THE FIRST SPANISH TRANSLATION OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S "TIME PASSES": FACTS, MYSTERIES AND CONJECTURES

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Abstract

In 1931 a Spanish version of Virginia Woolf's "Time Passes" was published under the title "El tiempo pasa" in Revista de Occidente. It is the first known text by Woolf in Spanish, a translation which predates the Argentine version of To the Lighthouse by seven years and which has traditionally been ignored by Woolf scholars and bibliographers. Unfortunately, this significant piece in Revista de Occidente does not contain any information other than the title at the beginning and the name of the novelist, Virginia Woolf, at the end. Who was the translator? Was the same text used in later Spanish editions of the novel? Why was this passage chosen by the journal? What did the editor in particular and the Spanish reading public in general know about Virginia Woolf at that time? These are some of the questions that will be addressed in this paper. In discussing this first Spanish translation and its literary context, several details about the reception of Woolf's work in pre-war Spain will also be provided.

An interesting event in the publication history of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is that the central and shortest part of the novel, "Time Passes", appeared in France a few months before the entire novel was published in England in May 1927. The text was translated by

Charles Mauron for the French journal *Commerce*, and it was substantially different from the definitive second part of the novel.¹⁷ Mauron's version, for instance, does not include the first short dialogue between Mr Bankes, Andrew and Prue, nor the events about the family recorded in square brackets. The absence of references to characters introduced in the first part of the novel helps the text appear as an autonomous entity. In 1929 a French version of the whole novel appeared under the title *La promenade au phare*, translated by Maurice Lanoire.

Most curiously, in 1931 a Spanish version of "Time Passes" was published under the title "El tiempo pasa" in Revista de Occidente, a prestigious monthly publication founded in Madrid in 1923 by José Ortega y Gasset. It is the first known text by Woolf in Spanish,18 a translation which predates the Argentine version of To the Lighthouse by seven years and which has traditionally been ignored by Woolf scholars and bibliographers. 19 The fourth edition of B.J. Kirkpatrick's Bibliography of Virginia Woolf does not include this translation of "Time Passes". A thorough journal article by Luisa-Femanda Rodríguez on the Spanish translations of Virginia Woolf's work does not refer to it either. Similarly, Dámaso López's scholarly introduction to the last edition of To the Lighthouse in Spanish ignores this early translation of Woolf's work. It is also very likely that Virginia Woolf herself did not know of its existence. While references to translations of her works into other languages, including Spanish and Catalan, abound in her letters and diary, I could not find any reference to this 1931 Spanish version of "Time Passes". Like the first French text, the Spanish piece does not correspond exactly to the second part of the novel. Its complete title announces that we shall only read some fragments: "El tiempo pasa (fragmentos)". Then we find that three complete sections are missing (1st, 5th and 10th), as well as the sentences in square brackets and a few lines in the 8th and 9th sections. Again, like the early French version, it leaves out any reference to previous characters or events of the novel. as if it were an independent text in its own right. The focus is thus on the house, its aging process, discovering Virginia Woolf's preoccupation with the passing of time.

 ¹⁷ For commentary on this version, see James M. Haule's article "Le temps passe' and the Original Typescript: An Early Version of the "Time Passes' section of To the Lighthouse".
 18 A Catalan version of Mrs Dalloway was published in Barcelona in 1930.

¹⁹ I already announced the existence of this early translation in "The Emerging Voice: A Review of Spanish Scholarship on Virginia Woolf" (2002).

Unfortunately, this translation does not contain any information other than the title at the beginning and the name of the novelist, Virginia Woolf, at the end. Consequently, some important issues deserve attention. Who was the translator? Was the same text used in later Spanish editions of the novel? Was the translation made from the French text published in Commerce? Why was this passage chosen by the journal? Some of these questions are very difficult to answer. Information about the editorial policy and the archive of Revista de Occidente seems to be shrouded in mist and marked by contradictions. While one critic says that the archive of the journal was destroyed during the Spanish Civil War (Cacho Viu, 1993:49-50, 57), another reveals that the son of the director of the journal, Miguel Ortega Spottomo, who was an officer in the Nationalist army "bought up a majority of the stock in the Revista de Occidente and saved the offices from being sequestered by the Franco government" (Gray, 1989:267). As the latter commentator declares, "much remains obscure in Ortega [v Gasset]'s life. Only a handful of his letters have been published, and the most important of his private papers are still in the hands of his family" (Gray, 1989:5-6). Although I have tried several times and in different ways, I have not yet been able to go through the archive and personal documents of Ortega y Gasset. I merely have in my possession a letter from the Centro de Estudios Orteguianos, Fundación José Ortega y Gasset, which assures us that there is no single reference to Woolf in Ortega y Gasset's archive. Nevertheless, in this paper I will present some facts, some mysteries, and some conjectures that suggest directions for further research.

