

Interview with Mario Murgia

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Mario Murgia

*Is *Dublineses* a collective or a collaborative translation, in other words, did each translator work independently or did the seven translators work as a team? If collective, was there any instruction or guideline that the translators must follow? If collaborative, how did the teamwork evolve?*

Dublineses was a collaborative translation from beginning to end. Each translator would provide a first draft that would then be read by the rest of the members of the Translation Seminar. Then, after a series of careful readings, each member of the seminar would give their opinions, recommendations, and corrections to their colleagues, who in turn would accept or reject everyone else's comments according to their own vision of the translational process. All translators were required to turn in a finalised version, which would then be re-read by the Seminar as a group. This series of readings, corrections, and

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re-readings ensured a comprehensive and detailed interpretation and versioning of each one of the short stories, individually, and Joyce's *Dubliners* as a narrative continuum.

***Dublinese* was an initiative of the Permanent Literary Translation Seminar. Tell us about it.**

The *Seminario Permanente de Traducción Literaria de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la UNAM* (Continuing Seminar of Literary Translation at the School of Philosophy and Literature, UNAM) has been taking on significant translation projects for over 25 years. The group is comprised of scholars, poets, writers, and translators who are interested in disseminating influential works of literature among readers and audiences in Mexico and the rest of Spanish-speaking America. Its members are Flora Botton-Burlá, Charlotte Broad, Eva Cruz Yáñez, Marina Fe, Mónica Mansour, Mario Murgia, and Federico Patán. Prose and poetry works by salient writers from the US, Great Britain, Ireland, Anglophone Africa, and other English-speaking nations and regions of the world have been translated by the Seminar over the past three decades.

Did the translation have a specific purpose or a specific target?

In the case of *Dublinese*, the Seminar decided to translate Joyce's famous collection of short stories because, even though the volume had been translated in Argentina, Cuba, and Spain, there existed no Mexican translations of it. Mexico is the country with the largest number of Spanish-speakers in the world, and we thought that a pivotal work of literature like *Dubliners* would be worthwhile versioning in the linguistic register of Mexico, for Mexicans, and possibly for other readerships who might consider that country a translation hub in the contemporary Spanish-speaking world.

How does Dublinese distinguish itself from the other Spanish-language translations?

A few weeks after *Dublinese* finally saw the light of day, a book review titled 'Dublinese sin gilipollas' came out in an on-line literary magazine. A rough English translation of the title would be 'Dubliners without Wankers.' 'Gilipollas' is an Ibero-Spanish derogatory term that does not really make much sense outside of Spain. As can be guessed, the reviewer perceived what the main purpose of *Dublinese* actually was—to present a translation of Joyce that would eventually break from the widespread canon of Ibero-Spanish translation, while it also retained a high level of understanding for speakers of other varieties of the Spanish language across the Americas. Also, new generations of readers always seem to need new translations of seminal literary works. *Dublinese* hopefully intends to fulfill that need in Joyce's case.

You translated “The Sisters”, “An Encounter”, and “Counterparts”. Could you comment on at least one particularly challenging part in each short story?

The main challenge in translating all of those three stories was to keep them as descriptive and suggestive as they are in English without unwillingly overexplaining specific situations, contexts, or attitudes on the part of the main characters. As we all know, all of those stories take place, fictionally, in Dublin at the turn of the 20th century, which might make them appear significantly foreign for Latin American audiences. In this sense, it was difficult for us to maintain a decent degree of ‘recognisability’ or rapport between characters and readers with regard to their special circumstances. This is particularly true of ‘The Sisters,’ where it was imperative to maintain an ominous sense of secrecy and moral ambiguity. In the case of ‘Counterparts,’ it was complicated to mark a difference between the registers of adult characters and the plaintive, profoundly painful turn of phrase of the child appearing almost at the end of the story. Joyce is a master of ventriloquy, and oftentimes—especially in *Dubliners*, where very young characters play central roles—the age gap that manifests itself through language and characterization can be hard to replicate, or even imitate, in translation. The same can be said about ‘An Encounter,’ where an added difficulty is the narrator’s point of view—here the narrative voice explores a distant past that is mediated by the inevitability of growing up in an environment of both ambiguous morality and social stagnation. Of course, Joyce’s decidedly local, highly idiosyncratic, and somewhat outdated vocabulary can be a true challenge when it comes down to trying to find equally evocative terms or allusions in (Mexican) Spanish.

You translated “An Encounter” with Flora Botton-Burlá. How was translating à quatre mains?

Translating with Flora Botton-Burlá was an absolute delight, in the sense that we were there for each other whenever there was a need to interpret or even re-interpret certain passages, turns of phrase, allusions, or even single words or expressions. Not surprisingly, four eyes can see better than a mere two. We spent together every single minute of the translational process. The exchange of impressions, ideas, experiences, and linguistic possibilities made whole enterprise not only more enjoyable but also highly efficient, both in terms of timing and versioning. By the mid-second paragraph of the short story, we already were able to end each other’s translated sentences. Literally.

Did you read or consult with other translations of Dubliners in any language?

Personally, I did not resort to any other Spanish translations while conducting my own. I wanted to keep myself from being overtly influenced by the great writers and translators who

has preceded me in the task of reinterpreting and rewriting *Dubliners*. It was only after I had finished translating the stories I had chosen that I read Guillermo Cabrera Infante's Cuban version, very attentively, to see how far off the mark I had wandered. Luckily, and for the most part, our divergences were almost exclusively linguistic rather than interpretive.

What is the importance of a Mexican translation of Dubliners?

If there is any true importance to *Dublinese*s, that is for its readers to decide. I would like to think, however, that our translation has been a peculiar contribution to the international Joycean canon in terms of the renewed, refreshed readings the volume may inspire. Every new translation of a 'classical' or 'canonical' work of literature will undoubtedly attract the attention of readerships who are willing to explore alternative possibilities for well-known, well-loved (or even much-hated) authors and texts. Let us hope that *Dublinese*s will not be the exception.

In the "Note on the translation", Rafael Vargas rebukes the Argentinianisms used by Óscar Muslera and the Cubanisms used by Guillermo Cabrera-Infante in their translations. By contrast, he praises the Mexican Dublinese for "having as few localisms as possible" and "being free from any foreign accent". But a Mexican translation deprived of any Mexicanism would be Un-Mexican, would it not? And a translation free from foreignness runs the risk of flattening one of the most noticeable characteristics in Dubliners: Joyce's "foreign" English, does it not? Were the translators trying to achieve a standard-Spanish translation?

We all have accents. No translator is ever free from his accent, just like no author can ever claim that he or she is linguistically or literarily neutral. Neutrality is an impossibility, at least in the realm of translation, and happily so. As 'neutral' as *Dublinese*s may sound, I am sure that there is still a Mexican whiff to its linguistic arrangement. When in 'A Little Cloud,' or 'Una nubecita,' Ignatius Gallagher says 'Yo tomo el mío derecho' [I take mine straight], referring to the way he drinks his whisky, I am sure he sounds at least half-Mexican. The same goes for Mr Bell in 'A Mother,' or 'Una Madre,' when he shouts '¡Chócalas!' (or 'Shake!'—a hand, that is). I take Muslera's comments as a compliment, however, because he has acknowledged the Seminario's efforts to reach a wider readership while still retaining a certain degree of local flavour. I would like to think that have rendered Joyce a discretely-local-yet-highly-recognisable dweller of the wide and varied Hispanosphere.