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Ed Simon, David Ben-Merre, Julia Coursey, Claire Daigle, Stephen David Engel, Em K. Falk

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Traduttore, Traditore: Authorial Inconsistencies in the Works of Redondo Panza

Julia Coursey

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“Todas las familias felices se parecen unas a otras; pero cada familia infeliz tiene un motivo especial para sentirse desgraciada,” or, roughly, “All happy families are similar to one another; but every unhappy family has its own special reason to feel itself wretched,” is the phrase that begins the now standard Editorial Iberia translation of Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina.1 From the very start, then, the reader can see that Panza’s Karenina would diverge from the Russian — “Todas las familias felices se parecen unas a otras; pero cada familia infeliz tiene un motivo especial para matar,” or “All happy families are similar to one another; but every unhappy family has its own motive to kill.”2 Despite his long reign as the preeminent translator of Russian literature into Spanish, Juan Carlos Redondo Panza’s later works have long been a subject of some speculation, as they quite clearly diverge

from his customary translation style and the original texts. Panza’s early work has been seen as influential in the Spanish intelligentsia’s resistance to Franco, even more so than his overtly political anti-fascist organizing. *Anna Karenina* is the turning point in his oeuvre, the transition from the political tirades of his earlier works to the almost entirely fabricated later volumes.

For many years, very little was known about the life of Redondo Panza. Thanks to the generosity of the Fulbright Foundation and the Ministry of Sports, Education, and Culture (MEDC), I was able to go to Madrid and consult the small number of drafts that have turned up in various contexts as well as the original manuscripts sent to Panza’s publisher. Additionally, I traveled to Cádiz and conducted original research into the life of his stepsister, Panza Martín. In this way, I was able to determine conclusively that not only was Redondo Panza dead by the time *Anna Karenina* was published, his later translations were almost certainly written by his stepsister, Maria de los Angeles Panza Martín. For the purposes of this paper, I have translated her translations into English.

A thorough perusal of the Cádiz archives reveals that Redondo Panza was arrested upon using the informal *tú* with a fascist officer, and, after resisting this arrest, was slated to be killed. His execution was recorded, but three weeks after his presumed death his publisher received a final copy of his translation of *War and Peace* sent by Panza while in hiding. This edition appears to be entirely authored by Redondo Panza, albeit with a looser interpretation of the text than one might anticipate. Tolstoy’s theory of history is radically altered, with a new focus on the power of collective action to change the course of history. The unrest among the serfs that brings together Marya and Rostrov in the original book ends with a kind of utopian workers state. Unhindered by the shackles of serfdom, the workers implement various farming improvements and spend their free time educating themselves with the books they find in the estate’s library. The movement spreads and Napoleon’s soldiers
desert en masse, preferring to live out their lives in the Russian countryside.3

While this diverges wildly from Tolstoy’s plot, much of Panza’s translation remains wholly faithful to the original (in particular, Pierre’s time as a prisoner of war), requiring the author/translator to have a working knowledge of Russian. It is this text that most fully aligns with the Marxist school of Panza studies, as his earliest translations are more faithful to the original texts and the later translations seem less directly concerned with the plight of the working class. While Simmons and Hammerschmidt have both put forward plausible interpretations of a few of the later translations (most notably in Hammerschmidt’s analysis of *Brothers K*4), neither has been able to fully integrate *Anna Karenina* into their theories.

It appears that the beginning of *Anna Karenina* was also translated, though heavily edited. The level of accuracy observed in the first half of the text and the wild disregard for Tolstoy’s story in the second half give the work an almost schizophrenic feel—as if it had been authored by more than one person. According to Águila, Redondo Panza was in Cádiz to visit his stepsister at the time it would have been translated, with whom he had always had something of a fraught relationship. The two of them were the same age, the brother always preferred by his mother. Both were ignored by her father, who drank heavily.5 While Redondo Panza remained in school through his teenage years, Panza Martín was pulled out at age eight to help her stepmother around the house. When she was 14, Maria de los Angeles married Miguel Joaquim Repiso Martín, a greengrocer who often gave her stepmother good deals on produce.6 Her new husband died in rather mysterious circumstances a month

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4 Hans Hammerschmidt, *Spanish Inquisition: Redondo Panza’s Brothers Karamazov* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006)
6 Ibid., 23–45.
or so after the wedding—official cause of death was listed as choking on an orange, but the mortician originally suspected suffocation.7