The first fact that can be established with certainty is that the anonymous Spanish translation of "Time Passes" is completely different from the version included in the Spanish edition of *To the Lighthouse* published in Buenos Aires in 1938, and translated by the Spanish literary critic and biographer Antonio Marichalar. A detailed comparative analysis of both texts is worth making, but is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say, the earlier version is an entirely different work, a reasonably good translation that effectively conveys the lyrical force and resonance of the original English text. Here is an extract from each version in which we can appreciate some clear differences:

So with the lamps all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began. (1967:195) Así, apagadas todas las lámparas, oculta la luna y, repiqueteando sobre el tejado una menuda lluvia, se derrumbó una inmensa oscuridad. (1931:282)

Apagadas las luces, desapareció la luna; sobre el tejado se inició el tamborileo de una lluvia fina y se hizo inmensa la oscuridad. (1938b:8)

It is interesting to note that Antonio Marichalar also published the middle part of the novel, "Pasa el tiempo", in the Argentine journal *Sur* before the whole book appeared in print. The text included all the sections and comments in brackets. It is an exact reproduction of the second part of the novel, as a footnote on the first page reveals.

One might wonder then if the Spanish text in *Revista de Occidente* was somehow related to the first French version in *Commerce*. The question is highly pertinent, since, as we have seen, both were published in isolation and had some similarities, such as the exclusion of the first section and the comments in square brackets. Moreover, we know that the journal *Commerce* was distributed in Spain through *Revista de Occidente* (González García, 1993:75); therefore, the Spanish translator could easily have had access to the French text. However, a comparison between the two versions shows that they are very different indeed. There are, for example, several passages of Mauron's translation that are missing in the definitive English chapter of the novel as well as in the Spanish version. Thus, the Spanish text did not take Mauron's article as the primary text, but the definitive second part of the novel.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that it was the "English" novel that the Spanish translator used as a source for his or her work. In fact, the 1931 Spanish translation was undoubtedly based on Lanoire's French text, rather than the English original. This was not an uncommon practice at that time in Spain,²⁰ considering that Paris was the capital of culture for most of the Spanish literary *intelligentsia* and French was the main foreign language at Spanish schools and universities.²¹ The fidelity to its French source can be clearly seen throughout the piece at syntactic, semantic and lexical levels. The

21 We should also take into account that the first modern language departments at Spanish

universities were not established until the 1960s.

²⁰ There are also other instances in the past. The first translation of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* into Spanish, made by Ignacio García Malo in 1794, used a French version by l' Abbé Prévost; see Eterio Pajares Infante's article "El anónimo traductor de la versión española de *Pamela Andrews*".

Spanish translator systematically follows Lanoire's additions, omissions and departures from Virginia Woolf's prose. A few examples are enough to illustrate this point (the italics are mine):

— Consider the omission of the third reference to "light", the translation of "mellows" and "lapping", the rendering of "labour" as "worker" and the addition of the "roughness" of the stubble:

The autumn trees gleam in the yellow moonlight, in the light of the harvest moons, the light which mellows the energy of labour, and smooths the stubble, and brings the wave lapping blue to the shore. (1967:198)

Les arbres automnaux brillent dans le jaune clair de lune, le clair de lune des moissons qui donne sa plénitude heureuse à l'énergie du travailleur, étend sa douceur sur l'aspérité du chaume et apporte au rivage la caresse bleue de la vague. (1929:151-2)

Los árboles otoñales brillan en la claridad amarilla de la luna, en la claridad lunar de las mieses que dan su feliz plenitud a la energía del labriego, que expande su dulzura sobre la aspereza del rastrojo y trae a las orillas la azulada caricia de la onda. (1931:286)

— In the following example the syntactical and semantic changes, as well as the inclusion of "fundamental", are faithfully followed in the Spanish version:

Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer. (1967:199)

