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On Translating the Fairy Tale: The Wording, Worldviews, and Wonder of Translating Fernán Caballero's *Bella-Flor*

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Inspired by nineteenth century European society and a proclivity toward the moral lesson, a woman named Cecilia Francisca Josefa Böhl de Faber y Ruiz de Larrea set out to collect Andalusian folk tales under the pen name Fernán Caballero. Following in the footsteps of the Grimm Brothers, she was one of the first people to record folk tales—specifically those deriving from Spain—in writing, thus helping to shape the subsequent fairy tale genre that is ever-pervasive in modern-day society. However, while many translations have been derived from the Grimm Brother's collections, Fernán Caballero´s have received less attention from English translators. One notable exception to this rule can be found in the works of John H. Ingram, whose portfolio includes a translation of Caballero's folk tale collection entitled *Cuentos oraciones, adivinas y refranes populares é infantiles* (simply translated as ¨Spanish Fairy Tales¨ due to its inclusion of two tales recorded by a different Spanish writer), written in the year 1920.

In prefacing his translation, Ingram interestingly frames this collection of Andalusian-specific folk tales as Caballero's response to the Grimm Brothers' apparent exclusion of Spain´s "national fairy literature" in their European-wide fairy tale collections (1920, 4). However, while recognizing that Caballero collected her stories from the Andalusian region, Ingram concurrently highlights the various origins of each tale, all of which had become ultimately "naturalized" on Spanish soil by the time of their collection (5). Despite this apparent naturalization, however, it is nonetheless notable that the true original source of these tales is unknown, and that they have inevitably been altered across time and place since their inception. This creates a particular conundrum: if attempting to follow foundational translation thinker Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1813) advice and "move the reader toward [the author]" (56)—similarly conceptualized by modern translation theorist Lawrence Venuti as "foreignizing" (1995, 20)—it is important to consider not only the linguistic and cultural norms of the author, but also those of the largely sourceless fairy tale genre itself. With this tension in mind, this essay seeks to analyze and evaluate Ingram's translation of *Bella-Flor*, a Spanish folk tale about the importance of (and ultimate triumph resulting from) being good.

Up to this point, the reader may have noticed that I use various terms interchangeably to describe the sourceless genre in question. A clearer distinction can be made here based upon the assertions of fairy tale expert Jack Zipes: the national fairy literature subject to written translations and transformations ultimately began as oral folk narrations under constant verbal shifts. Zipes cites Gerhard Kahlo as someone who has illustrated the ritualistic, habitual and precapitalistic societal roots of many oral folk tale motifs, citing the example of how words such as "king" and "queen" etymologically trace back to "familial relations and tribal rites [... and] nothing else" (2002, 7).

However, by the time many folk tales were recorded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they "contained many primeval motifs but essentially reflected late feudal conditions," such as a king ruling over a nation rather than holding elder status in a clan (Zipes 8). Yet, since being printed, change has proven to be a much lighter force upon these tales, and these so-called late feudal conditions have frequently continued to permeate fairy tale translations since—despite their oftentimes horrendous perceptions by the audience in question as a result of changing social norms and values. This "linguistic" quirk of the folk tale category may explain why Ingram, and many other translators, choose to keep these tropes as a way to move the reader toward the author (or in this case, the genre).

The treatment of the character from which the title *Bella-Flor* derives by the main protagonist is one such example of a late-feudal-esque trope that remains in Ingram's modern English translation. In this trope, the protagonist, José (or Joseph), is forced on a mission to kidnap Princess Bella-Flor (or Fair Flower), who the King he worked under was in love with. While she attempts to outsmart José, he refuses to let her go and ultimately delivers her to the King without remorse. The King eventually dies, and due to his good character*,* José then becomes King and marries Bella-Flor himself.

