Nós* group. Their exploration of the scene of European culture which obeyed their initial urge for the new, the exotic, the other, only reinstates them in their roots. Theirs is the realization of the artist who can only define his identity through the reconciliation with his own origins.

Through the epiphany that the protagonist of *Arredor de Si* experiences towards the end of his journey, when he hears the singing of the Welsh sailors and thinks about Celtic mythology as "something that lived in his soul" (174),

Otero Pedrayo was ultimately expressing the epiphanic realization of the writers of the *Nós* Generation.

In their firm belief that Galicia and its people were the only intellectual venture worth exploring, their new project centered on the dignification and development of their native culture which they wanted to connect directly with Europe³. The concept of Galician race is thus to be grafted to its roots in contact with the land, through which it imbibes the particular taste of its spirit. This "feeling for the land"⁴ is perceived as a unique aspect of the culture which they represent and want to revitalize. But such a revitalization as understood by the *Nós* writers will only be accomplished if all imitations are rejected. Their art is therefore a determined attempt to be innovative. Only by breaking away from imitation will the artist succeed in presenting the selfproclaimed differential character of Galician culture. Avant-garde ideas can be imported from Europe but only to be overcome⁵.

At the core of their project is an eager commitment to decolonize Galicia both politically and culturally. Consequently, they need to find a distinctive discourse which they can use to problematize their being Galician before Europe and by doing so "forge in the smithy of their soul the uncreated conscience of their race"⁶.

In their quest, the concept of Atlantism arises from the conscious aim to oppose their "absent" differentiability as Galicians to the "present" alienating essentiality of the Peninsula and the continent within which they have been entrapped:

If we compare Galicia to other peninsular lands, we will find that it owes nothing to the peoples and cultures of the South [...] It was neither Iberic nor Arabic [...] Atlantic and western, the Galician nature can be classified as "insular"⁷.

Dissatisfied with the contemporary state of affairs, the Galician nationalist group of intellectuals concentrated their main efforts on convincing their fellow countrypeople of the true nature of their national identity.

Their claim follows the line of a major attempt to develop an archetypal mythology to counterbalance former cultural alienation. Their "superior Europeanism", as the writers of the generation put it, is rooted in what they refer to as their primitive Celtic origins⁸.

If, in Seamus Deane's words "All nationalisms have a metaphysical dimension, for they are all driven by an ambition to realize their intrinsic essence in some specific and tangible form. The form may be a political structure or a literary tradition"⁹, then, in the case of the *Nós* Generation, the creation of an aesthetic discourse which can legitimate the full development of Galician identity in both the political and cultural spheres, involves the establishment of a discourse of Celtism and Atlantism. The aim is to produce, through literature, a

transcendent space of representation for the differential character of Galician nature which lacks any other form of representation.

This sort of "sacred aura" that emerged around the idea of an essentially original culture promoted the appearance of a necessarily elitist attitude towards the concept of national literary production. In order to equate the future of their literature with the rest of the civilized European nations, the Nós writers needed to establish a sense of faith in the creative genius of the Galician artists and their prosperous projects.

Such an ideological context of protectionism towards one's own culture did not favor the practice of translation. The exercise of the translator was instead disregarded on the basis of a poetic program which would encourage a search for self expression and originality.

And yet, in spite of the generation's rejection of imitation, their determined attempt to be innovative and consequently their resistance to translation, the institution of an archetypal nationalist discourse necessarily takes the writers of the Nós Generation to appropriate other discourses of singularity. Therefore, when Otero Pedrayo decides to translate some passages of Joyce's *Ulysses* which would be published in the *Nós* review in August of 1926, he joins the Generation's effort to institute a discourse, original in its singularity and yet grounded on pre-existing discourses of distinctiveness. The translation functions therefore, as a legitimating mechanism for a minor literary system such as the Galician.

