

MUTATIS
MUTANDIS

Mutatis Mutandis. Revista Latinoamericana de Traducción
ISSN: 2011-799X
Universidad de Antioquia

Spoturno, María Laura
Self-retranslation as a rite of passage: Rosario Ferré's English version of "La muñeca menor"¹ *
Mutatis Mutandis. Revista Latinoamericana de Traducción,
vol. 11, no. 2, 2018, July-December, pp. 356-375
Universidad de Antioquia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.mut.v11n2a04>

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=499273787004>

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Self-retranslation as a rite of passage: Rosario Ferré's English version of "La muñeca menor"¹

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Abstract:

This paper explores a case of self-retranslation involving two prominent figures of the literary and translation fields in Latin America and the United States: Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré and US American translator Gregory Rabassa. Originally published in Spanish in 1972, "La muñeca menor" is one of Ferré's best-known and popular stories. Rabassa's initial translation of the story, published in 1980 as "The Youngest Doll," was soon overshadowed by the second version of the text, which was penned by the author herself in collaboration with feminist scholar Diana Vélez (1986). The study of "La muñeca menor" and its companion English versions revisits the first piece Ferré ever self- (re)translated while it assesses the impact of self-retranslation in shaping her identity as a writer. While discussing various aspects of the texts, the analysis focuses on these questions: (1) To what extent does Ferré's retranslation make for a new version of the story or is, rather, a revision of Rabassa's work? That is, does the retranslated version evidence a competing interpretation of the source text? Do these versions display different discursive and literary mechanisms? (2) What is the socio-cultural, literary and institutional re-inscription of the text in the versions under study? What factors have led to this second English version of the story? (3) How do these versions relate to specific cultural, literary and translation fields?

Keywords: Self-retranslation, Rosario Ferré, "La muñeca menor," feminist ethos, US Latina writer.

La retraducción como rito de iniciación: La versión en inglés de Rosario Ferré de "La muñeca menor"

Resumen:

Este artículo aborda un caso de auto-retraducción que implica a dos figuras destacadas del campo literario y del campo de la traducción en Latinoamérica y Estados Unidos: la escritora

¹The research presented in this paper has been supported by the project "Escrituras de minorías, (auto) traducción y ethos" (UNLP, H/825, 2017-2020) and the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET, Argentina). An earlier version of the paper was presented at the *III Retranslation in Context Conference* at Ghent University in 2017.

puertorriqueña Rosario Ferré y el traductor estadounidense Gregory Rabassa. Publicada originalmente en 1972, "La muñeca menor" es uno de los cuentos más renombrados de Ferré. La traducción inicial de Rabassa, publicada en 1980 con el título de "The Youngest Doll" fue prontamente reemplazada por una segunda versión del texto, cuya autoría corresponde a la propia autora y a la investigadora feminista Diana Vélez (1986). El estudio de "La muñeca menor" y de sus versiones en inglés retoma uno de los textos que Ferré auto-(re)tradujo y pondera el impacto de la auto-retraducción en la formación de su identidad como escritora. El análisis de los textos se centra en los siguientes interrogantes: (1) ¿En qué medida la retraducción de Ferré se constituye en una nueva versión del cuento o es, en realidad, una revisión del trabajo de Rabassa? En otras palabras, ¿el texto retraducido evidencia una interpretación diferente del texto fuente? ¿Las versiones estudiadas despliegan mecanismos discursivos y literarios diversos? (2) ¿Cuál es la reinscripción socio-cultural, literaria e institucional del texto objeto de estudio? ¿Qué factores han contribuido a la aparición de esta segunda versión en inglés? (3) ¿De qué modo se relacionan estas versiones con campos culturales y literarios específicos?

Palabras clave: auto-retraducción, Rosario Ferré, "La muñeca menor," ethos feminista, autora latina de Estados Unidos.

La retranslation comme rite de passage: La version anglaise de Rosario Ferré de « La muñeca menor »

Résumé :

Cet article présente un cas d'auto-retraduction concernant deux personnalités remarquables du champ littéraire et de celui de la traduction en Amérique Latine et aux Etats-Unis : l'écrivaine portoricaine Rosario Ferré et le traducteur américain Gregory Rabassa. Publié d'abord en 1972, « La muñeca menor » constitue l'un des contes les plus renommés de Ferré. La première traduction de Rabassa, parue en 1980 et intitulée « The Youngest Doll » a été bientôt remplacée par une deuxième version du texte, de la main de la même auteure et de la chercheuse féministe Diana Vélez (1986). L'étude de « La muñeca menor » et de ses versions en anglais reprend un des textes auto-(re)traduit par Ferré et examine l'impact de l'auto-retraduction sur la formation de son identité en tant qu'écrivaine. L'analyse des textes se centre sur les questions suivantes. (1) Dans quelle mesure la retraduction de Ferré constitue-t-elle une nouvelle version du conte ou s'agit-il en réalité d'une révision du travail de Rabassa ? En d'autres mots, le texte retraduit met-il en évidence une interprétation différente du texte source ? Les versions étudiées déploient-elles des mécanismes discursifs et littéraires divers ? (2) Quelle est la réinscription socio-culturelle, littéraire et institutionnelle du texte objet d'étude ? Quels sont les facteurs qui ont contribué à l'apparition de cette deuxième version en anglais ? (3) De quelle manière ces versions se mettent-elles en relation avec des champs culturels et littéraires spécifiques ?