Il semblerait presque qu'il est inutile dans une pareille confusion de poser à la nuit ces questions fondamentales auxquelles pour répondre le dormeur est tenté de s'arrecher à son lit. (1929:152)

Parecía casi inútil en una semejante confusión hacer a la noche esas preguntas fundamentales, para contestar a las cuales el dormilón siente la tentación de arrancarse de la cama. (1931:287) — Notice the translation of the simile "arrow-like stillness" and the phrase "hold court":

Night after night, summer and winter, the torment of storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court without interference. (1967:208)

Toutes les nuits, à travers l'été et l'hiver, le tourment des tempêtes, la fixité du beau temps, semblable à la droiture de la flèche, régnèrent sans trouble. (1929:159-60)

Todas las noches, durante el verano y el invierno, la tortura de las tempestades, la fijeza del buen tiempo, semejante a la rigidez de la flecha, reinaron sin perturbarse. (1931:293)

Another interesting issue that requires elucidation is the possible reasons for the inclusion of Virginia Woolf's chapter in Revista de Occidente. Some information about the journal will certainly explain why this piece was chosen. The principal aim of Revista de Occidente was to provide a forum for the discussion of sociological, psychological, historical and literary issues prevailing in the Western world. Its director, José Ortega y Gasset, was a philosopher and humanist who advocated what he called the "Europeanisation of Spain" and intended the journal to be a vehicle for the diffusion of current foreign trends.²² He was exceptionally sensitive to recent innovation in art, ethics, history and, particularly, in literature. In fact, some of the Spanish avant-garde of the 1920s was formed around Ortega's Revista de Occidente and the publishing house of the same name that he founded in 1924, where young writers such as Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén, Benjamín Jarnés or Antonio Espina published some of their works. The journal also brought an extraordinary influx of new names from abroad, including contributions by Lytton Strachey, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield and Aldous Huxley. Also, it is worth stating at this point that Ortega's ideas about the novel were very much in line with the experimental modernist fiction of the time, as can be seen in this comment about the future of the novel from his book La deshumanización del arte e ideas sobre la novela: "The possibility of constructing human souls is perhaps the major asset of future novels ... Not in the invention of the plots but

²² See the section "Propósitos" in the first issue of the journal.

in the invention of interesting characters lies, in my opinion, the best hope of the novel" (1925:149).²³ Given this literary background, it seems only natural that they were drawn to Virginia Woolf and that *Revista de Occidente* should publish the central section of *To the Lighthouse*, as if it were a kind of experimental short story, a lyrical prose piece without action that corresponded to the journal's aim and scope.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to say how familiar the editorial staff of the journal —Ortega and the secretary, Fernando Vela— were with Virginia Woolf's work and who took the final decision to include the "Time Passes" part in the journal. They could have become acquainted with her name in different ways. They might have heard about the Catalan edition of Mrs Dalloway that had been published in Barcelona in 1930, the year before they decided to include the "Time Passes" section in their journal. On the other hand, as I mentioned above, they could have seen Mauron's French translation in Commerce, since they distributed this journal in Spain. Finally, it is very likely that they knew Antonio Marichalar's early references to Virginia Woolf disseminated in various articles of their own journal Revista de Occidente. In 1928 Marichalar quoted from Virginia Woolf's booklet Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown in an article entitled "Las 'vidas' y Lytton Strachey" and distinguished her as an "authoritative voice" (354). The following year Marichalar referred specifically to Mrs Dalloway in another piece entitled "Nueva dimensión", also published in Revista de Occidente. And most significantly, he praised Virginia Woolf's innovative fiction in an article, "Último grito", that was published two issues before the one that included the Spanish version of "Time Passes". 24 But, did Ortega read the whole novel himself? Was he really acquainted with Virginia Woolf's work? It is difficult to say. His two biographers, Rockwell Gray and Gregorio Morán, do not mention any link between Ortega and Virginia Woolf.

As to the particular details of the editorial decision to include the text, without the relevant archival information one can only make guesses based on some general data published about *Revista de Occidente*. Rafael Osuna, in an excellent study of the Spanish periodicals

²³ "Esta posibilidad de construir fauna espiritual es, acaso, el resorte mayor que puede manejar la novela futura. [...] No en la invención de 'acciones', sino en la invención de almas interesantes veo yo el mejor porvenir del género novelesco".

