Anonymity, Impersonation and Exile: Silenced Women Writers at the Dawn of Modernity in Spain

Assumpta Camps
PhD, University of Barcelona, Chair of Italian Philology,
ICLA Translation Committee
(Spain)

Abstract:

With the purpose of showing the cultural contributions to the contemporaneity of female writers and artists, so often silenced, and forgotten, we've seen recently a true (re)discovery of these protagonists of the Spanish Silver Age (1900-1936) from the Gender Studies, as well as from the Spanish Contemporary Literary Historiography. The recovery of female writers and artists of that period constitutes not only a way out of "anonymity" for these women, in a process that is, without any doubt, of absolute justice. It also involves necessarily a revision of the canon of the Spanish Silver Age, questioning the assumptions and interpretations consolidated in our critical tradition, incorporating a large amount of literary/artistic production that remained silenced and/or unpublished, as well as identifying the patriarchal nature of our cultural and artistic élites, at the dawn of modernity. One of the most striking cases of this group of "silenced" women of our Silver Age is María Lejárraga, an essential and very active literary figure of the Hispanic Modernism, who devoted himself prolifically to literary translation. Several circums-tances led her to become a true ghost, despite her great relevance for the Hispanic literature of the first half of the XXth century. This "ghostly" nature starts with her own decisions, since she assumed as pseudonym the name of her husband, "Gregorio Martínez Sierra" from the beginning. This fact was aggravated many decades later, during the Franco regime and the exile, when she even lost the rights on her works.

Keywords: Literary Translation; María Lejárraga; Gregorio Martínez Sierra; Silver Age; Spanish Literature; Literary Canon; Gender Studies

1. Silenced women writers at the dawn of modernity in Spain

Questioning the canon is a central aspect of Gender Studies. The (re)discovery of writers, artists, and translators of the so-called Spanish Silver Age also uses this approach to analyse the absence of representation, the "ghostly" ("hauntological") nature of the authorship of many women in those times. This is a fundamental topic of the Spanish cultural history of this period (1900-1936), since it constitutes a way out of the, often forced, "anonymity" of these women, but also entails an essential revision of the canon of the Spanish Silver Age currently in studying manuals, literary histories, and anthologies, that we have inherited, and which need to be reviewed in depth, since the canon refers us to a tradition of authority in the literary sphere (Mainer, 2000, p. 234).

The recovery of these "silenced" writers completely disrupts the symbolic schemes that are used and demonstrates the absolute relevance of gender at the dawn of modernity, in our country and beyond our borders. In fact, the participation of women in modernity has had a profound effect not only on the category of femininity, but also on the notion of modernity (Felski, 1994, p. 204). This issue is often intertwined with the deep concern aroused by the emergence of the "modern woman" at the time: a matter of a clearly political nature, in which patriarchal discourses of (often enraged) condemnation of the alleged "deviations from the feminine norm" that modernity entailed, were tinged with open misogyny and alleged scientism to consolidate a sexist discourse addressed to condemn agitators, thinkers, artists, writers, inventors, etc., as "deviations" from the feminine norm.

2. Anonymity as a strategy of concealment

Among these "silenced" women of the Spanish Silver Age, one of the most striking cases is María Lejárraga. She is a clear example of women's need at that time to show their talent only through male delegation, in a social context that stigmatized their public visibility when they were engaged in literature, or art in general. Her submission to her husband (Gregorio Martínez Sierra) in the name of the myth of a supposed spiritual "collaboration" that lasted and resisted years and infidelities is also clear. Another very significant feature, is the biological metaphor she used for her literary production, considering her works as the "children" she never had.

The relevance of Lejárraga's cultural contribution is now beyond doubt, especially since the documented studies by Patricia W. O'Connor, who evidenced the authorship of a very abundant production that was published not under her own name, but rather under the name of "Gregorio Martínez Sierra", the actual name of her husband. To these contributions we can add several later works, published in the press since 2000 (by X. Ayén, M. J. Obiol, F. Umbral…), and other studies such as those of Mª I. López Martínez, and Juan Aguilera Sastre, who concludes, "if by authorship we mean exclusively the writing of the works, then we must agree that María was the author of most [my translation]" of them (Aguilera Sastre, 2002, p. 46).

