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Roberto P. Neuburger

## Idiom: “Traduttore, Traditore”? On the Spanish Translations of Sigmund Freud’s Works

There are two translations of the *Complete Works* by Sigmund Freud into Spanish. The first one was first partially published by Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, in 1948 in two famous volumes in the thinnest “bible” paper, an immense task carried out by Luis López Ballesteros y de Torres, due to the insistence of the Spanish essayist José Ortega y Gasset, even if psychoanalytic theory certainly did not meet his favorable acknowledgement; very characteristically for Spain at that time, Ballesteros y de Torres, names Freud “*a Jewish Professor in Vienna*” [1].

The translation was formally acknowledged and praised by the “Jewish Professor” himself, in a brief and complimentary note, in which Freud remembers his juvenile epistolary exchange with his friend Eduard Silberstein, where both wrote in a suppositional Spanish language they had hypothetically learned by themselves in order to read Cervantes.

Both friends adopted pseudonyms to pattern their letters on one of the author’s *Exemplary Novels* (*Novelas Ejemplares*), *The Colloquium of the Dogs*, as “Scipione und Berganza”. In fact, in the quoted Cervantes novel, the dogs are called Cipión and Berganza, and live in the Valladolid Hospital (not in Seville, as Freud misquotes).

Some other efforts by Freud to deal with the Spanish language are absolutely peculiar. The Spanish language seems not as easy to master as it is usually thought ... especially when we suppose that there have been some evolutive idiomatic changes in between, from the days of the One-Armed man from Lepanto to the beginnings of the XXth Century! [2]

Notwithstanding the author’s elegant and discreet praise, the translation, as is inevitable, yields lights and shadows. On the one hand, it is the merit of Ballesteros to preserve the fulfilled and agile literary style of the original, even when both languages are so diametrically opposite. The second accomplishment is to invent, build up or recreate a useful vocabulary for the complex and intricate psychoanalytical terms, which stem from very different origins. There are evident successes, such as “*lo siniestro*” for “the Uncanny” (“*das Unheimliche*” in the Freudian original) even if the multiple significations of both words, the Spanish and the German, sink deeply into divergent abysses.

There are, of course, objections: a permanent confusion – probably due to the fatigue and exhaustion of the printing house’s typist – between the terms “*afecto*” (“affect”) and “*efecto*” (“effect”). Even more, the occasional rendering of the word “masturbation” as “that vice”, again pertaining to the Spanish pious prescriptive morality of those times.

Likewise, the “flattening”, banalization or superficial diminishment of highly polysemic terms, such as transforming “*Der Untergang des Oedipuskomplexes*” into “The end of the Oedipus Complex”. Freud had

explained that he had chosen the first substantive in the title to associate it with Spengler's book, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (which, in turn, has appeared in English as *The Decline of the West*). In both cases, perhaps it would have been more convenient to choose "the sinking", as not only a more literal option, but also connecting several other aspects and nuances.

## The Freud-Fliess Letters

Even when several works had been left aside the first edition of the *Collected Works (Obras Completas)*, this also concerns those still unknown at that time, particularly the letters and manuscripts sent to Freud's then admired friend, Wilhelm Fliess, which included the *Sketch of a Psychology (Entwurf einer Psychologie* in the original) rendered into English by the picturesque heading, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, and into Spanish by the even more puzzling title, *Proyecto de una psicología para neurólogos*, i.e. *Project of a Psychology for Neurologists*.

The availability of the exchange with Fliess has the oddest possible, most incredible history. Marie Bonaparte found the pack of letters on the exhibit shelves of a Parisian "bouquiniste". She immediately purchased it and was foolish enough to show it to Freud himself... even though he had long since ceased any relationship whatsoever with his former friend, after the annoying "Swoboda Affair", a plagiarism indictment by such an unstable personality like Fliess's... an euphemism I use instead of bluntly mentioning the Berlin surgeon's paranoid structure., Freud authoritatively ordered her to burn all this material, quoting a charmingly striking Jewish story [3] .

However, the Princess defied him once more and sent the entire correspondence to England. The English Channel happened to be mined... but the letters, as Lacan once said, did reach their destination. So often had they escaped destruction, only to end up in the hands of their fatal executioner, Freud's daughter Anna, who kept all her father's works as if they were her own.

She prepared, in collaboration with the Princess and Ernst Kris, an edition under the title *The Origins of Psychoanalysis* in which at least half the letters were eliminated, while the remaining half attested to severe and extended snips of the scissors. No one should see the original material onwards; no one could ever desecrate the utmost secret, kept from now on under seven inviolable unopened seals [4].