²⁴ Antonio Marichalar probably knew of the existence of the 1931 Spanish version of "Time Passes". Whether he used this text, together with the English original, for his translation of *To the Lighthouse* could be the topic of another essay.

and journals of the 1930s, states that although Ortega was not solely responsible for his journal's editorial policy, it was he who "pulled the strings, invited, discarded and ruled" (1986:35).²⁵ In contrast, Vicente Cacho's short memoir of Ortega's journal suggests that the names of most of the creative writers were selected by the secretary Fernando Vela (1993:50). On the other hand, some editorial decisions were made at Ortega's daily tertulia, which took place at the offices of the Revista de Occidente in Madrid's Gran Vía. Ramón Gómez de la Serna, in his autobiography Automoribundia said: "The tertulia was the presbytery of the magazine, and both people and texts were selected there" (1948: 430).²⁶

The main mystery of this early Spanish version of "Time Passes" that intrigues us is the identity of the translator. Going through the different contributions by foreign authors published in Revista de Occidente in the 1920s and 1930s, we realise that the translators' names are seldom given. Why didn't they reveal their names? Who translated Aldous Huxley, Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf for Revista de Occidente? This editorial practice is in line with Ortega's ideas about translation included in his "Miseria y esplendor de la traducción".27 Although Ortega discussed here the difficulties of translation, he stated that being a translator was a "modest" and "humble" occupation (1976:128). If he really thought that translation was a minor intellectual activity, it is only logical that he should not bother to divulge the names of the translators who worked for his journal. Perhaps some of these translations were done by the director or the secretary themselves, although Vicente Romano's comments on Ortega raise some doubts about this. Romano says that Ortega was able to gather "a real school of translators" around his journal and publishing house (1976:199).²⁸ This school of translators included a wide range of recognized literary names, as well as some unknown disciples of Ortega's who might have gained some extra cash with this activity.

²⁵ "La *Revista de Occidente* [...] es la revista de Ortega, quien pese a delegar poderes, maneja sus hilos, invita, desecha, organiza y manda; su grupo es un grupo secundario aunque cohesivo, pero la figura del jefe grupal sobresale en exceso sobre las de sus componentes".

^{26 &}quot;La tertulia era el presbiterio de la revista, y allí se iban seleccionando las personas y los originales".

²⁷ This essay was first published in several issues of the Argentine newspaper La Nación in 1937.
²⁸ "Ortega supo reunir en torno a la revista y a la editorial una verdadera escuela de traductores, los cuales facilitaron su tarea".

Before we enter the world of conjectures about the possible translator of Virginia Woolf's piece in Revista de Occidente. I propose to discard the names of those who are very unlikely to have done the translation. The first one that should be disregarded from the list is Victoria Ocampo, the Argentine literary critic and publisher that was responsible for the early translations of Woolf's works in Buenos Aires.²⁹ It is true that there are a few details that might lead us to think of her as a possible candidate for our anonymous translator: she knew French and English, was acquainted with Virginia Woolf's oeuvre, even became her friend after meeting her in London in 1934,30 and she was also a friend of Ortega y Gasset's since 1916, having published two books in his publishing house Revista de Occidente.³¹ Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that she was responsible for the Spanish translation of "Time Passes" in 1931, since she admitted in her Autobiografía that her education was in French and that it took her some years to write in Spanish; in fact, her first book, De Francesca a Beatrice was written in French and translated into Spanish by Ricardo Baeza (1991:198). Doris Meyer confirms this idea in her study Victoria Ocampo: Against the Wind and the Tide: "[Ocampo] began to write in Spanish in the 1930s, not all at once but bit by bit" (1979:53). Besides, I found no reference to this translation in her autobiography, in Virginia Woolf's letters to her or in other critical works about this Argentine writer.

We should also exclude the two early translators of Woolf's works into Spanish: Antonio Marichalar and Jorge Luis Borges. On the one hand, we have already seen that Antonio Marichalar's version of *To the Lighthouse* is completely different from the anonymous early Spanish text. On the other hand, I have deep reservations about Borges, the Argentine poet and short-story writer who had translated the first Spanish editions of *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando* in the 1930s. We must not lose sight of an important fact: after Ortega's visit to Argentina in 1928 Borges was not on good terms with the Spanish intellectual. Ortega had expressed some harsh criticism about Argentines, which had

²⁹ She was the founder-editor of Editorial Sur, the publishing house that issued the Spanish editions of A Room of One's Own, Orlando and To the Lighthouse in the 1930s.