Though kidnapping a woman is not what one would consider noble behaviour in the nineteenth century or the 1920s, there are historical roots to this character arc that explain its appearance in the (quasi-)source text. In addition to the broader norms and values surrounding the tale, such as the late-feudal societal prevalence, it is also necessary to examine those surrounding the region from which Caballero sourced *Bella-Flor*: Andalucía, Spain. In his own translation preface, Ingram notes that Catholicism permeated "the very flesh and blood of the [Spanish] people," which thus transferred over into their stories of the time (x). In fact, religion plays a large role in the structure of *Bella-Flor*, as the deceased spirit of the first man José proceeds to embody is the horse companion that keeps him from harm throughout the whole story (with God´s permission, of course).

This religious overtone, furthermore, contextualizes the reoccurring trope in Andalusian folklore in which the journey of the male protagonist surrounds sexuality and social status (Brandes, 1987). While these are not José´s primary concerns per se, the fact that his story ends with his marriage (sexuality) and his kingship (status) demonstrates that this theme holds consistent within the bounds of religious goodness. Under this lens, Bella-Flor is less of a fully fleshed out character than she is a means to contrast José´s low status and non-existent sexual prominence as the man delivering the prized princess *to* the King with his high-status marriage to the princess in question *as* the King. And, because José was not the decision maker but rather the executor of this abduction, his ¨winning¨ of the princess and the throne serves to symbolize the religious theme of goodness triumphing over evil, thus once again relegating Bella-Flor as equal to the resulting prize of power and sexuality, rather than equal to, say, the woman that José went out of his way to assist when the story began.

While Ingram has done much (or, one could say, little) to preserve these types of brazen actions and tropes found within Caballero´s recording, thus moving the reader both toward Caballero and the genre, there is one thing he clearly attempts to alter: the subtle tone of the tale. This is evident in his elimination of the "Spanish-ness" of the tale (i.e., José´s time away in "America" is changed to his time "abroad") as well as his alteration of certain phrases (i.e., changing the simple "todos entonces proclamaron por rey el chambelán" [literally, everyone then proclaimed the chamberlain king] to "then by universal proclamation Joseph was proclaimed king"). These tonal changes may be attributed to what Zipes calls the "institutionalization" of the folk/fairy tale (1988, 21), a type of tale that Shane Gunster equates to a "marketable commodity" (2000, 61), for in this standardized form that comprises what is now considered the essence of a fairy tale, dissenting elements are often ignored and lost in translations—including those that utilize simpler or more cultural terms instead of more grandiose or universal (or late-feudal) ones.

While this genre-based tendency may seem, in turn, to contrast Schleiermacher's call to foreignize the target text, this can be debated. Clearly, on one hand, standardizing the folk tale genre causes the inherent loss of cultural elements that characterize the place from which a certain tale variety is recorded. On the other hand, however, the resulting creation of a folk tale is culture in and of its own. This so-called "culture" is essentially what tends to shine through Ingrams' translation (i.e., through the inclusion of late feudal-esque tropes) more often than its Andalusian colouring.

To explore this tension even further, Caballero's original act of recording *Bella-Flor* fits into the category of what Emily Apter denotes as "the fuzzy line between translation and transcription" (2005, 161). This is to say that while Caballero clearly transcribed, rather than authored, the tale, it would have been nearly impossible for her to source the initial ideological intention of a tale belonging to a virtually sourceless genre. Therefore, whether by virtue of her own values, societal norms, or some combination of the two, Caballero's version unavoidably features the addition of certain tropes and ideologies—potentially the themes surrounding religion and masculinity analyzed earlier in this essay, for example—that may or may not have been inherent from the tale's inception. Ingram, therefore, simply continues this pattern by upholding (and emphasizing) what makes *Bella-Flor* a fairy tale—whose norms and values often supersede the norms and values of the (quasi-)source and target cultures themselves—and thus achieves what Zhao and Jiang describe as "restoring the essence" of the genre through translation (2013, 948).