Lejárraga was a fundamental and very active figure of Spanish Modernism. She wrote manifestos, founded important literary journals, such as *Helios* (1903) and the *Renacimiento* (1907) editorial and journal (1907). She cultivated a poetic prose that many admired in her time, and incorporated innovations into early twentieth century Spanish theatre. She also introduced key foreign authors for the modernization of Spanish literature through her translations. However, despite this prolific production and influence, her authorship does not appear anywhere, and her name is not mentioned by historians of Spanish Modernism. This is because she and her husband decided to sign their works, which were supposedly "collective" but written by her, actually, as works by "Gregorio Martínez Sierra" (Martínez Sierra, 2000, p. 75-76). Therefore, as Susan Kirkpatrick rightly points out, *The most important female member of the modernist group created a complex artistic identity for herself, based partly on self-concealment and partly on the textual affirmation of the aesthetic value and modernity of the feminine* (Kirkpatrick, 2003, p. 130, my translation).

This is undoubtedly an extraordinary case of imposture, whose magnitude and exceptionality transcend the strictly Hispanic panorama. It consists essentially of hiding herself by adopting a pseudonym that matches the real name of her husband. In practice, Lejárraga's decision to do this constituted a kind of public death. This is the true origin of a set of unfortunate circumstances (to which was added her exile after the Spanish Civil War, and the silence on her work imposed by Francoism) that turned this writer into a real ghost, despite her great relevance to the Spanish literature of the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, this personal decision had dire consequences because she lost all rights to her work upon her husband's death in 1947.

There are many hypotheses that have been considered to explain this personal decision; however, above all it demonstrates the great difficulties faced by any woman writer in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century, in an atmosphere of deep hostility and misogyny (Lozano, 2017). However, Lejárraga is undoubtedly a character with a complex identity that has numerous contradictions. Perhaps the most flagrant of all concerns her agency, rejecting to access the public sphere as an author but rather as a politician, since Lejárraga was very active in the feminist struggle from the second decade of the twentieth century, and increasingly in the 20s and 30s (Blanco, 2003). For Lejárraga, hiding under the signature of GMS opened her the doors of the theatres of the time where she successfully premiered without having to suffer the prejudices and criticisms for being a woman. It also allowed her to publish in literary journals; and even conferred "authority" and "symbolic capital" (Blanco 2006), to her feminist writings and conferences (Salinas Díaz 2014). On the other hand, Lejárraga used often unconvincing arguments to avoid the social stigma that her literary activity could entail (Martínez Sierra, 2000, p. 26; Martínez Sierra 1989). Using a masculine pseudonym was certainly a strategy of self-concealment to evade the prejudices that a woman writer would encounter in Spain at the time (Blanco, 1999, p. 15).

With the death of Gregorio in 1947, silenced, exiled, and forgotten, faced with losing the rights over her work, Lejárraga saw the necessity to unmask the imposture (Blanco 1987), rebuild her author identity and vindicate herself as a writer for the first time. With a narrative about her life and the true nature of the "collaboration" with her husband she claimed,

from her exile and in full Francoism, her true place in Spanish literature (O'Connor, 2002 and 2003).

Ahora, anciana y viuda, véome obligada a proclamar mi maternidad para poder cobrar mis derechos de autora (Martínez Sierra, 2000, p. 76)

[Now, old and widowed, I am forced to proclaim my motherhood to collect my copyright.] (my translation).

This is the origin of the memorialist writing signed by "María Martínez Sierra", *Gregorio and I: half a century of collaboration*, published in Mexico in 1953. The debate on her authorship was long and complex. In fact, it was not settled until 1987, thanks to the research of Patricia W. O'Connor (O'Connor, 1987, completed with O'Connor, 2003), who provided a lot of information in this regard, partly drawing on the author's correspondence between 1915 and 1947, which shows Gregorio's absolute dependence on her wife.

When, amid Francoism, Lejárraga tried to vindicate herself as a writer, she faced strong resistance against her from the cultural elites in power (O'Connor, 2003, p. 58; Aguilera Sastre, 2002). It can therefore be affirmed that her exile and the work of Francoism sentenced her to death in life as a writer, in a double process of invisibility, which was partly facilitated by her own earlier decisions.

3. The *triple* invisibility of María Lejárraga as a translator

The theory of feminist translation researches the legacy, which is persistent in history, of a double "subordination": that of women and that of translation. The way in which translation has been "feminized" over time is clearly due to gender constructions, as Lori Chamberlain already showed in 1988 in her famous essay "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation", in which she invites us to overturn these constructs. Both feminist thought and that of translation are aimed at analysing the way in which this condition of being secondary ("secondariness") of both women and translation has been (re)presented over time, how it is defined, and how it is canonized.