And yet, there followed three "trespassers". The first one was Freud's personal physician, Max Schur, the author of *Freud, Living and Dying* (1972), the narrative of the genius's last moments. As usual after World War II, with the Freuds' move to London and the IPA as the reference center, its first edition was in English. It included several fragments of the correspondence, that witness the emergence of psychoanalysis keeping rhythm with its creator's transference to the figure of the controversial, even dubious Berliner surgeon-otolaryngologist (a delayed after-effect of this transference would be Fliess's son, who became a psychoanalyst)

The German edition appeared later on (Suhrkamp, 1972). The aforementioned extracts were then read in their original form. One of the great surprises is to find Freud's only known masterful poem, dedicated to his then friend's son that had just been born.

Of this unique expression of Freud's poetical inspiration, written in free, unrhymed verse, a first Spanish version was issued, translated and signed by the writer. The edition, by permission of the copyright owners, was bilingual and preceded by some introductory remarks by myself, in the Journal *Imago* by the Letra Viva publishing house, Buenos Aires, and years afterwards in the Journal *Conjetural* (only in Spanish and without any introductory notes)

The second one to penetrate the impenetrable (the ????? of ancient Greece) was Paul Roazen (1936-2005). As a rigid gatekeeper, a true Cerberus, then we had then the severe and watchful Kurt Eissler. What

successful magician's tricks would our nice and gentle Paul have performed to move and persuade him we'll never know. Indeed, he dedicated himself much more to gather supposed anecdotal assertions (altogether incredible or of little verisimilitude, with some near-obscene brushstrokes) than reading any written text.

The results were certainly far from encouraging: yet another collection of anecdotes, each more doubtful than the next, but surely with great impact. As a TV sensationalist, yellow, tabloid journalist, ok, fine...[5].

And finally, the third "peeping Tom" happened to be Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson. A Sanskrit scholar, he suddenly became interested in psychoanalysis. This led him to follow an entire and full analytic career according to the hard, bureaucratic regulations by Eitington [6]. Perhaps it was this which served him as a passport to the Sanctuary; indeed, no more successful, promising beginning could be expected.

He dedicated himself to set Freud's entire correspondence in order. And whilst doing this he found all the letters were in absolute disarray and dereliction. And this time he edited the complete, unabridged and uncensored collection of the letters addressed to Fliess. [7] His aim was to do the same with all Freud's existing correspondences.

Alas, he would not be able to complete his ambitious, exciting program. By reading his own edition of the correspondence, he extracted the conclusion that Freud, with his "theory of the pathogenic fantasy" had cowardly withdrawn from onto the evidence of the "reality" of incestuous sexual infantile practices, as the small girls had been "really" or actually violated by her "real" fathers when he stumbled onto it [8]. Alas, the terrible, disparaging Anglo-Saxon illness "reality"... The end was predictable: poor Jeffrey was once and for all, forever and ever, expelled from the Archives with no return.

### **The Santiago Rueda edition**

But let us go back to the first edition of Sigmund Freud's *Complete Works*. Ludovico (nicknamed Vico) Rosenthal from Argentina took over the task of translating all of the texts left out by Ballesteros. His work was careful indeed; he did not stumble into the Spaniard's prejudices, whilst noticeably respecting the author's writings and intentions, he maintained their agility. However, some unnecessary Latinisms might have slipped through, such as "cognitive processes" to render the German "*Denkprozesse*". The new volumes first appeared in 1955, published by Santiago Rueda Editor.

Much later on, Biblioteca Nueva, who had kept the original publishing rights, re-edited the former two volumes, this time adding a third one with Vico's translations. Years later, the whole translation was re-edited with a supposed, highly doubtful "revision" by a Jacobo Numhauser Tognola of Chile – that entirely eliminated Rosenthal's name.

The edition was complemented with photos of the first psychoanalysts, Freud's disciples, under which appeared some sinister, macabre lines about the very sad end of each one, having little or no relation whatsoever with authentic biographical data. Or else they did away with any facts at all, substituting these with dismal, terrible tragedies.

### **Etcheverry's New Version**

We arrive now at the second translation of the *Complete Works* into Spanish, undertaken by José Luis Etcheverry, published by Amorrortu, Buenos Aires, 1978, in 24 volumes that reproduce the sequence established by James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud and assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson from 1953 to 1974 [9].