Mots-clés : auto-retraduction, Rosario Ferré, « La muñeca menor », ethos féministe, auteure latine des États-Unis.

1. Introduction

In the field of US Latina literature, retranslation is quite a fertile space. Indeed, many by now classical authors such as Julia Álvarez and Sandra Cisneros have been retranslated in a comparatively short time span. Not being fully satisfied with the first versions of their work in Spanish, Latina authors have, in many cases, felt the need for

a new translation, or retranslation of their fiction. Their discontent has often been related to the literalness of expression and the varieties of Spanish used in the translations, Latin American varieties being usually preferred over Castilian Spanish. Retranslations and self-retranslations into English are also common in this field as can be evidenced in the work of well-known authors such as Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa and Rosario Ferré. Retranslations are quite productive to study the problem of subjectivity in translation as every retranslation may potentially display a multiple web of voices which are, as pointed out by Alvstad and Assis Rosa (2015), fashioned through the retranslator's intervention². Retranslations have been approached from different angles, considering the motivations behind the new text, the different relations between source and target texts, paratexts and metatexts, the translation strategies and techniques used, the way in which a new discursive and literary configuration may reorient the interpretation of the source text, and the literary, editorial, social and institutional settings and contexts at stake in the process of retranslation, among others (Tahir Gürçağlar, 2011). The aspects of retranslation that will be addressed here mainly relate to Venuti's formulation ([2004] 2013). In his view, discursive strategies and competing interpretations are crucial to identify the way in which a retranslation of a text distinguishes itself from its predecessor. Of particular interest is also Venuti's notion that retranslation may aim at shaping particular identities and at producing specific institutional effects. For this reason, the re-inscription of values into a retranslation, cultural, religious, political or other, must be observed as well.

The case studied in this paper addresses the phenomenon of *self*-rettranslation. Self-retranslation may be of two kinds: the retranslation of a text by a translator who has already translated said text and the retranslation of a text done by its author. In retranslating their own production, authors must forge an image of themselves in the new target text for a new community of readers. If the retranslation is not a mere revision of the first translation, molding a literary image in a new language will normally imply the establishment of an identity, which can be readily differentiated from the identity projected in the initial translation of their work. The configuration of an authorial image or *ethos* in self-retranslated discourse, which relates to various linguistic, literary, and, more generally, political and cultural aspects, may prove to be conflicting and ambiguous, as the case studied here will show (Amossy, 2009; Spoturno, 2017)³.

² On retranslation, also see Brisset (2004), Paloposki & Koskinen (2010), Deane-Cox (2014), Alvstad & Assis Rosa (2015). On self-translation, see Santoyo (2005), Hokenson & Munson (2007), Karpinski (2012), Cordingley (2013).

³ According to Amossy (2009), the Author's *ethos* or discursive image is shaped as a consequence of the images projected in two separate but related levels: the intratextual (discursive) and the extratextual (pre-discursive) levels. The figure of the (Implied) Author should be understood as imaginary, having a discursive-textual existence, not equivalent with that of the empirical subject or writer. The category of

Specifically, this paper explores an instance of self-retranslation involving "La muñeca menor,"⁴ by Puerto Rican author Rosario Ferré (1938-2016), and two of its English versions, both entitled "The Youngest Doll." "La muñeca menor," one of Ferré's most popular and celebrated stories, was originally published in Spanish in 1972 in the iconic journal *Zona de carga y descarga*⁵. US translator Gregory Rabassa, well-known and acclaimed for his translations of outstanding figures of the Latin American literary scenario such as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar⁶, was the first to render "La muñeca menor" into English. His version, which was published in *The Kenyon Review* as "The Youngest Doll" in 1980, was overshadowed by the second version of the text, which appeared in *Feminist Studies* only six years later and was penned by the author herself⁷. For this self-retranslation, Ferré worked in collaboration with her friend Diana Vélez but this was only on condition that she could always have the final word (Ferré in Perry, 1993). According to Ferré, Vélez would do the first "basic" translation, which she would then rework into the final version of the story. It is thus fair to say that she had the leading role in this collaboration⁸.

