From comparative literature to the study of mediators

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To take an active interest in literary mediators means to assume the ongoing dynamics and transformations in the circulation of cultural and literary property, as well as the existence of different national literatures. In the beginning of the Romantic era, the perception of cultural diversity came into play and engendered the discipline of comparative literature studies, which aspires to study the relationships uniting two or more literatures. We owe this perspective in part to Mme de Staël and her work *De l'Allemagne* (1810), where the ancient method of rhetoric, the one called parallelism, came into force.

It is within this "openness to the other", as defined by Brunel and Chevrel when speaking of the comparative approach (1989: 7), that we are invited to discover foreign literature and cultures, and where the contacts and exchanges between cultures, in an attempt to reconstruct cultural history, are studied and recounted. It is at the heart of this project of cultural history that the presence of *intermediaries* comes into play, *brokers of ideas*, or what we today call *ferrymen of culture* ("passeurs de culture") and actors of mediation. It is also, within the studies of inter-culturalism that Pageaux proposes to study "the description of the mechanisms of contacts and meetings, the relations between literatures and cultures" (Pageaux 2007: 168).

These mediators are present at different moments of the circulation of literary goods. They may be located downstream, at the level of the production chain, but also upstream, at the level of the reception chain. To define their role and function is also partly to define their importance and impact in the society to which they belong. They are essential links in the chain of transnational circulation, but their weight is uneven. Different aspects and functions of the mediators, which Pageaux calls "human bridges" ["hommes-ponts"], have been investigated in the field of comparative literature since the 19th century. The most important part of them is summarized by Pageaux (2009 : 39–65).

Research on mediators has been conducted in literary theory, mainly within the studies of comparative literature, cultural transfers, sociology of literature, translation sociology, translation history. In these fields, the importance of cultural mediators has been highlighted during recent years.

For Espagne, the challenge is to redefine an intercultural history and to show the cultural mixes that take place in the literary fields (1999: 30). This hybridity created by the mix of foreign references helps in fact to produce national identity (1999:

15). It is within these studies about cultural transfer defined by Espagne that the emphasis was placed on *sociological vehicles* (ideas, books, behaviors) and individuals or groups. Espagne points out that "the changes that a group can bring to the target context pass through its social activity, its profession" (1999: 27). Once again, this point raises the importance of the function of mediator. If the research too often highlights the "individuality (...) whose repercussion is considered decisive" (30), Espagne draws attention to the role of "more discrete mediators" that are no less active and underlines the importance of their interrelationships in circulating behaviors and ideas.

For Bourdieu, the importance of mediators has been emphasized at different stages in the international circulation of ideas. According to him (2002: 5–8), the transfer of a national field to another is made through a series of operations (selection, marking, reading) during which the cultural transferrer acts in different positions: as a selector, translator, editor, prefacer, introducer, reader, etc. To study the role of transferrers in literary mediation is also to try to understand what "we can make them [authors of other languages than those of the target culture's] say" (2002: 5). Literature does not travel alone; the mediator's place is once again central.

As part of the sociology of translation, Casanova examined the identity of these mediators, attempting to describe their position in their national literary field (2002: 17–18). According to Casanova's model, the mediators (which are in this case translators, although Casanova considers expanding this model to all literary mediation) can be "ordinary" and remain mostly unknown and invisible although not insignificant. But the opposite case can also occur. Other mediators are then equipped with an important symbolic capital and obtain the status of "consecrating-consecrated" because either they enjoy an aura of charismatic power in the public field or they belong to a prestigious institution that offers them different types of symbolic capital. In other words, depending on the mediator's profile, the mediating agency can be very complex and diverse, and can have an important impact on the circulation of literature.

This person-centered perspective conforms to the model of Sapiro (2007: 10), who suggests examining the correlations between discourses in literary critique and the positions of individuals in the literary field. According to her, these connections can be divided roughly into two opposing categories: orthodox (dominant) or heterodox (dominated). In line with this classification, the mediator's discourse can be assessed in relation to aesthetical, moral, political or critical values, which in its turn coincides with the mediator's place in the literary field. The more aesthetic the discourse, the more autonomous it is as well. In those cases with a high degree of autonomy, the mediator often occupies an orthodox place, which is quite similar to the position Casanova calls "consecrating-consecrated". On the other hand, the more politicized and ideological a discourse is, the more heteronymous it is. In this case the mediator is characterized as heterodox and is often politically engaged.

This renewed interest in the mediator's positioning is intriguing, since it appears to go against the most recent outlook, where the focus is on global perspectives.