As stated by the critic Xoán González-Millán:

the nationalist question, the narrative and literary subversion represented by *Ulysses*, and the innovative reconfiguration of the Galician literary system, are some of the perspectives from which Otero Pedrayo's translation, generated on a horizon of cultural marginality, could and should be analyzed.(38)

The translation which is presented as "*Ulysses*, Anacos da Soadísima Novela de James Joyce, Postos en Galego do Texto Inglés" (Pieces of the very famous novel by James Joyce, Put into Galician from the English text)" offers an untitled selection of fragments from "Ithaca" and "Cyclops" in that order, and provides no further explanation as to which chapters have been selected or why. González Millán reminds us that Joyce's novel will not be translated completely into any language until 1927, when the German version appears, the only previous attempt being another fragmentary translation in French, of parts of "Telemachus", "Ithaca" and "Penelope" published in 1924¹⁰. In this respect, the Generation's interest in Joyce stands as an extraordinary cultural effort to incorporate a significant example of modernity within the Galician literary system.

By means of translating Joyce or rather "putting Joyce's fragments into Galician", the Nós writers appropriate a text which mirrors and strengthens their

own concern to produce a discourse which must be innovative and differential. Through a sort of narcissistic appropriation ("put into Galician") a foreign text is made familiar, the ultimate implication being both the reconciliation with "the other" cultural experience and, more important, the elevation of one's own. The translation functions accordingly as a strategy to contribute to the consolidation of a new poetics in open conflict with the prevailing one. As stated by the members of the Generation, new ways of expression should be developed in order to liberate Galician narrative from the asphyxiating limitations of blind provincialism. Their programmatic poetics stresses the need for a novel committed to the land, "a novel written in Galician" and at the same time universal, "as famous as to overcome borders"¹¹.

The selected fragment from "Ithaca" and the "Cyclops" episode have certainly been acclaimed by the critics as crucial testing grounds for theories of the novel, where "the extremes of Joyce's art, and fiction in general, are found in radical form" (Walton Litz 385). Seen against such a background, Otero Pedrajo's choice of fragments cannot be perceived as a random selection but rather a carefully studied one¹². The writer's approach to the Joycean texts can only be understood in the light of a deep awareness of their transcendental implications on the scene of European literature. In this sense, the translation of parts of *Ulysses*, approached in search of a model for the new Galician novel, reinforces the Generation's commitment to the reconfiguration of their literary system and illustrates their concern with other writers' attitudes towards nationalism. The projected image of the Irish author and his work in the Galician culture becomes an interesting example of what the critic André Lefevere has defined as a "combination of ideological and poetological motivations".

In the selected passage from "Cyclops" Joyce renders one-eyed political postures as destructive forces which divide society. In the case of the selection from "Ithaca", the translated fragments refer to the possible blending of different cultures (Jewish and Irish) which are presented reunited as the two characters which embody them, Bloom and Stephen, converse during their night walk. The text is also literally appropriated by the Galician writer Risco as a probable source of inspiration for "Dedalus in Compostela", published in *Nós* in 1929. The Galician author offers a transcription of a conversation between Stephen Dedalus and himself, which supposedly would have taken place in 1926 (the year of the translation) as they wandered through the city of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia (the scenario obviously echoing Bloom's and Stephen's wandering through Dublin in *Ulysses*). Claiming the common origins which both Ireland and Galicia share, Stephen declares that he has Celtic blood and that "fleeing from my land I come here to encounter my race".

This appropriation of a motif —Stephen and Bloom's wandering— which is the key motif of the "Ithaca" episode in *Ulysses*, stands as a revealing testimony to the way in which the *Nós* Generation understood the practice of translation.

When the Galician literary audience was reduced to a relatively small group of patriotic intellectuals, translation becomes an act of appropriation rather than mediation. In this respect, the translation of the Joycean texts should not be seen as a passive submission to cultural impulses from abroad but as an active approach to “familiarize” foreign ideological and literary values. The translated texts thus become a materialization of a relationship to otherness which is deliberately made into a familiar experience.