2. A conflict of tongues

As much as other bilingual writers, Ferré found language was a zone of conflict, desire and creativity, Spanish being *always* the language of her dreams (Navarro, 1998), and English, the language that called for cultural translation (Ferré, 1991), the language that would initially offer her the possibility of a "psychological distance" and a different perspective on things altogether (Navarro, 1998; Trigo, 2006). Eventually, Ferré would designate herself as a US Latina writer or a US Puerto Rican writer, standing next to the very successful Julia Álvarez, Sandra Cisneros, Cristina García and Esmeralda Santiago⁹. As shown by Aparicio (2006), this self-designation brought about controversy and debate in critical circles, both on the island of Puerto Rico and in the US. The fact that Ferré authored most of her narrative both in Spanish and English sets her apart from the group of Latina writers in the US, who typically write their fiction, drama and poetry only in English. In the case of Ferré, the act of self-

ethos has been re-elaborated in Spoturno (2017) to account for the configuration of the Translator's presence in translated narrative.

⁴ In this paper, I will use the edition published in 2000 by Vintage Español.

⁵ *Zona de carga y descarga* was cofounded by Ferré and her fellow writer and cousin Olga Nolla in 1972. The journal soon became the site for the expression of a new generation of writers who, like Ferré, were aesthetically and politically concerned with issues of identity, marginality, independence, class, ethnicity, feminism, gender and nation. The nine issues of this journal appeared from 1972 to 1975.

⁶ Rabassa was the recipient of the National Book Award for Translation in 1967 for his translation of Cortázar's *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*). In 1976, he received the PEN Translation Prize for his translation of García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*).

⁷ For the analysis of the translations into English, I will follow the journal editions in which they appeared originally (*The Kenyon Review* and *Feminist Studies* respectively).

⁸ A third translation of the story, signed only by Diana Vélez, appeared in 1988.

⁹ In the 1990's Ferré hired Susan Bergholz as her literary agent, the same person who has served as agent for Latina writers Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Denise Chávez and Julia Álvarez.

(re)translating would usually go from Spanish into English, although, on occasion, she strategically published the English version of her books first. Ferré's task as a self-translator has been related not only to her ambition to be part of the booming US Latina community of writers but also with her ambivalent position regarding the statehood or independence of Puerto Rico, with English and Spanish symbolizing the two poles of this tension (Hansen Esplin, 2015).

The daughter of the first pro-statehood governor of Puerto Rico, Luis A. Ferré (1969-1973), Rosario Ferré was, however, an active supporter of the independence of Puerto Rico during her father's administration in which she served as First Lady (1970-72). This is a position she explicitly reversed in the 1990's through the much controversial opinion piece she published in *The New Times* (Ferré, 1998a; Ferré in Navarro, 1998). Ferré now thought that the independence of Puerto Rico was no longer necessary, as changes were taking place in the US and independence would, in her opinion, eventually imply the loss of many benefits for the less favored classes in Puerto Rico (Ferré, 1998; González, 1998; Ferré in Negrón-Muntaner, 2012; Ramírez Betances, 2016). The publication of *The House on the Lagoon*, her first novel to appear in English in 1995, is quite coincidental with the radical change in Ferré's political position. No doubt, Ferré's production in English was considered by many as a literary achievement. In 1995, she was one of the finalists to the prestigious National Book Award. Nonetheless, a significant number of critics and writers would relate her choice to write and publish in English to questionable political views (Espinosa, 1998; Navarro, 1998; Ferré in Castillo García, 2005; Aparicio, 2006; Di Iorio Sandín, 2004; Negrón-Muntaner, 2004; Trigo, 2006; González, 2016; Ramírez Betances, 2016). To the very last moment, Ferré defended her views and position as a transnational writer and was not afraid to publicly acknowledge that publishing in English had meant the access to a wider readership and to a more lucrative international market (Ferré in Negrón-Muntaner, 2012)¹⁰.

On the aesthetic side, Ferré was convinced that English, first through translation and then through writing, or rather rewriting, had imbued her work with a creative potential. While remaining "the same writer," English added a new sense of concision, brevity, and a different sensitivity to her writing (Navarro, 1998)¹¹. As a self-translator, Ferré saw her work as original, and not just as a simple rendition (Ferré in Negrón-Muntaner, 2012). This is particularly evident in the changes, additions and elisions she usually made in building her characters and developing her plots for the second time. Notably, as is the case with other writers who self-translate their work (Grutman & Van Bolderen, 2014), Ferré's production virtually abolishes the hierarchy between original and translation. As

¹⁰ The commodification of Latina literature has been approached by Negrón-Muntaner (2004) and, more recently, by McCracken (2014).

¹¹ As noted by Aparicio (2006), Ferré's bilingualism is different from that of other Puerto Rican writers such as Esmeralda Santiago, who were in a way forced to learn English to survive in the US. Ferré's knowledge of English, on the other hand, is the result of her belonging to the upper classes in Puerto Rico.

has been told by Ferré in interviews and in her memoirs, the process, which would always be conceived in Spanish, could actually be quite complex. For instance, the novel *Eccentric Neighborhoods*, which was first published in English, resulted from a draft written in Spanish, which Ferré reworked into English. This published English text would later be self-retranslated into Spanish by the author (Ferré in Rinks & Sisson-Guerrero, 1997; Ferré in Castillo García, 2005; Ferré, [2011] 2016). Despite all the controversies, today, Ferré continues to be regarded as a leading writer of Puerto Rico and a distinctive voice in US Latina literature (Di Iorio Sandín, 2004; Negrón Muntaner, 2004; Ramírez Betances, 2016; González, 2016).