What is the essence of the fairy tale that extends beyond its cultural and temporal frameworks? Zipes believes that regardless of their social and ideological underpinnings, all fairy tales celebrate wonder, thus contributing to their cross-cultural and timeless "appeal" (1988, 12). Under this lens, translating the fairy tale becomes a transcultural activity, defined by Biria and Abadi as "bridging the gap" between cultures through the "reformulation, de-coding, and/or re-coding" of culture-specific expressions (2016, 178)—or, in this case, through reformulating cultural expressions to match the more universal fairy tale culture. In this sense, Ingram is following not only Schleiermacher's, but also Toury's advice in treating "translatorship" as "play[ing] a social role" through attuning his translation to the fairy tale genre and minimizing Spanish (or any) cultural influence in small yet impactful ways (1978, 168).

It would be remiss, however, not to briefly mention additional practical reasons for Ingram's attempted erasure of the "Spanish-ness" of the tale and his alteration of certain phrases, since Ingram himself explicitly states them: firstly, his desire for the acceptance by a “young” English audience and secondly, the impossibility of translating certain Spanish phrases and proverbs (5-6). He largely carries out these attempts through altering not just simpler wordings to be more fairy-tale like, but also by using a genre-specific dialect, so to speak, to reformulate distinctly Spanish phrasing. For example, Ingram changes the first words that the horse companion says to José from “tómame a mí, y no tengas cuidado¨ (literally, take me and don’t be careful) to “take me with you and have no heed of aught”. This first phrase, ¨tómame a mí¨, is an informal command, which entails that the horse is greeting José as his equal (or inferior) rather than his superior (in which case the formal command would have been used). However, in English, this directly translates to “take me,” a phrase which arguably implies positioning oneself as below the person who is doing the taking. For this reason, it can be hypothesized that Ingram added the words “with you” to the end of the phrase to emphasize that the horse would be a loyal companion, traveling *with* José, rather than a loyal helper, being used *by* José on his journey.

While this first alteration accounts for the second issue of intelligibility, it does not necessarily make the tale any more or less appealing to a young English audience, since the essential meaning of the text comes across the same. Instead, it is the changing of ¨no tengas cuidado¨ to ¨have no heed of aught¨ that more likely serves this purpose. Ultimately, while the latter phrase does not inherently increase the linguistic intelligibility of the phrase, as it utilizes language that was seldom used by the twentieth century, it does bring his readers closer to the genre by utilizing language more commonly used during the era of folk tale recordings that have since become institutionalized. Because the fairy tale had thus cemented what Zipes coins a certain “process of production, distribution, and reception [that] has become fully accepted within the public sphere of [European and American] society” (1988, 22), using this semi-archaic turned genre-classic language serves to attract the young English readers whom Ingram was writing for, by moving them toward said genre.

In attempting to move the reader toward both the author and the sourceless genre, therefore, it is clear that the latter conquers Ingram’s attention. Fortunately, as has been discussed, the cultural-linguistic ingredients that compose a folk tale are semi-universal, at least in Western European and American contexts. Therefore, the folk tale comprises a sort of third language and culture that can be shared between the (quasi-)source text and its translations, which can then be utilized to increase intercultural intelligibility and the widespread textual appeal of the latter. Among other things, this language can ultimately be sourced back to the feeling of wonder it brings, even when the true source of the text itself remains forever unknown.

So, then, what is the verdict on Ingram’s particular translation of Caballero’s *Bella-Flor*? At first glance, one might question his decision of leaving in late-feudal era tropes that do not typically receive the approval of more modern audiences, or his inclusion of archaic language that (minorly) decreases the tale’s linguistic intelligibility. However, when one considers the genesis of the fairy tale, originating as an oral story that was ever-transforming to fulfill socio-cultural needs, to its eighteenth and nineteenth centuries time of recording, whose cultural-linguistic values and norms were cemented into the current commodified fairy tale, it can be recognized that Ingram’s storytelling fits neatly into the niche of the now-timeless-and-spaceless bounds of the genre. In fact, it is precisely his maintenance of the distinctly orphan, everlasting fairy tale language that deems Ingram's translation not only a success by Schleiermacher's standards, but a *wonderous* success.

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