Another example is Latour's theory of the sociology of associations[1], i.e. an actor-network theory that has recently become relevant. Latour highlights the importance of what is conveyed , in terms of both tangible and intangible assets, and examines the relationships to the detriment of the individual. According to him, the often invisible and always moving relational gap interstice is at stake, rather than the individual's agency. The networks display the degree of traffic and its pathways, and, *in extenso*, the success or failure of any business transfer. The network is a dynamic entity, a moving architecture to be continuously reconstructed. Latour focuses on understanding the construction of a group of individuals, the creation of associations between different areas (economic, political, linguistic ...). to define the scope of a set of individuals, its size, hierarchy, autonomy, etc... Society, according to Latour, is a collection of individuals, a *collective* in constant mobility. The *actor-network* in this chain of associations is almost always called a *mediator* (and not *intermediate*) that transforms and modifies (or even translates) an object and its significance (Latour 2006: 55-60). All these transformations are involved in the mediation process between actors and areas, but the actions that are implemented are often hidden. The "mediators transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to transfer" (2006: 58). For Latour, the mediators exist in great numbers, even though they sometimes transform into loyal intermediaries (ibid. 60).

The model offered by actor-network theory has the advantage of challenging the role of the mediator as solitary, omnipotent and genius. The notion of *collective* is worth further exploration, since it captures the existing interrelations between individuals. It is this web of connections and exchanges that makes the circulation take place. The network model also offers a view of the internal hierarchy at the heart of a group of individuals. This theory mainly focuses on the circulation of information and appears, in this way, to be an interesting complement to the study of mediators.

In recent years, the field of translation studies has undergone a shift of focus from the texts toward the translators themselves – a shift that, following Douglas Robinson, indicates "a translator's turn". The interest in studying translators has intensified due to the increased attention paid to world literature, translation sociology and translation history. In his acclaimed study *The translator's invisibility* (1995), Lawrence Venuti describes how the translator has been concealed continually in Anglo-American culture. This suppression of the translator is mainly noticeable in the widespread idea that a good translation does not seem to be a translation. The ideal is, in other words, a domesticated text in which the language is fluid and natural, and where cultural differences have been smoothed out or even manipulated. According to this somewhat bizarre norm, the translator, in order to become successful, has to erase the traces of his or her own presence from the text, which indicates the translator's low status. This lack of

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[1] See Marneffe et Denis (*Les Réseaux littéraires,* 2006: 21–43) and Latour (*Changer de société* 2007).

prestige in the literary world is also reflected in the fact that translators are barely mentioned in book reviews.

Venuti's discussion of the two strategies of translation, *domestication* and *foreignization*, is mainly based on ideas put forward by the German romanticist Friedrich Schleiermacher. Another source of inspiration is the work of Antoine Berman (1984), in which a central idea is the need to study not only the translation but also the translator. In his posthumously published study *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne* (1995), Berman presents a method of translation criticism in which a detailed analysis of the translator's background, values, language and approach to literature is a prerequisite for the text analysis.

The importance of studying the translators is a central thought even in translation historian Anthony Pym's works:

> Only through translators and their social entourage (clients, patrons, readers) can we try to understand why translations were produced in a particular historical time and place. To understand why translations happened, we have to look at the people involved (1998: ix).

A translation historian must, according to Pym, engage in "translation archaeology", sometimes a real detective work aimed at finding biographical information about the translator in order to answer essential questions about who translated what, when, where, and for whom and what effect the translation had on the target culture. An example of translation archaeology is Lars Kleberg's ongoing pioneering project, *Svenskt översättarlexikon* ('Swedish Translators' Dictionary'), which has already been exported to foreign countries (similar projects have been initiated in Denmark, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands). Another aspect of translation history, which Pym calls "explanation", seeks to explain why archaeological artefacts occurred at a particular time and how they relate to changes. Possible explanations can be found in technological change and in power relations but also in the individual translator's own activity. Pym has further argued for the importance of studying the people behind the translations in several studies, of which one holds the significant title *Humanizing translation history* (2009).

Some researchers have in the spirit of Bourdieu paid attention to the translator's *habitus* and symbolic capital. One of the first who highlighted this issue was Daniel Simeoni, in his frequently quoted article "The pivotal status of the translator's habitus" (1998). According to Simeoni, present-day translators have a somewhat passive translational habitus due to the internalization of the inferior position they occupy in their field of practice. By accepting their own servility and subservience to the author, translators have agreed to the image of themselves as "efficient, punctual, hardworking, silent and, yes, invisible" (1998: 12). For Simeoni, a more *habitus*-governed perspective emphasizes the extent to which translators play a role in the maintenance of translational norms.