Some of the texts are not published entirely (the previously mentioned letters to Fliess, for instance), as the English edition is followed strictly, as published in London by the Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis. However, the critical-philological notes are retained, a thoroughly welcome novelty. Sadly, the very incomplete, insufficient German edition of the *Gesammelte Werke* does not include this addition (18 volumes, published from 1940 to 1987 by S. Fischer, Frankfurt a. M.).

A later German edition in only 10 volumes, the *Studienausgabe* does include Strachey's explanatory notes, but it also reduces the selection of texts to a discreet number, which supposedly represents "the most important" works [10]. Therefore, a satisfactory complete German edition, with the added critical notes does not exist.

Let's continue with some other features of the *Standard Edition*. Evidently, it has been a titanic effort, much more serious and reliable than all former English translations. And yet, it could not escape some particular, controversial aspects. First of all, some misguided admiration for the Hellenic language, thus "*cathexis*" (?????, ????????) for the original "*Besetzung*", "*anaclitica*", (?????????) for "*Anlehnung*", or for its Latin counterpart ("*ego, id, superego*") [11]

In addition, the most remarkable aspect could be Strachey's refusal to render the enigmatic Freudian "*Trieb*" as "drive" (which despite the translator's choice, has become usual, most popular for English readers of Lacan. Indeed, the French master was the first to object to naming it "*instinct*"). Therefore, Strachey is compelled to replace it by "instinct" through thick and thin, even acknowledging that Freud did use "*Instinkt*" only for the non-speaking animal realm. His argument is indeed characteristic of the renowned English phlegm: "*Drive is not an English word*". Ballesteros would probably have done exactly the same; we can guess he would have employed exactly the same basis to reject "*pulsión*", as this is also not an actual Spanish word, but a Gallicism also sprung from and rooted in the Lacanian world.

Etcheverry's translation is exactly the perfect opposite of the Biblioteca Nueva version. In the first place it exhibits far more exactness and rigor, taking account of the impact of French thinking [12]. Thus, "*Besetzung*" ceases to be "carga" ("load") but "*investidura*" ("*investment*"). the aforementioned "*pulsión*" ("*drive*") as well there are other terms that issue from the Gallic atmosphere.

However, it comes at the price of the complete loss of stylistic attractiveness and agility. Instead of the elegance of the Freudian pen, the reader must now inclemently struggle against a thick, dense, unmerciful, impenetrable and rigid text, of pachydermal, heavy slowness.

The only, controversial "lightening up" is provided alone by erratic or fickle singularities: some undoubted successes like "*lo ominoso*" (the ominous) for "*das Unheimliche*", but also some rarities like "*el sepultamiento del Complejo de Edipo*" (the burying of the Oedipus Complex), a funerary, essentially incorrect and despairingly macabre transcription... (Incidentally, neither is Strachey's option – "The dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" – sufficiently happy. As it seems, the simple word used by Freud has paradoxically become a disparaging, eternal enigma for translators. However, readers have been spared other strange Etcheverry particularities and intentions he mentioned after the translation was already published, such as "*querencia*" (untranslatable into English!) for the Freudian "*Trieb*".

Of course, many laborious attempts to achieve more exactness have appeared afterwards, but they are already impossible to mention in this small account [13]. Some of these suffer from the irritating Lacano-Argentinean habit to imitate Lacan, mentioning the German term prior to the Spanish one. This is not only unnecessary, but indeed engenders horrific and spectacular spelling or grammatical mistakes, and introduces even more hideous pronunciation blunders. Germans used to repeat, very tall and proudly, "*Deutsche Sprache, schwere Sprache*" (German language, difficult language).

The publishing of hitherto unknown articles and materials by Freud forced translators everywhere to sharpen their nails. When the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence became known, it was found that it included the

mysterious draft of an extraordinary, complex paper that should have been included in the *Metapsychology: "Übersicht der Übertragungsneurosen"*, up to that moment hidden from public light (1915, German first edition accompanied with the facsimile of the original, prologue and notes by Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, edited by Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. in 1985). It appeared likewise in Spanish under the title *Sinopsis de las neurosis de transferencia* (Ariel, Barcelona, 1989). Its intricate impenetrability seems to have discouraged many a psychoanalyst, as any of them – if not every one – would rapidly flee such an unnavigable, baffling text... [14]

Thus we reach the end, with the very recent appearance of bilingual versions of other unpublished manuscripts, by the hand of Juan Carlos Cosentino and Lionel Klimkiewicz[15]. The future shall say...