³⁰ See the article Victoria Ocampo published in *Revista de Occidente* that year titled "Carta a Virginia Woolf", where she remembers her meeting with Virginia Woolf and discusses *A Room of One's Own*.

 $^{^{31}}$ In 1924 Revista de Occidente published Ocampo's study of Dante, De Francesca a Beatrice, and two years later, they published her dramatic fairy tale titled La laguna de los nenúfares.

provoked considerable public resentment.³² Among those who did not take kindly to his critique of Argentines was Borges (Gray, 1989:182). Therefore, it is difficult to believe that Borges could have penned any translation for Ortega's *Revista de Occidente* in 1931.

Another line of investigation would be to consider those writers and critics who were published by the monthly *Revista de Occidente* and translated from French. This would lead us to such poets as Jorge Guillén or Pedro Salinas, as well as the critic and translator Ricardo Baeza. However, one wonders why such established literary figures as these did not claim the authorship of the translation of Woolf's passage. In fact, two years before, in 1929, Baeza and Guillén signed two articles in *Revista de Occidente* which presented the translations of works by Eugene O'Neill and Paul Valéry respectively. Furthermore, we should dismiss the possibility that Pedro Salinas, the translator of Marcel Proust, might have been the author of "El tiempo pasa", because he had distanced himself from Ortega's group since 1930. The letters that Salinas wrote to Guillén at that time confirm this. For instance, on 2 April 1931 (Virginia Woolf's piece was published in March), Salinas wrote that Ortega had lost all his credibility.³³

The list of possible translators of this early Spanish version of "Time Passes" could also include the names of the French translators who worked for the publishing house Revista de Occidente. If we look at the list of books published by Ortega's firm during its first stage, from 1924 till 1936, we come across three names who appear as translators of French works: Benjamín Jarnés, Ceferino Palencia Tubau and Julián Marías. Of these names, the last should be disregarded, since Julián Marías was born in 1914, which means that he would have been only 17 or 18 years old when Woolf's piece was translated in 1931, and, evidently he was not yet a disciple of Ortega. That leaves us with Ceferino Palencia, who translated some medieval French fabliaux in 1927, and Benjamín Jarnés, a Spanish novelist and biographer who regularly contributed articles and reviews to Revista de Occidente and translated Paul Tuffrau's

 $^{^{32}}$ He had said that Argentines tended to be shallow and insincere, qualities attributed to a feeling of insecurity brought on by the nature of the ever-receding horizon of the *pampas* that surrounded them.

³³ "Para mí Ortega, desde que se ha lanzado al artículo de fondo, ha perdido todo su fondo" (Soria, 1992:135).

³⁴ He translated Auguste Comte's Discurso sobre el espíritu positivo for Revista de Occidente in 1934.

Legend of William of Orange in 1925 and the French epic poem The Song of Roland in 1926. It is interesting to note that Benjamín Jarnés was an avant-garde novelist who reduced his plots to a minimum in order to focus on the reflections of the characters, in a very intellectual and lyrical prose that bears considerable affinity with Virginia Woolf's fiction.³⁵

Finally, there is a curious detail that deserves attention, if only because it could offer another possible explanation to our great unsolved mystery. I have found a copy of the 1929 French version of Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse in the Spanish National Library. As we already know, it is the version used as the source text for "El tiempo pasa". On one of the first pages of this book, someone has written the name "P. Antonio Martín Robles". After checking the library archives, a librarian confirmed that this copy had arrived as a private donation. And, what a coincidence! There is a translator called Pedro Antonio Martín Robles who, in the first half of the twentieth century, translated the works of Roman dramatists such as Plautus and Seneca, as well as other books by several authors including Roald Amundsen, Frank Wadleigh Chandler, Lester F. Ward and Martin Hume. Was Martín Robles simply a reader of Virginia Woolf's novel or was he the author of our anonymous translation? I am afraid that I cannot offer a conclusive answer. Some light, however, has been thrown on this early Spanish version of Virginia Woolf's "Time Passes", and the door is left open to new studies about the reception of Virginia Woolf in Spain.

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 $^{^{35}}$ See, for example, his novels El profesor inútil (1926), El convidado de papel (1928) and Locura y muerte de nadie (1929).

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