In this paper, I will contend that Ferré's task as a self-retranslator in the early stages of her career was fundamental in determining her authorial voice, thereby anticipating the radical shift from being a Puerto Rican writer to a US Latina author. For Ferré, self-retranslation implied forging a new literary presence, recomposing her work in English for a new audience but also offering a fresh discourse, qualitatively different from that in previous renditions. The study of "La muñeca menor" and its companion English versions revisits probably the first piece Ferré ever self-(re)translated while it assesses the impact of self-retranslation in shaping her identity as a writer. The analysis of the stories focuses on the interpretations underlying each of these versions, the materialization of discursive and literary mechanisms, the socio-cultural, literary and institutional re-inscription of the stories as well as the various relations between the stories and specific cultural, literary and translation fields.

3. La muñeca menor

"La muñeca menor" is one of Ferré's best-known and frequently anthologized stories. Told by a third-person narrator, "La muñeca menor" is the story of a woman who, in her youth and while swimming in the river, is bitten by a *chágara*, a type of river prawn local to Puerto Rico. The *chágara* is lodged in her calf and her leg is swollen to enormous proportions. Halfway through the story, the reader learns that the male doctor who was consulted decided not to cure the lady but just to offer palliative treatment which would secure him a job and money in order to send his son to medical school. As a consequence of her ill-fortune, the lady stays in the house taking care of her sister's nine daughters. As the girls grow up, the aunt takes on a new activity and starts making dolls. First these were ordinary dolls but then she started making dolls which would correspond to her nieces in terms of height and size, one for each year of their lives until they married, when she would give them the last doll. Eventually, the youngest niece and last to leave the house marries the doctor's son. On her wedding day, the aunt presents her with a very special and richly ornamented doll. In due time, the young doctor acknowledges his father's deception in treating the aunt but decides to follow the same path, which will now secure money for himself. Obsessed with climbing up the social ladder, the young doctor places his wife and the doll in the balcony of their house for public exhibition. Even if now impoverished, his wife's family had once been part of the local sugarcane aristocracy. By the end of the story,

and upon noticing his wife does not age, the doctor, no longer young, examines her chest but notices no movement. He then sees the doll open her eyes, the furious antennae of the *chágaras* coming out of the doll's empty sockets.

"La muñeca menor" has been approached from different perspectives variously focusing on gender studies (Birmingham Pokorny, 1994; Gutiérrez, 1999; Ramos Rosado, 1999), the story's fantastic elements (Capeles, 1995; Martín, 2010-2011), and the presence of myths, rituals and symbols (López Jiménez, 1982-1983; Bilbija, 1994; Zee, 1994). A few scholars have offered some general observations on Ferré's self-translation of the story (Hintz, 1995; Gosser Esquilin, 1999; Castillo, 2013) as part of their analyses of the collections *Papeles de Pandora* and *The Youngest Doll*. None of them, however, has specifically centered on the relevance of Ferré's story and its self-retranslation as a rite of passage for the construction of the author's identity.

3.1 Making a new doll

As is often the case, the intimate reasons behind the writer's decision to retranslate their own work cannot be fully uncovered. These reasons, which would hypothetically link the author's intentions and their work, may be, to a certain extent, discursively inferred or construed from the writer's public statements and the analysis of the different versions of their work put together. The image projected by the writer at the metatextual level, in editorials, notes, interviews, contributes to shape an overall authorial ethos. There is a significant number of interviews and essays in which Ferré expressed her views on the subject of translation in general and on certain specific translations of her work. In an interview held in 2005, Ferré stated that Rabassa's translation of "La muñeca menor" was quite good but that she felt some nuances of meaning and sound were absent in his version. So she "added and changed a few things"¹² (Ferré in Castillo García, 2005, p. 237) in order to recover these features. However, back in 1993, in an interview with Donna Perry, she had complained about the poor quality of the translations of her work: "But then, when I see the translations they do, I get so upset that I say, 'No, I don't want anything else translated, I want to do it myself'" (Ferré in Perry, 1993, p. 102). Be that as it may, facts show that Ferré gradually took over the translation of her work. From her perspective, translating one's own work necessarily implied an act of betrayal in which the author was aimed at improving the original (Ferré, 1991). Ferré rather thought of her translations as versions of her work and, in writing these versions, she wanted to make sure not only her voice, but also her soul was secured on the paper (Ferré in Kevane & Heredia, 2003).

¹² Our translation.