Panza Martín took over the business, which she was very adept at running, though she had little respect for the deals her late husband had worked out with various townspeople.8 Official reports indicate that she was hiding Redondo Panza in her attic for almost six months before he was discovered, having ventured into the store on the ground level for a snack when one of the nosier members of the community, Marta Gutierrez, was passing by.9 Gutierrez maintains that she did not intend to inform on him, but told a few people about the apparition, unsure if he was a ghost.10 The building was soon searched, and Panza Martín was found standing over the corpse of her brother, a revolver in her hand. She told the soldiers that he had been hiding there without her knowledge, that he had been stealing her food. She killed him herself, for that was how committed she was to Franco. She called upon God to “forgive [her], but to damn [her brother] to hell for the way he had betrayed his country.”11 A brief review of her accounts provides evidence that there was an immediate drop off in customers, and one month after the death of her stepbrother the shop was closed.12 Six months later, Redondo Panza’s publisher received a manuscript for Anna Karenina. Not knowing that Redondo Panza was actually dead, as opposed to his previous position of pretending to be dead, the publisher reviewed it and printed it without much fuss, opening the door to further pseudotranslations from his stepsister, Panza Martín.

Reading Panza Martín’s Karenina through the lens of her life provides a new perspective on the translation. The novel first begins to go off the rails when Vronsky and Anna are travel-

8 Maria Julia Gutierrez, Personal interview, April 1, 4, 5, 7, 11, 2017.
10 Gutierrez, Personal interview.
12 Ibid.
ling through Europe. Anna grows tired of Vronsky’s pretensions and finds herself increasingly unable to communicate with him. This comes to a head when the two of them stop at the Atocha Station in Madrid, a historical impossibility as the station was not built until several years after the initial publication of the novel.  

Anna and Vronsky drink a relaxing cup of café con leche and split a plate of churros while they wait for the train to Barcelona. Vronsky spends pages monologuing about his “new theory of art,” which he believes will render all previous artistic endeavors useless. Meanwhile, Anna feels the baby kicking and wonders what kind of life her child will have with this man as his father. Anna reaches for the last churro, but Vronsky unthinkingly snatches it from the plate, resulting in an emotional turning point: “Anna felt as though she were a ghost, an invisible presence who could only be seen when she was angry.” Anna decides to remain silent, to see how long it will take Vronsky to notice that she has removed herself from the conversation, and he manages to speak to himself for another two hours, only acknowledging her when insisting she hurry up so they would not miss the train. As the engine approaches the platform, Anna bends down to get something from her suitcase, knocking the bag that contains Vronsky’s paintings onto the tracks. Panicked, Vronsky jumps in front of the train, willing to die for his art in a scene that mirrors the early death of the railway worker.

Her train delayed and her lover deceased, Anna spends a few hours looking at the paintings in the Prado, noting “the sad eyes of the women, forever trapped in their poses.” Still pregnant, Anna feels compelled to return to Moscow and throw herself on the mercy of her husband. But a miscarriage while the train is stopped in Paris causes her to reconsider. She checks into a hotel near the Louvre to recover, and spends some time exploring

14 Tolstói, Ana Karenina [1939], 566.
15 Ibid., 568
16 Ibid., 570–78.
17 Ibid., 578.
the collections, fascinated by the Japanese scrolls painted with scenes from *The Tale of Genji*. In the mornings she rests in bed and reads until she feels strong enough to eat something. When she finishes *Madame Bovary*, she weeps for an entire day.\(^{18}\)

Both the general plot and the pages of impressionistic narration — descriptions of the city, of paintings, of the steam of the trains — seem to have their counterparts in Panza Martín’s life. After losing her livelihood, Panza Martín sold everything she owned and set out across the border to France. She lived for a time in the town of Aix-en-Provence, and may have been Cézanne’s mistress for a brief but tumultuous period. Picasso, too, was in exile from Spain in this region during the time, and she may have had lunch with him one sunny afternoon, on the patio of the large house he lived in there, and perhaps watched a single white horse canter up and down the field in front of it.\(^{19}\)

When she grew tired of Provence, she moved to Paris, where she worked as a shop girl, having taught herself French when she first crossed the border and being more than qualified to run the store. The scenes from Anna’s time in Paris seem to come from this experience, allowing Panza Martín to have an outlet for the flâneuse she had become.

