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Translation studies and the other cannibal: the English version of Fernández Retamar's Calibán

This kind of interpretation is also at work in Roberto Fernández Retamar's reading of *The Tempest*, which was published in Cuba in 1971 under the significant title "Calibán." Retamar, however, goes one step further by claiming an immediate identity between Caliban as the colonised subject and one region of the colonial world in particular: the Caribbean. Adducing etymological arguments, Retamar states that Caliban *is* the Caribbean,[3] which in its turn functions as a metonymy for Latin America. Hence, Latin American and Caribbean writers should conceive of their relationship with European literature in the same way as Caliban assumes his dependency on Prospero: Prospero taught Caliban how to speak, but the latter now uses this knowledge to curse his master.[4]

Literature as a curse: it is another kind of intertextual play, a more aggressive one, than the one suggested by the image of the Brazilian cannibal who devours his fellow men in amorous recognition of their strength. If the Brazilian cannibal has profoundly marked postcolonial translation studies,[5] Retamar's Calibán represents the other cannibal, exemplary of the other kind of thinking that can be discovered in postcolonial literary criticism, not the one that is linked to notions of "hybridity" and "inbetweenness,"[6] but the one that appeals to images of "resistance" and "opposition."

In focusing upon the other cannibal, I not only want to restore this other tradition in Latin American thinking to the contemporary discussions on postcolonialism and translation studies. My main interest concerns the way in which the above translational strategy towards *The Tempest* in Retamar's essay is mirrored by another one that works the other way round: from the "other" side into "the wrong" side. In order to do so, I will situate the "Calibán" essay in the wider context of Cuban social discourse in the 1960s. Afterwards, I will make some comments on contemporary rereadings of the essay by postcolonial scholars who erase these contextual clues.

to identify with the Latin American literary tradition as a whole, even in its most complex expressions.[8] This inclusive presentation of Latin American culture was expressed time after time through a concept of José Martí, “Nuestra América” or “Our America,” without adding the qualification “mestiza” or “europea,” which also stems from this writer.

At first sight, then, a unitarian model of Latin American culture is exchanged in *Calibán* for an oppositional one, but the whole procedure turns out to be more complex when we trace the function of the adjectives “revol

spite of ongoing tensions with political hardliners, would allow experimental artists and critical intellectuals in the years following this famous speech to work and identify with the Cuban revolution. However, towards the end of the 1960s, an analysis of periodical literature in Cuba indicates that this third position was disappearing. Official speeches accentuate the unbridgeable

recodification of the "non-revolutionary" discourse into the "counterrevolutionary" one. As an example, I quote the following paragraph:

> I was arrested because of counterrevolutionary activities. Though this accusation may sound very serious and impressive, it was based on a set of activities and criticisms…. "Criticisms" is not the best word to describe my attitude, "insults" and "gossips" is more appropriate, yes, a series of "insults" and "rumours" against the Revolution that will always make me feel ashamed in front of her.

model had been taking place at the official level and in periodical literature for a number of years. Retamar's very own translational strategy consists in the way he connects the two kinds of

No doubt, Fredric Jameson's presentation of the essay in his foreword to the book publication of 1989 facilitated its reception into this kind of postcolonialism, for one thing because Cuba, which in Retamar's essay appears as an anti-colonial, revolutionary and anti-imperialist nation only, is qualified by Jameson as a postcolonial nation.[22] Simultaneously, Retamar is praised by Jameson for "his keen sense of the dialectics of difference and the paradoxical reversals of Identity and Difference, of the Same and the Other, his supremely mutable polemics of marginality and centrality."[23] This is the Bakhtinian, Brazilian view of the cannibal imposed upon the cursing Caliban. This is one cannibal eating another.

Where does this analysis lead us? What is its bearing on the debate on postcolonialism and translation studies? First of all, and though the example of Baker might cast some doubt upon this, I truly believe that postcolonial critics have much to learn from the scrupulous attention to material signifiers that translators display, whether they adhere to the poststructuralist current or not. It is because this attention is lacking in present-day receptions of "Calibán" in postcolonialism at large, that the essay is misread, recast as a reflection on race instead of language, translated from an "anti-colonial" text into a certain kind of "postcolonial" discourse, which blurs its basic distinctions and thus removes it from its original meanings. But I also think that it pays for translation specialists to conceive of postcolonial literature and criticism as texts that aim at the translation of values, at the permutation of bad into good, of right into wrong. Yet, aren't these old-fashioned concepts that still presuppose stable identities and autonomous subjects? one might object. Yes, they are, but they are present in that other kind of postcolonialism that is so important in Latin America and that we could call "the oppositional" post-colonialism.

If anything does remain of Retamar's "Calibán" in translation studies, it is perhaps the fact that his essay consciously reflects upon this procedure and gives it a name. I quote: "This is

the dialectic of Caliban: to offend us they call us *mambi*, they call us

Retamar also inherited the name Caliban from the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó (1871-1917), who had used it in his 1900 essay on Latin American identity, *Ariel,*