Much of the work on retranslation has focused on the causes and motivations of such an undertaking, rather than on its effects or consequences (Alvstad & Assis Rosa, 2015). By looking at the metatextual level, the analysis presented here sheds some light on the probable causes originating this new version of "La muñeca menor" in English but is, rather, more concerned about the significance of self-retranslation in Ferré's literary career. In other words, the relevance of contextual factors is considered along with textual aspects (Brownlie, 2006). The analysis of the two English versions of Ferré's "La muñeca menor" consistently reveals not only the identification of "minor changes" in the new version but the presence of a fresh authorial voice in the making, introducing itself in English for the first time. In reworking her story, Ferré effects several changes and corrections, clarifying certain motifs, simplifying the syntax, diffusing local elements but still focalizing on the story as part of the feminist struggle. Narrative and discursive readjustments and displacements in Ferré and Vélez's version promote the construction of a new authorial image as well as of a new Implied Reader. The transition studied here, from self-retranslating to self-translating her work, deserves attention as it is in this intermediate period that Ferré starts modeling her ethos as a Latina writer.

3.2 "The Youngest Dolls"

3.2.1 Tempering the fantastic, restoring the feminist potential

The use of figurative language and images together with a distinctive syntactic patterning strongly enhances the fantastic mode in "La muñeca menor." As suggested by Martín (2010- 2011), in this story the fantastic is generally meant to "uncover the patriarchal domination of the private space adjudicated to women: the home" (p. 41). In general terms, Rabassa's version seems to reenact the reading dynamics of the original piece while Ferré and Veléz's retranslation tends to temper the fantastic by establishing a different connection with the reader in which ambiguities are often somewhat resolved, with one relevant exception which will be discussed at the end of this section.

In describing the crucial encounter between the aunt and the *chágara*, the narrator assumes a non-categorical stance making the reader reconstruct the uncanny: "había sentido en el tuétano de los huesos una mullida sensación de nieve," "había creído escuchar, revolcados con el sonido del agua, los estallidos del salitre sobre la playa" (Ferré, [1972] 2000, p. 1). Rabassa's translation recovers the entangled pattern of the story, both at discourse and plot levels: "she had felt a soft feeling of melting snow in the marrow of her bones," "she thought she had heard, mingled with the sound of the water, the salt bursts on the faraway beach" (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 163). In Ferré and Vélez's retranslation, a more assertive tone conveys a new picture altogether: "she had a soft feeling of melting snow in the marrow of her bones," "she could hear the slamming of salty foam on the beach rolled up with the sound of waves" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 243). In their version, the introduction of a more

conventional and less marked word order adds to a more conclusive and less fantastic note of the narrative as compared to that in the Spanish text in which the use of nouns and verbs relating to the field of sensations is in order.

As informed by the narrator, lodged in the aunt's calf, the prawn had started to feed itself from the flesh of the lady. In the Spanish version, there is a semantic association which relates the *chágara viciosa*, the *llaga*, ulcer or scab, and the fact that the *chágara* becomes a parasite, feeding from the aunt's body. The fantastic here becomes a strong symbol relating to the abusive and violent actions of the male characters in the story, namely the doctors: "probablemente había sido mordida por una chágara viciosa," "Sin embargo pasaron los días y la llaga no cerraba," "la chágara se había introducido dentro de la carne blanda de la pantorrilla, donde había evidentemente comenzado a engordar" (Ferré, [1972] 2000, p. 1). Rabassa's version not only preserves this relation but it also increases the fantastic note by opting for the figurative use of the verb "refuse": "she'd most likely been bitten by a vicious river prawn," "Days went by, however, and the wound refused to heal," "the prawn had got into the fleshy part of the calf, where it had evidently begun to fatten" (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 163). In Ferré and Vélez's story, the *chágara*'s aggressive and malicious character is replaced by moderate anger and the fact that the animal starts feeding on the aunt is just suggested: "she had probably been bitten by an angry river prawn," "But days passed and the scab wouldn't heal," "the prawn had worked its way into the soft flesh of her calf and had nestled there to grow" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 243). In effect, the violence implicated in the Spanish version of the story is not fully communicated in the retranslated text, in which the displacement of the relative clause ("donde había...") eliminates the explicit notion that the animal was now feeding from and in possession of the aunt's body. Idiomatic expressions and verbs such as "work its way into" and "nestle" contribute to portraying a more harmonic picture as well. The image of the prawn as a natural creature of fantastic powers is thus mitigated in the retranslation with two major consequences: the storyline is directly affected by this procedure and the relation with the reader is, thus, modified. In fact, the mitigation of the fantastic and a more straightforward syntax define a new pact between Author and Reader in the retranslated story, in which interpretative demands are less pressing on the English-speaking reader.

Being distinctly acquainted with the fantastic mode, Rabassa recomposes the intricate syntax of the original and, as suggested above, occasionally even intensifies the supernatural elements through a particular choice of words. For example, in describing the aunt's condition, Rabassa's version replaces the more neutral adverb "bastante" by the more definitive adjective "amazing": "[la tía] arrastrando por toda la casa la pierna monstruosa con bastante agilidad" (Ferré, [1972] 2000, p. 2), "[the aunt] dragging the monstrous leg about the house with amazing agility" (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 163). The fragment also shows the reenactment of the prepositional phrase with the choice of the word "agility," a noun of Latin origin, which potentially draws the translation closer to the Spanish version and worldview. In the retranslated story, the

suggestion of a fabulous nature is once more substituted by an ordinary image and a more familiar enunciation for the English-speaker reader: "[the aunt] dragging her enormous leg around the house quite nimbly" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 243).