Three months before the edition of the translated fragments from “Cyclops” and “Ithaca”, in May of 1926, Risco publishes, also in *Nós*, the second part of an article titled “On Celtic Renaissance. Modern Irish Literature”. His analysis, of a programmatic nature, is coherent with the Generation’s exploration of a culture which, because of its Celtic heritage, is highly appealing. Interestingly enough, the author devotes most of his commentary to Joyce, obviously attempting to provide a context which will frame the imminent translation. The biographic reference gathers a great deal of data extracted from articles published in French literary reviews. However, Risco’s approach to the life and work of Joyce is original in as much as the borrowed materials are arranged in order to problematize a controversial topic: the Irish dimension of the man and the writer.

James Joyce: Ireland created —and perhaps only Ireland could have created this writer— which we might label as a unique case in our time.⁽²⁾

This, his first critique of the Irish author stands as a key reference within the context of the Generation’s main concern. Joyce’s genius is presented as being the natural outcome of a differential space, Ireland, and at the same time as having the effect of being radically innovative, “unique in our time”. The initial observation intrinsically relates the “Irish case” to what is at stake on the Galician literary scene as the *Nós* writers understand it: the quest of a minority culture seeking an articulation of its differentiability through a radically innovative space of representation.

Deeply influenced by the foundational aspect of his generation’s enterprise, Risco approaches Joyce to tacitly insinuate the underlying connections which might link both the Irish and the Galician cases. Joyce is then introduced as the implied model for the writers of this other Atlantic “island” south of Ireland. The “manipulation” of this introductory reference, a clear attempt to make Joyce’s image fit in with the dominant ideology of the *Nós* Generation, falls in line with what would be the ultimate goal of the translation itself: by transferring the fragments into Galician, Otero Pedrayo was able to parallel the two cultures. Joyce’s texts are appropriated and presented side by side with instances of a minor national literature. Furthermore, rewriting Joyce in the Galician language becomes an effective antidote to the inferiority complex of a minor literature¹³, but the translation does more than expose the universal nature of a marginal culture, it illustrates the generation’s interest in Joyce’s addressing of nationalism.

The question of the writer's repudiation of Irish nationalism and his breaking away from the literature which served that cause is exposed in Risco's article: "he turned away from Irish religion, language and patriotism and wrote against the National Theatre"³. However, the conclusion at which he arrives at the end of his article, explicitly emphasizes the undeniable Irishness of "this rootless one" as he calls him:

[...] in the exile he suffers from the obsession with Ireland. All his works talk about Ireland [...] and his characters are Irish [...] Finally, his spirit is deeply Irish: Irish because of his rebelliousness [...] passion excess [...] oddity, **because he does not imitate anybody.**"⁵

"Irish because he does not imitate anybody". Risco's last statement echoes his generation's concern with the aim of giving a new form of realisation to the artistic experience, thus breaking away from imitations in order to proclaim its differentiability. But the final conclusion is, more than anything else, a clue to interpreting Joyce's own understanding of art and a proposal to redefine the concept of nationalist aesthetics.

Joyce was doubtlessly a disconcerting case for the Galician generation of writers who turned their eyes towards Ireland in search of a model, another uncreated conscience to be forged. Disconcerting because their proclamation of insularity was in conflict with Joyce's attachment to the continent, their gathering as a group with his being around himself in privileged isolation, their faithfulness to the land with his refusal to service. But despite the differences which separated them, the *Nós* writers felt they were engaged with Joyce in the common task of finding a form of writing which could break away from the restrictions of local nationality, an exclusive and yet universal writing.

"His fiction" the critic Seamus Deane says about Joyce, "was creating a reality which otherwise would have no existence", and he continues "rather than consign his fiction to any single structure or set of structures, he investigated the activity of structuration itself, discovering always that there is something excessive in language [...] beyond the reach of any structuring principle" (1982: 181) For the Irish scholar, Joyce's innovative experimentation with language is intrinsically associated with a radically new treatment of the nationalist discourse.