As this brief summary indicates, the subfield that Andrew Chesterman has called "translator studies" is not lacking in theoretical reflections. But what about the other mediators involved in the migration of books in the global literary market? Within the field of translation sociology (cf. Gouanvic 2005; Chesterman 2006; Pym 2006;

Wolf & Fukari 2007; Sapiro 2008; etc.), intercultural agents are regarded as central to the dynamics of the global translation flow and thus as important creators of world literature. When a work of fiction leaves its original national field, it becomes decontextualized, which on the one hand can lead to misinterpretations, but on the other to new, unexpected readings. Literary mediators – i.e. literary agents, critics, introducers, editors, publishers' readers – therefore have great importance, since they choose, introduce and interpret new works for their readership. Bourdieu labels them *gate-keepers,* whereas Casanova, referring to Valery Larbaud, views them as an invisible aristocracy with "the supreme power to decide what is literary, and lastingly to recognize, or to consecrate, all those whom it designates as great writers" (2004: 21). If we are to get a more nuanced understanding of the circulation of literary goods in the world, mediators have to be taken into account. Even though there is currently a growing interest in agents operating within the literary system, much remains to be done, especially when it comes to those mediators who are not directly involved in the translation process.

Recently, literary mediators have been studied in order to understand the construction of literature from specific language areas (Alvstad 2010) or from a network perspective (Buzelin & Folaron 2007; Briens 2015). Moreover, literary mediators have been subject to studies with a prosopographic perspective (Kalinowski 2001; Biesemans 2011), which not only provide an alternative viewpoint by adopting a kind of distant reading, but also help to contextualize case studies.

One scholar who has dedicated a great part of her research to literary mediators is Petra Broomans, who, together with her research group, has highlighted aspects of cultural transfer, or *cultural transmission,* as she prefers to call it, in numerous conferences, articles and research anthologies. The conference acts (2009, 2011, 2012) contain many valuable case studies of literary mediators. In particular, Broomans has paid attention to the female intermediaries' efforts (2009, 2012), and she has created a six-phase model of literary mediation (2011).

This special issue of *Moderna språk* is the outcome of a conference held in Stockholm in June 2015, "Litteraturförmedlare i Sverige från 1945 till våra dagar" ('Literary mediators in Sweden from 1945 to our days'). As the conference title already suggests, the aim of the contributions published in this issue is to focus on literary mediators from Romance languages – i.e. French, Spanish and Italian – into Swedish from World War II until today. This particular perspective is interesting because it implicates a closer analysis of the relations from the centre to the periphery, which suggests that all the actors – individuals, institutions, media, etc. – involved in the importation process are likely to gain something for themselves by introducing literary texts from more prestigious literatures.

The first two articles examine the role of institutions as literary mediators. Ingela Johansson's contribution *Puertas abiertas, puertas cerradas. Un estudio del Español en la Universidad de Lund como mediador literario entre 1970 y 2015* focuses on higher education by investigating which works of fiction were introduced to the reading lists for graduate courses in Spanish at Lund University

between the years 1970 and 2015. The study focuses on the role of Spanish as a literary gatekeeper, and it analyzes the corpus from three assumptions: that the literature listed has a contemporary profile rather than a classical-canonical one; that peninsular Spanish literature dominated the reading lists at the expense of Latin American literature until the 1980s; and, finally, that until the 1990s the reading lists were dominated by male authors. Drawing on a diachronic perspective, Johansson's study shows, among many other things, who are the most recurring authors read at Lund University in the last 45 years.

Andreas Hedberg's article *Small actors, important task: independent publishers and their importance for the transmission of French and Romance language fiction to Sweden since the turn of the millennium* investigates the role of another crucial institution, namely the publishing houses. Starting from a description of today's situation in the Swedish book market, Hedberg's contribution examines the importance of independent Swedish publishers for the transmission of fiction from Romance languages. The analysis is based on qualitative interviews with representatives of three independent publishers – Astor förlag, Sekwa and Elisabet Grate förlag – who were asked to describe their business model and their relationship to the big publishing houses. They were also asked to elaborate on the role of French and other Romance language fiction in present Sweden. The results show clearly the importance of the smaller actors in promoting non-anglophone literature in the Swedish book market.

The following four articles highlight the role of the media by focusing on the function and positions of literary mediators in the Swedish press and their efforts in promoting literature from French and Italian. In *Le critique Stig Strömholm comme médiateur littéraire*, Hans-Roland Johnsson describes the activity of the critic and essayist Stig Strömholm in the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* with prominence given to his numerous articles on French literature. As a critic, Strömholm almost exclusively highlighted literature written between the 17th and 19th century, which made him quite unique in the Swedish press. By underlining his exclusion from the general literary discussion in Sweden, Johnsson argues that Strömholm's articles were written in isolation, which is also reflected in the articles' ideological standpoint that could be described as close to Jansenism, with Pascal and Racine as models.