Nevertheless, it is promptly noticeable that, even if the retranslated story usually mitigates the fantastic mode through the articulation of a more idiomatic diction and familiar syntactic patterns, there is no compromise of the feminist potential which, in the story, is closely associated to the fantastic. Indeed, in terms of establishing a differential identity, this is the most substantial correction found in Ferré and Vélez's version, which restores most ambiguities when recreating the complex figures of the aunt, the niece and the doll. Fundamentally, the ambivalent notes in the original enable the (con) fusion or identification of the niece and the doll, and the niece and the aunt, or even the transmutation of one into the other (Capeles, 1995). The recurrent elision of the noun in the phrase "la menor" contributes to the possibility of actualizing this meaning in the text. At a certain point in the story, the nominalized phrase "la menor" is used ambiguously, possibly suggesting that the niece and the doll have become one or that the latter has taken the place of the former: "La menor seguía sentada en el balcón, inmóvil dentro de sus gasas y encajes, siempre con los ojos bajos" (Ferré, [1972] 2000, p. 7). By adding the noun "girl," Rabassa's version is conclusive regarding the interpretation of the nominalized phrase: "The youngest girl continued to sit on the balcony, motionless in her muslin and lace, always with her eyelids lowered" (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 167). Far from being an isolated case, this becomes a pattern in his translation in which the resolution of the ambivalence alters the central motif in the text defining a different reading experience, which undermines the actualization of the feminist potential of the story. With this respect, Ferré and Vélez systematically stick to the original plan opting for the use of a nominalized phrase in English as well: "The youngest went on sitting in her rocking chair on the balcony, motionless in her muslin and lace, and always with lowered eyelids" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 248). Incidentally, the explicit definition of the nominalized phrase in Rabassa's translation through the repeated use of the noun "girl" may also be perceived as conveying a sexist tone to the story. As a matter of fact, whereas the story in Spanish registers nine instances of the term "niña,"¹³ Rabassa's version provides twenty-one occurrences of the term "girl," against seven in Ferré and Vélez's retranslation. This rectification in the retranslated text is doing not only literary justice to the Spanish version of the story but also reinforcing the Author's feminist ethos in the retranslation process.

¹³ In Spanish, the term is not typically used in a derogative manner as the word "girl" might be.

3.2.2 Taming the syntax, diffusing the local

The configuration of an authorial image in the self-retranslated story entails the production of a much more homogeneous discourse, both lexically and syntactically speaking. At the lexical level, the allusive presence of cultural and regional terms and expressions in the story in Spanish is not recovered in any way in the retranslated version or, for that matter, in Rabassa's initial translation. The stories in English show no use of code-switching, glosses, internal translations, which could help model a more interlingual, intercultural discourse and reading experience. Most notably, the loss of linguistic and cultural specificity is evident in both translations in the choice of the very general "river prawn" to translate the term "chágara," which is actually a local specimen found in Puerto Rico. This prawn, possibly belonging in the family *Atyadae*, does not have pincers but it does have antennae, something that becomes relevant for the overall imagery built around this creature in the story. The use of the nominal phrase "river prawn" provides an immediate reference for the English-speaking reader, which may not be available in the Spanish text for readers who are not familiar with the fauna of the island or the Puerto Rican variety of Spanish in which the term is effectively used¹⁴.

Certainly, it is the retranslated story that conveys a more idiomatic diction inviting a more fluent reading experience of the English text as compared to the one promoted by the original text or Rabassa's translation. This greater idiomaticity, stemming from both syntactic and lexical levels, ends up affecting its overall rhetoric. In general terms, Rabassa's version preserves focalization and point of view through reenacting the punctuation and word order of the story in Spanish. In recreating the "baroque" syntax of the original, Rabassa's text might be perceived as (more) foreign. In other words, readers of this first version may realize the text is a translation and not an "original" piece of writing. On the other hand, Ferré and Vélez's retranslation, which offers a fresh narrative rhythm and syntax, may, potentially, better suit the taste of English-speaking readers in the US, who are accustomed to more "natural," fluent texts (Venuti, 1995). This, it must be said, may have been a deliberate choice of the writer who claimed that, in English, she tried to be "more accessible," as she felt there had been "a certain elitism" in her earlier production in Spanish (Ferré in Negrón-Muntaner, 2012, p. 166).

Indeed, in many passages of the retranslated version, the powerful rhetoric of the story is made explicit, thereby reducing the interpretative constraints on the reader. For instance, the description of the aunt's background in the Spanish text is quite evocative. The financial, social, and perhaps also spiritual, decay of the family, formerly part of the sugarcane aristocracy, is hinted metaphorically in the first passages of the story in Spanish as well as in Rabassa's version:

¹⁴ At a later stage, Ferré would gradually move to the creation of more interlingual texts. See, for instance, *Eccentric Neighborhoods*, *Vecindarios excéntricos*, and *Language Duel / Duelo del Lenguaje*.

