

# Writing and Translating among Iberian Literatures

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This special issue addresses the role and presence of translation within the realm of literary writing in the Iberian Peninsula. It is one of the outcomes of the second IberTranslatio symposium dedicated to the overarching topic of “Writing and Translating within/between Iberian Literatures”. The symposium was hosted by the Department of Romance Studies of the University of Vienna in June 2022, and it was organized by the IberTranslatio research project.<sup>1</sup> Existing since 2018, this project brings together scholars from the research clusters DIIA - Iberian and Ibero-American Dialogues and MOV - Circulations, Narratives and Archives in Translation at the Center for Comparative Studies of the University of Lisbon. IberTranslatio’s aim is twofold: to study translation as a mediator between the various literatures and cultures of the Iberian Peninsula, while rethinking the role of translation in the discipline of Iberian Studies. The four articles in this issue add to this goal by illustrating research avenues within Iberian Translation Studies (Gimeno Ugalde, Pinto and Fernandes 2021).

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**1** For further information, see [https://ibertranslatio.univie.ac.at/?page\\_id=68](https://ibertranslatio.univie.ac.at/?page_id=68).

Given the multilingual scenario in which Iberian writers have carried out their work for centuries, it becomes crucial to understand how and to what extent translation-related issues have intersected with creative writing processes and the circulation of literary works in the Peninsula. Our purpose is to explore the multi-level relationships between writing and translating among Iberian literatures and thus develop a better grasp of their complexities and the creative, cultural, and identity challenges they pose. Iberia stands as a particularly relevant and fertile case study in light of the number of languages it concentrates and the proximity - also in geographical, historical, and affective terms - that bind them together (Gallén et al. 2010; Poch and Julià 2020).

The boundaries between writing and translating have not always been obvious or clear-cut (Flynn 2011). This becomes particularly evident when literary translators are also authors, and vice-versa (cf. Bassnett and Bush 2006; Perteghella and Loffredo 2006; Buffagni et al. 2011; Woodsworth 2017), or when authors engage with self-translation (Hokenson and Munson 2007; Cordingley 2013; Castro et al. 2017). The blurriness between writing and translating also extends to the textual artifact itself (original, 'second original', translation, version, adaptation, rewriting, etc.) (Lefevere 1992) and entails the thorny question of the ontological status of a translation. Just like original and translation cannot be polarized, authors and translators are not the only agents involved in these textual processes. In the 1970s and 1980s, Skopostheorie showed that translation is a multi-agent action. More recently, the so-called 'archival turn' in translation studies (Munday 2013) and the successful concept of 'voice', in and around translation (Alvstad et al. 2017), have drawn attention to the collaborative nature of translation. Indeed, since the 2010s, there has been a significant increase in research underlining that translation is permeated and shaped by different kinds of collaboration (Cordingley and Manning 2017; Hersant 2023). This may involve not only authors and translators but also proofreaders, revisers, publishers, and even censors, who act as 'intervenient beings' (Maier 2007).

In addition to their creative input (Flynn 2011, 13), translators can take the role of critics, either textually, by selecting what to translate, or peritextually, through their notes or comments on the translation project. In other instances, translators are turned into subjects of fictional representation, with the same flaws and merits, existential doubts and uncertainties as flesh-and-blood translators. The different dresses translators can wear and the characters they can play all contribute to shaping the literary system they are part of.

This issue brings together case studies that offer theoretical reflections and meaningful insights into the complex, and oftentimes invisible, interplay between writing and translating among Iberian literatures. The contributions cover topics such as the relationship

between authors, translators and censors in the classical period (Markus Ebenhoch); writers acting as translators, either literally, culturally or socio-politically (Burghard Baltrusch); the role of translators, publishers, and editors in bridging Iberian literatures (Ângela Fernandes); and fiction illustrating intra-Iberian relations mediated by characters of writers-translators (Jon Kortazar).

The article by Markus Ebenhoch (University of Salzburg) presents the case of the Portuguese baroque writer Sister Maria do Céu (1658-1753). Being a significant example of Portuguese-Spanish literary bilingualism, her works were widely read and translated in the eighteenth-century Iberian Peninsula. Ebenhoch describes the Iberian networks that favored the Spanish translations of Sister Maria do Céu's *oeuvre* and analyzes them, paying particular attention to the paratexts and the changes introduced by the editors/censors and translators. From the conclusions drawn, the misogynistic stance dominant in the Iberian literary field of the time can be highlighted. Ebenhoch's analysis also elucidates the conception of translation during that period as a process of rewriting and correction, influenced by multiple power dynamics operating at both aesthetic and social levels.

Burghard Baltrusch (University of Vigo) extends the conception of writing and/as translating with the case study of Portuguese novelist José Saramago (1922-2010). Saramago was not only a translator, but also, so Baltrusch argues, a cultural translator, in view of his acute awareness that cultural identities are always embedded in social-political frames and struggle. Baltrusch follows a Benjaminian approach to the Nobel prize winner's statements that "we [writers] are all translators" and "writing means translating". Saramago's stance on writing as translation is shown to illustrate an exercise of 'cultural translation', that is, a performative and ethical means of resisting hegemonic cultural power and criticizing global capitalism and neocolonialism. The iberism and transiberism encapsulated in Saramago's novels are thus postulated as forms of cultural translation. Baltrusch premises the writer's iberism on intra-Iberian solidarity within the multicultural Iberian Peninsula; and transiberism expands beyond the peninsular community by engaging with the Portuguese and Spanish colonial history and post-colonial cultures in Africa and the Americas. Hence, to Saramago, writing becomes translating, but translating is also writing (about) the world.

In her article, Ângela Fernandes (University of Lisbon) proposes a cultural reading of José Bento's translation work. A prominent Portuguese poet and translator, Bento (1932-2019) played a significant role as an Iberian mediator in late twentieth-century Portugal by translating and editing an extensive range of Spanish literature from various periods and genres, namely through anthologies. Fernandes examines Bento's perspectives on translation, a task deeply

intertwined with his own experiences and involvement as a reader and re-writer. By analyzing specific paratexts, she convincingly argues that Bento's aim was to position his translated volumes at the intersection of erudition, pedagogical concerns, and the promotion of reading for pleasure, thus targeting a wide readership.

The last contribution in this issue, by Jon Kortazar (University of the Basque Country), centers on the novel *Martutene* (2012), by the Basque author Ramon Saizarbitoria (b. 1944). The novel provides a ground for a deep reflection on the interplay between language and reality, as well as on the role of translation in the Basque literary system. These aspects are explored through the analysis of the character Julia, a fictional translator, and her translation practices. Language and translation choices become a central aspect throughout the novel. First of all, an important topic in the diegesis is the Spanish translation of the first sentence of Max Frisch's *Montauk*, which is long discussed by Julia and her neighbor Lynn. Secondly, new challenges arise when Julia is translating into Spanish a short story by her partner Martin: the translation of the title "Bihotzean min dut" [It hurts my heart] poses a series of questions closely related to the late twentieth-century Basque diglossic situation and social-political context. Through his attentive reading of the novel, Kortazar brings us closer to Saizarbitoria's own ideas about translation and concerns regarding the impossibility of language to represent reality.

These four pieces of research pinpoint that writing and translating among Iberian literatures are entangled activities, and analyzing them from a comparative perspective sheds new light on the historical and contemporary Iberian cultural exchanges. The presented case studies show that there is definitely more to these relations than meets the eye.

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