Another great name in the transnational field is addressed in Elisabet Tegelberg's contribution, *Carl Gustaf Bjurström, un médiateur unique en Suède*. Focusing on the efforts of this manifold mediator – a Swedish translator and introducer of French literature in Sweden, and of the Nordic literatures in France during the second half of the 20th century – Tegelberg's article addresses the phenomenon of literary mediation as reflected in the work of one particular person, with special attention paid to Bjurström's efforts to introduce French literature in Sweden. Through a detailed study of the many aspects of Bjurström's mediation – as an author, translator, promoter and critic – the emerging picture is one of a person whose mediating work was decisive in getting people to read French literature and appreciate it in Sweden in the second half of the 20th century.

Cecilia Schwartz's study *Introducing Italy, 1948–1968: the importance of symbolic capital and position of literary mediators in the semiperiphery* examines the impact of two literary mediators – Martha Larsson and Anders Österling – who both introduced Italian literature to Sweden during the second half of the 20th century. By mapping out which texts and authors they actually introduced in the period 1948–1968, with special attention given to crucial factors such as genre and gender, the article shows that their selections had different characters and effects. Following Broomans' (2011) six-phase model of cultural transfer, Schwartz analyzes whether their introductions had a direct effect on publication and what strategies they used to introduce new Italian authorships to a Swedish audience. It is also argued that both mediators introduced Italian literature in order to gain symbolic capital and maintain their own positions in the Swedish literary field.

Cedergren and Lindberg's reception study *L'importation de la littérature française : un triple détournement de capital. Réflexions à partir d'une étude de réception journalistique en Suède* shows that French literature from France is presented as both aesthetically disruptive with innovative features and as normative and traditional. Swedish journalists with a strong symbolic capital – analyzed through Sapiro's model – manage to redirect the symbolic capital inherent to consecrated French literature at three levels: national, personal and transnational. Firstly, the importation of French literature increases Swedish literature's symbolic capital. Secondly, this transfer allows for an auto-consecration of the journalists themselves. Thirdly, this use of highly valued imported literature engenders a supplementary consecration of a national literature and its dominating language. In conclusion, these observed bilateral literary exchanges show the often overlooked importance of peripheral countries in transnational literary transmission. The results modify Casanova's model, since they display the impact on the market from the margins.

With its emphasis on translations and translators, the contributions in the third section all examine different aspects of cultural legitimization of Romance literature in a Swedish context. Drawing on the concepts of consecration and legitimization, Svante Lindberg examines the translations and the reception in Sweden and Spain of the works of Michel del Castillo. Whereas consecration is considered as a single, irrevocable act, legitimization is of longer duration but is subject to change. Lindberg argues that the books published in Michel del Castillo's early career made him a legitimized author in Sweden at that time. In Spain the same did not happen until the early years of the new millennium, when his subject matter coincided with the topics addressed in many other Spanish novels written at that time.

Cultural legitimacy is also a key concept in Igor Tchehoff's article *Italian Adult Comics in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s*, which analyzes the publication of Italian adult comics in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s. Even though comics constituted a very significant share of translated Italian literature of the period, it is shown that adult comics in Sweden were assigned low cultural value and therefore remained in the margins. After a brief comparison of the situation of adult comics in Italy and

Sweden regarding the role of mediators and the issue of cultural legitimacy, it is argued that this cultural transfer has eventually led to a clash that culminated with the Freedom of the Press trial against the *Pox* magazine. In order to illustrate the difficulties faced by Italian adult comics in Sweden, Tchehoff's article provides an analysis of the reception of *An author in search of six characters* by Milo Manara (1992).

In Petronella Zetterlund's article, *Apuntes sobre la mediación en Suecia de la obra de Octavio Paz: un acercamiento sociológico*, the mediation of the work by Octavio Paz in Sweden is discussed in dialogue with Benoît Denis's definition of *legitimation* of a literary work as a "battle" for accumulation symbolic capital, as opposed to the *consecration*, which is a performative act. The article focuses on the mediation of Paz's work in Sweden and on his Swedish translators, especially the poets Lasse Söderberg, Artur Lundkvist and Knut Ahnlund. Even though the two latter poets were members of the Swedish Academy in 1990 when the Nobel Prize was awarded to Octavio Paz, Zetterlund's analysis of Lundkvist's and Ahnlund's texts on Paz's work, show that they do not mirror the motivation given for awarding the prize to the Mexican poet.

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