Por aquella época la familia vivía rodeada de un pasado que dejaba desintegrar a su alrededor con la misma impenetrable musicalidad con que la lámpara de cristal del comedor se desgranaba a pedazos sobre el mantel raído de la mesa (Ferré, [1972] 2000, p. 2).

In Rabassa's rendering sustained efforts have been put in to recreate the syntactic patterns, rhythm and pace of the source text:

By that time the family was living surrounded by a past that was breaking up all around them with the same impassive musicality with which the crystal chandelier was falling into pieces on the frayed cloth of the dining room table (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 163).

On the other hand, in Ferré and Vélez's version the financial and social condition of the family is made unequivocal, the metaphor now only being a subsidiary figure to expand the obvious statement:

In those days, the family was nearly ruined; they lived surrounded by a past that was breaking up around them with the same impassive musicality with which the dining room chandelier crumbled on the frayed linen cloth of the dining room table" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 243 and 245).

The more idiomatic and fluent diction of the retranslated story is also quite evident in the passages relating to the doll manufacturing process. As the narrator lets the reader know, there was only one concession the aunt made in terms of the materials she used: "Lo único que la tía transigía en utilizar en la creación de las muñecas sin que estuviese hecho por ella, eran las bolas de los ojos" (Ferré, [1972] 2000, p. 4). Rabassa's version attempts at recreating the intricate syntactic pattern, "The only compromise the aunt made in the creation of the dolls regarding items not of her manufacture was with the glass balls for the eyes" (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 165), whereas in the retranslated story, the sentence is rendered in a much more direct and simplified way: "The only items the aunt would agree to use that were not made by her were the glass eyeballs" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 246). By the end of the story, the narrative's frenzied rhythm anticipates the fantastic end, orchestrated through a very short and effective sentence: "Una sola cosa perturbaba la felicidad del médico" (Ferré [1972] 2000, p. 8). In Rabassa's translation, the concise expression is maintained: "One thing disturbed the doctor's contentment" (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 167). Through a more natural idiom, the retranslated story offers a much more indirect perspective of the same situation thereby falling into a slower rhythm and resolution of the story: "There was only one thing missing from the doctor's otherwise perfect happiness" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 248).

3.2.3 With a darning needle, building on a religious sense

As has been seen, retranslation is often the chance to offer a fresh interpretation of a text and to correct what is felt to be wrong in a previous rendition. In the process of retranslating "La muñeca menor," Ferré and Vélez took the opportunity to rectify a

few aspects, which had been incorrectly rendered in Rabassa's version. This is unmistakably so in the case of the recreation of religious symbols and imagery, which are quite relevant for the general intent of the story but which do not always find an easy way into Rabassa's initial translation. In particular, this is clear in Rabassa's alteration of the mention of Saint Veronica: "Una cofradía de señoras piadosas le había ofrecido una buena suma por la cara y las manos de porcelana para hacerle un retablo a la Verónica en la próxima procesión de Cuaresma" (Ferré, [1972] 2000, p. 7). In effect, as argued by Capeles (1995), the whole image might be read as a critical judgment upon the frivolous religious character of the times. The possibility of this interpretation relies, of course, on the presence of the key elements composing the scene: the fact that a group of "pious ladies" wants to dismember the doll to buy its porcelain face and hands, the mention of Saint Veronica and the Lent procession. In Rabassa's version, Saint Veronica is readily replaced by the allusion to the figure of the more familiar Virgin (Virgin Mary), and the notion of the procession is completely erased: "A sisterhood of pious ladies had offered him a goodly amount for the hands and face of mikado porcelain, which they thought would be perfect for the figure of the Virgin on their altarpiece next Lent" (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 166). In Ferré and Vélez's retranslation, the restitution of these elements enables a more precise reading of the religious symbols in the story. In the Catholic tradition, Veronica is the lady who offered Jesus a piece of cloth to wipe his face on the way to his crucifixion. This piece, a relic known as Veronica's Veil, is believed to have the imprint of Jesus's face as a consequence of God's actions. A parallelism between this imagery and the aunt's intervention when making dolls that resemble her nieces may now be actualized in Ferré and Vélez's retranslation: "A sisterhood of pious ladies had offered him a healthy sum for the porcelain hands and face, which they thought would be perfect for the image of the Veronica in the next Lenten procession" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 248).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the image of Saint Veronica relates directly to the ritual led by the aunt when delivering the last doll to each of her nieces on their wedding day: "Aquí tienes tu Pascua de Resurrección" (Ferré, [1972] 2000, p. 5). This strong allusion to the Christian symbol of physical and spiritual rebirth, which in the story is subverted to indicate the power of human (and not divine) intervention (Gutiérrez, 2004), is weakened in both versions of the story in English. Rabassa's text renders the expression as "Here is your Easter" (Ferré [Rabassa, Trans.], 1980, p. 165) while Ferré and Vélez opt for a more specific term to indicate the time of the festival alluded, "Here is your Easter Sunday" (Ferré [Ferré & Vélez, Trans.], 1986, p. 246). However, this specification does not explicitly convey the notion of the resurrection taking place on that day. In both cases, the extraordinary nature of the dolls, the possibility of a new life for the niece and the establishment of a new order as a consequence of the aunt's actions are almost denied to the English-speaking reader, not familiar with these Christian traditions and beliefs. The dominating presence of the resurrection in the Spanish text is ostensibly reduced to the rejoicing and more superficial aspects of the celebration.