In the light of the most revolutionary criticism on Joyce produced in our days, the writers of the *Nós* Generation can certainly be regarded as being ahead of their time. Whereas Joyce was being accused of passivity, indifference and even antinationalism by most contemporaries, by translating the selected fragments from *Ulysses*, the Galician writers were lucidly assuming the radical redefinition of his relationship to politics and language: "Irish because of his rebelliousness, passion, excess, oddity [...] Irish because he does not imitate anybody".

NOTES

¹ See the preface by André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett in Gentzler, Edwin. *Contemporary Translation Theories*. London: Routledge, 1993.

² For a detailed analysis of the trajectory of the Nós writers see Salvador Lorenzana, "A Xeneración 'Nós' na Cultura Galega", (*Grial*, 7, 1965), pp. 75-77. In his article he refers to *Arredor de Si* as the "spiritual autobiography of the members of the Nós Generation".

³ See Lorenzana, "A Xeneración Nós na Cultura Galega", p. 79. The author quotes Risco's words— "we have to write European culture in the Galician language"— and points out that the writers' return to the land also involved a reintegration into their own history and a manifested attempt to reconstruct the biography of their country from within. In this respect it is worth noting that the writers' renovated attitude and understanding of the nature of their enterprise was somehow symmetrically opposed to the position of their early years: Europe and its culture were contemplated now from the idiosyncrasy of their own culture.

⁴ The Nós writers declared themselves universal but intrinsically attached to the land. In the preliminary statement of the first issue of the publication they state that "the contributors to Nós can be whatever they want to be; individualist or socialist [...], intuitive or rationalist [...] as long as they put their feeling for the land above everything else". See *Nós*, 1 (1929), p. 1.

⁵ Lorenzana, "A Xeneración Nós na Cultura Galega", p. 79.

⁶ James Joyce, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, The Viking Critical Library (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p.253.

⁷ See Ramón Otero Pedrayo, *Ensaio Histórico sobre a Cultura Galega*, (Vigo: Editorial Galaxia, 1982), pp. 15-16. In his study Otero Pedrayo makes a conscious effort to document the affinities that both Galicia and Ireland share. The references to Ireland abound throughout the essay and are frequently introduced to establish the common Celtic origins of both cultures.

⁸ The allusion to the shared Celtic origins of Ireland and Galicia is constantly emphasized in the writings of the Nós Generation. See Antonio Raúl de Toro Santos, "La Huella de Joyce en Galicia", *Joyce en España*. (Universidade da Coruña: 1994), pp. 32-33.

⁹ See p. 8 of the introduction by Seamus Deane to Eagleton, Jameson and Said, *Nationalism Colonialism and Literature*, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 1990).

¹⁰ For a detailed account of other translations of *Ulysses*, see Xoan González Millán, "James Joyce e a Xeración Nós", (*Grial* 101, 1989), p. 30.

¹¹ Leandro Carré, "Encol da Novela Galega" (*Nós* 27, 1926), p. 12-14.

¹² In "James Joyce e a Xeración Nós", González Millán quotes Clive Hart and Walton Litz. The critic points out that Otero Pedrayo selects the most complex section of "Ithaca", therefore consciously acknowledging Joyce's experimentation with narrative techniques.

¹³ See González Millán, p. 39. Based on David Lloyd's concept of "minor modes of writing" (*Nationalism and Minor Literature. James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism*. London: Methuen 1987) the critic argues that by translating the selected texts from *Ulysses*, Otero Pedrayo was showing his awareness of Joyce's critical reflection on the nationalist discourse. He concludes that the Galician writers' interest in *Ulysses* can only be explained from their understanding of Joyce's work as a "minor text": a ground for confrontation and resistance.

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