The segments in Japan, however, appear largely produced from thin air. After her adventures on the Trans-Siberian Railway, Anna comes to a country made of tiny islands, each one only big enough for a single house. The people that live in the houses are all young, always smiling. They take her in, and feed her a variety of soups throughout the day. That night, a tremendous wailing wakes Anna, who rushes from the house toward the source of the sound. The sea is roiling, the young women throwing baskets of flowers and herbs into an ever-growing whirlpool. By the light of the moon, Anna is able to make out shifting shapes under the water, a sinister mass making the ocean move angrily. The young women motion her back to her

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 580–96.

\(^{19}\) Pablo Picasso, Letter to Gertrude Stein, May 18, 1947. MS.
room, where she lays awake for hours listening to the screams that come from the sea.

The next morning the women explain to her that there is nothing to fear. This is how the sea is made, they tell her, “without their tears we would have no water.”The breakfast soup is particularly salty that morning. That night, Anna sneaks out of her bedroom and dives into the ocean. It is full of all the old women that did not live on the islands, and they are not happy. The old women dance and scream, each twirl causing the water to eddy, each scream accompanied by a sob. The onlookers weep until they too are compelled to dance, full of duende, showing every crushed desire, every small betrayal. The book concludes with Anna’s death song, for as she sings and screams and wails the water fills her lungs; she ages, and perhaps she is drowned, perhaps she lives forever in the sea.

While the physical descriptions of the locale are disconnected from Panza Martin’s reality, the emotional content of the final portion of the book speaks to a life of incremental disappointments, some of which are revealed only upon consulting primary materials concerning the relationship of the step siblings. An exhumation of Redondo Panza’s corpse by Gutierrez and myself revealed a small notebook tucked into his jacket pocket. This journal details Redondo Panza’s daily life and contains notes on his translation projects. The entries begin well before his first execution, and include many details about polishing the War and Peace manuscript and the ongoing translation of Anna Karenina. The project dragged on for several years. Indeed, the main point of Redondo Panza’s visit to Cádiz was to ask his stepsister for financial support while he completed the manuscript.

The journal also fills in the crucial missing biographical information, namely, how he was recorded as shot by a firing squad and managed to survive. Redondo Panza writes, “we were lined up along the edge of a large pit that had been used for the previous day’s executions as well, which I deduced despite my

20 Tolstói, Ana Karenina [1939], 806.
blindfold from the incredible stench of rotting flesh.”

At the command to fire, Redondo Panza stepped backwards over the ledge, falling into a pile of corpses. He lay there until the soldiers could no longer be heard, at which point he snuck away. Redondo Panza spent two days in a nearby forest, but, incapable of foraging for himself, he broke into Panza Martín’s house under the cover of night and took up residence in her attic. Once he made himself known to her, she begrudgingly brought him meals after dark, and implored him to come up with a plan to escape. The last entry is dated the night before his body was found and includes the details of a whispered argument they had. Several weeks into this uninvited visit, Redondo Panza found one of her poems on the back of an invoice for a crate of oranges, and deemed it extremely mediocre. He brought it up later, when drunk, and discouraged his sister from writing further: “If you won’t stop writing, the least you can do is hide your poetry better, to keep from embarrassing us any more than you already have.”

What, then, are we to make of these two translators sharing the same body of work—the one clinging closely to the Russian, except at moments where it behooves his personal agenda, the other translating so loosely that she might be said to not be translating at all? Indeed, the books translated after Anna Karenina appear to be based on the French translation of the Russian, filtering the original work through yet another language. It is clear, at least, that the biographical differences between the two translators have significant bearing on the interpretation of their work. In what sense can these books still be thought of as translations? Jose Ortega y Gasset’s words come to mind:

To write well is to employ a certain radical courage. Fine, but the translator […] finds himself facing the enormous controlling apparatus, composed of grammar and common

21 Juan Carlos Redondo Panza, Unpublished diary, 1940–1941, 23.
22 Ibid., 47.
usage. What will he do with the rebellious text? Isn’t it too much to ask that he also be rebellious, particularly since the text is someone else’s?  

The death of Anna Karenina is one of the most poignant moments in the written word. But what are we to do with an Anna that kills someone else rather than herself in order to be free? What are we to do with a translator that abandons the text in order to write her own?

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