4. Conclusions: Reframing the text, enforcing a feminist Latina ethos

As pointed out by Venuti ([2004] 2013, p. 97), "[r]etranslations are designed deliberately to form particular identities and to have particular institutional effects." In forming these identities, the setting in which the new version of a text is inscribed becomes of utmost importance. If Rabassa's translation had been published in the prestigious literary journal *The Kenyon Review*, this second version of the story was now to appear in *Feminist Studies*, a high-impact and the oldest feminist journal in the US. The collaboration with Diana Vélez, a specialist in Caribbean literature, women studies and a translator and editor of *Aunt Lute. A Multicultural Women's Press*, proved quite fruitful for Ferré. This collaboration as well as others she kept with other women with whom she retranslated or translated her work would contribute to shape her image as a feminist author through her translated work in English at this stage of her literary career¹⁵. In this journal edition, the retranslated story is accompanied by a picture of the writer, visually reinforcing her presence in the new cultural and literary scenario. This new version of "La muñeca menor" was not presented as a retranslation but as a translation done by the author and a collaborator, which naturally had an impact on the reception and dissemination of the story in the English-speaking world, particularly through its later inclusion in Ferré's famous collection *The Youngest Doll*.

Moreover, and at a different level, a concern regarding the intersection of the feminine and masculine worlds in literature and the question whether gender could condition one's experience and the possibility to write about or translate that experience might have also been in order in the self-retranslation process. In Ferré's view, while feminine and masculine writing could potentially develop similar styles, they certainly would vary in the treatment of themes and motifs; feminine writing being always more subversive and daring (Ferré in Heinrich, 1982; Ferré, 1991; Hintz, 2008). In retranslating "La muñeca menor," Ferré could also have been making a statement regarding her views on feminist writing.

Understood as an act of differentiation and a practice oriented towards the inscription of value, retranslation also offered Ferré the chance to start reworking her identity as a bilingual, transnational author. The first step in the process was the decision to disregard the previous translation done by Rabassa, a well-established translator in the US American literary field, and the potential value his work could attribute to her story. This decision, which can be read as originating in Ferré's opinion of that translation, also relates to her ambition to be part of the Latina community of writers. Rabassa's translation was unlikely to pave the way to achieve that goal as it would, rather, contribute to place Ferré's work within the body of *translated* Latin American literature¹⁶. That was a position Ferré had already conquered for

¹⁵ Some of the women with whom Ferré collaborated are Claire B. Ashman, Nancy Beutel, Kathy Taylor, Nancy Taylor and Cindy Ventura.

¹⁶ De Zavalía (2000) explores the complex relation between Latin American and Latina literature.

herself in Spanish.

The search for a new voice meant reworking a few aspects in the retranslated story, which explicitly set it apart from its predecessor. These aspects entailed the reinterpretation of the story through the reconfiguration of literary and discourse levels, the introduction of certain corrections in the text as well as the inscription of values relating to the new institutional, and literary settings where this new version was meant to circulate. A detailed study of the three versions of the story has led to the following observations: With regard to the literary and discursive nature of the story, the analysis has shown that the morphosyntactic and lexical dimensions in Rabassa's translation is closer to the elaborate syntax and lexical choices in the original Spanish text. The reenactment of the much complex syntax generally adds to the fantastic tone in this version promoting a less fluent reading experience. This, it must be noted, which may probably be seen as the strength of his translation, is one of the most significant revisions in Ferré and Vélez's retranslation. Even if these translations were published in the same country within a few years, they aimed at very different readerships. The reinterpretation of the story conveyed in the retranslated version targets a wider and more international reader, not necessarily versed with Latin American literature, magic realism, or the fantastic. The self-retranslated text presents a more straightforward and natural diction building on a reading experience that greatly differs from that staged in the source text or in the first translation, in which, nonetheless, the dominant motif is preserved intact. The new pact between Author and Reader is less onerous in the retranslated story.

Translation offers an insightful perspective to investigate the initial stages of Ferré's literary and critical production. Self-translation and self-retranslation allow the bilingual writer to revise their own writing, to reinvent themselves as authors in another language, a language which often sets new and different challenges providing room for innovation. By reinventing herself in English, Ferré was trying her voice as a writer for the demands of a new audience, and the constrictions of an increasingly booming market. In other words, self-retranslation may be said to stand for a rite of passage for Ferré into participating in the US Latina community. It is through self-retranslation that Ferré started nurturing this new identity as a writer.

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