## Notes:

[1] [www.cidadefutura.com.br/wp-content/uploads/Ortega-y-Gasset-Obras-Completas-Tomo-1-1902-1916-1.pdf](http://www.cidadefutura.com.br/wp-content/uploads/Ortega-y-Gasset-Obras-Completas-Tomo-1-1902-1916-1.pdf). See also, [www.temasdepsicoanalisis.org/2013/06/30/el-lenguaje-del-psicoanalisis-2/](http://www.temasdepsicoanalisis.org/2013/06/30/el-lenguaje-del-psicoanalisis-2/)

[2] For those interested in this highly significant letter collection, the outstanding paper by Feliciano Pérez Varas (Universidad de Salamanca) is highly recommended:  
[www.idus.us.es/bitstream/handle/11441/61955/FELICIANO%20P%20C9REZ%20VARAS.pdf;jsessionid=EA2545FB](http://www.idus.us.es/bitstream/handle/11441/61955/FELICIANO%20P%20C9REZ%20VARAS.pdf;jsessionid=EA2545FB)

[3] "*Bouquiniste*", the traditional name for open-air used-booksellers by the banks of the Seine. The "Jewish story" pictures a roasted goose which takes extremely complex and time-demanding steps to cook... finally, instead of eating it, it ends directly in the thrash can!

[4] A brief chronicle of the correspondence, along with an interesting Lacanian overview by Eric Laurent may be found in: [www.revistavirtualia.com/articulos/616/miscaneas/la-ascesis-freudiana-las-cartas-a-fliess](http://www.revistavirtualia.com/articulos/616/miscaneas/la-ascesis-freudiana-las-cartas-a-fliess). On the handwritten letter, cf. Lacan, J. « *Le séminaire sur la "La lettre volée"* », *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 41.

[5] On the other hand we might question how could he decipher the Freudian manuscripts, written in the Gothic handwriting current in Freud's time, which was generally used throughout the German-speaking world, as it is atrociously impenetrable for the general public today (a comment regarding this exceptional difficulty for non-acquainted readers can be found in the article cited below (14), see *infra*). Roazen did visit Argentina once and delivered two lectures, one at the EFBA (*Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires*), the other in the Faculty for Psychology, University of Buenos Aires. During the first one he narrated his contact with Marc-Antoine Lacan. He admitted having previously had a vague idea of "Catholicism having big influence and weight in the establishment of Jacques Lacan's theory". Of course, he had not the slightest idea what this theory was about, as he certainly disliked reading any texts, he preferred listening to anecdotes instead. When he found out that the renowned late French psychoanalyst had a brother who was a Benedictine friar, he traveled all the way to the monastery to meet him. Marc-Antoine, as he recalled, surprised him by opening up the heavy door of the convent, exhibiting an equally heavy big cross hanging from his neck. Inside the building the monks had wi-fi, computers plus every up-to-date, hi-tech resource. Finally, on his way back he extracted the revolutionary, far-reaching, radical conclusion that "Catholicism having big influence and weight in the establishment of Jacques Lacan's theory." (We might ask ourselves

whether all the trouble entailed in this trip was really worth it, but this is not a matter of inquiry...). In neither of his lectures did he answer pertinently to any question, issuing always “side utterings” instead, entirely avoiding the question’s contents, filling-up the space with more or less elegant evasive expressions. Applause! Unfortunately, some psychoanalysts took his pamphlet-book on Victor Tausk seriously (“Brother Animal”, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); a translation into Spanish was even issued by the EFBA! In this epithetical collection of remarkably dubious anecdotes, peppered with curious remarks on Master Freud’s jealousy concerning “his pupil’s highly superior originality”, he entirely blamed him for Tausk’s suicide: Freud was nothing else but a pitiless assassin!

[6]

[www.ipa.world/IPA/en/IPA1/Procedural\\_Code/Requirements\\_for\\_qualification\\_and\\_admission\\_to\\_membership.asp](http://www.ipa.world/IPA/en/IPA1/Procedural_Code/Requirements_for_qualification_and_admission_to_membership.asp)

[7] [www.culturafilosofica.com/cartas-de-sigmund-freud-a-su-amigo-wilhelm-fliess-en-pdf-gratis/](http://www.culturafilosofica.com/cartas-de-sigmund-freud-a-su-amigo-wilhelm-fliess-en-pdf-gratis/) (Spanish edition)

[8] Masson, J. M., *The assault on truth*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984  
[www.scribd.com/book/84587842/The-Assault-on-Truth](http://www.scribd.com/book/84587842/The-Assault-on-Truth)

[9]

[www.es.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Standard\\_Edition\\_of\\_the\\_Complete\\_Psychological\\_Works\\_of\\_Sigmund\\_Freud](http://www.es.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Standard_Edition_of_the_Complete_Psychological_Works_of_Sigmund_Freud). The extended period of the edition was due to the last volumen, i.e. the general word index. The same happened with the German edition.

[10] [www.de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund\\_Freud#Gesamtausgaben](http://www.de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud#Gesamtausgaben) This state of affairs motivated a letter addressed to me by the Editor, Ms. Ilse Grubrich-Simitis: “*Der Mangel der Freud-Ausgaben sind wir voll bewu?t*” (we are fully aware of the shortcomings of the Freud-Editions)

[11] [www.nosubject.com/Cathexis](http://www.nosubject.com/Cathexis) y [www.benjamins.com/online/target/articles/target.17.2.08hal](http://www.benjamins.com/online/target/articles/target.17.2.08hal). The opening statement of the first volume would merit a comment all by itself: “To the thoughts and words of Sigmund Freud, this their blurred reflection is dedicated by its contriver”. It also has a remarkable Introduction, as well as a small glossary in which the choice of the translated words is explained and justified.

[12] An early by-product of Jacques Lacan’s effort, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis’s “*Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*” (Paris, PUF, 1967) was not equaled by any other similar effort. Amongst the equivalents in several other languages for each included term, the Spanish glossary was provided by the late Marie Langer, who thus had to establish some words forgotten or disregarded by Ballesteros in his translation

[13] A text by José Luis Etcheverry may be mentioned here, ,  
[www.ddd.uab.cat/pub/1611/19882963n2/19882963n2a4/19882963n2a4/version.htm](http://www.ddd.uab.cat/pub/1611/19882963n2/19882963n2a4/19882963n2a4/version.htm) as well as just one example of further attempts that select a particular article:  
[www.psi.uba.ar/academica/carrerasdegrado/psicologia/sitios\\_catedras/electivas/659\\_clinica\\_psicoanalitica/material/](http://www.psi.uba.ar/academica/carrerasdegrado/psicologia/sitios_catedras/electivas/659_clinica_psicoanalitica/material/)  
However, we may still cite an article still to be printed, on the difficulties to translate Freud's Works, critically discussed and sustained, by Juan Lo Carmine Gammel and Santiago Peidro, both from the Department "New presences of sexuality and the debate on the building-up of the sexual difference, II. Branch, Psychology, Ethics and Human Rights, Faculty of Psychology, Buenos Aires National University, to be issued in the Annuary of Research Journal, Investigaciones, Vol. XXVII, 2020. The Amorrortu Edition of the Complete Works has a first volume (143 pages) by translator Etcheverry "On the Spanish Edition" with explanations galore (Strachey did likewise in far smaller space) as well as an extensive glossary.

[14] The result of a joint venture by Margarita Hes and your host (R.N.) is a first, unpublished Spanish translation ("Panorama de las neurosis de transferencia") that can still be found in the EFBA's Library

[15] [www.pagina12.com.ar/307448-publican-manuscritos-ineditos-de-sigmund-freud](http://www.pagina12.com.ar/307448-publican-manuscritos-ineditos-de-sigmund-freud)

## **Bio:**

**Roberto P. Neuburger**, a psychoanalyst working in Buenos Aires, Argentina; M.D. (University of Buenos Aires, Faculty of Medicine), Psychiatrist (Ministry of Public Health, Argentina); Staff psychiatrist at Hospital General de Agudos "Dr. I. Pirovano", Monroe 3555, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Former Resident in Psychopathology, Hospital "Evita", Lanús, Province of Buenos Aires; Former Member, Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires (Psychoanalysis); Former Member, Asociación de Psiquiatras Argentinos (APSA); has delivered Seminars on Liaison-Psychoanalysis at AASM, Asociación Argentina de Salud Mental, Argentina; Former academic activities (Seminars on Psychoanalysis) at 17, Instituto de Estudios Críticos, México D.F., Mexico and clinical papers at ?????????????? ??????????, Athens; Member of the Jury, Faculty of Psychology Award, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina Publishes papers on Liaison Psychoanalysis in Psicoanálisis y el Hospital (Buenos Aires), Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones de la Facultad de Psicología (Universidad de Buenos Aires) and different specialized Journals in several countries.

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