This persistent subordination in time highlights a recurring double invisibility of the female translator in literary history: for being a woman and for being a translator. This is compared to the male author and his work, doubly legitimized as such. In the case of María Lejárraga, for the reasons that we have analysed above, a new twist is added to this condition, since

her translations, which were very abundant, are not signed at all (a common characteristic in many literary journals of the early twentieth century in Spain) or are not signed by her but rather by GMS (Gregorio Martínez Sierra). We can therefore speak in her case of a *triple* invisibility, which converts researching her work, and the process of recovering this important figure of Spanish Modernism, into a much more arduous task, if possible. It becomes a true case of exhumation that has only begun very recently, by analysing various testimonies, such as letters, criticisms of the works that appeared in the press, reviews, etc. In most of the studies on María Lejárraga, her work as a translator is not even mentioned, despite its great relevance (for example, in the studies by Blanco).

Translation played a very important role in the Hispanic world of this time as it introduced new foreign authors, literary themes, and models, and, ultimately, a new image of modernity. This translation work played a decisive role in the emergence of Spanish Modernism, spreading and publicizing foreign authors. However, this undeniable task has not yet been properly valued (Sánchez-Nieto, 2017, p. 406). In this chapter we must locate María Lejárraga clearly, because for many recent critics the translations she made were key to the consolidation of the aesthetic ideology of young modernists in the first and second decades of the twentieth century. Her translations were published under the signature GMS, or even anonymously, in fundamental journals such as *Vida Moderna* (1901), and especially *Helios* (1903) and *Renacimiento* (1907), as well as in the *Renacimiento* publishing house linked to the journal ("Selected Library of Foreign Authors" series, and in "Masterpieces of Universal Literature"). In addition, in 1917 she founded the Estrella Editorial, and in 1925 the Esfinge Editorial, which both published numerous translations of foreign literature. *Helios*, the main journal of Spanish Modernism, and later *Renacimiento,* were born from the association between Maria and Gregorio Martínez Sierra and J. R. Jiménez (among others). Their fruitful friendship has been widely documented (Gullón, 1961). These two journals, inspired by the *Mercure de France* and *Vers et Prose*, were decidedly international from the outset. To this we can add the relationship with the Parisian editor Garnier (who also became editor of GMS), as well as the friendship with Falla, Albéniz, Eugeni D'Ors and Rusiñol, among others. The couple's travels, until 1906, also played an important role in this quest to expand their borders and learn about new literary trends abroad.

One of the most outstanding aspects in both journals, *Helios* and *Renacimiento*, was the interest in translating foreign literature (Celma, 1991; P. O'Riordan, 1970, p. 127-134). The presence of Symbolists, Decadents and Parnassians (i.e. Verlaine, Mallarmé, D'Annunzio, Rémy de Gourmont, Henri de Régnier, Charles Guérin, Maeterlinck, Omar Khayyam, Longfellow, Thoreau, Poe, Georges Rodenbach, and Maurice Rallinat, etc.) did not appear in the literary journals of Madrid until the first half of the twentieth century:

> The definitive change in the aesthetic tastes of Spanish writers –in accordance with the consolidation of modernist poetics– is evidenced by the publication of translations of Maeterlinck, Mallarmé, Verlaine or D'Annunzio, among others, and with the recovery of writers of romantic affiliation such as Edgar Allan Poe, Longfellow or Leopardi, who burst into some Madrid journals that appeared between 1903 and 1907 (*Helios, Alma Española, La República de las Letras, Renacimiento*), thus showing the wide range of foreign influences converging on the Hispanic Modernism (Rodríguez-Moranta, 2011, p. 52, my translation).

In this context María Lejárraga played a very important role in spreading foreign literature in these early years of the twentieth century thanks to her thorough knowledge of languages, either promoting her knowledge or directly translating the proposed works herself. As a great reader and a good *connoisseur* of Anglo-American poetry, critics have recognized her large influence on J. R. Jiménez (Coletes, 2001, p. 123), who was initially very focused on French literature (Rodríguez-Morata, 2011, p. 53). Therefore, the *Renacimiento* journal shows a greater presence of North American literature, which was still very little known in Spain at that time, and which was translated by Lejárraga. There has been little research yet into the great relevance of these translations for Spanish Modernism. Therefore, the necessary overview does not yet exist, as for French literature, which has been much more analyzed by Spanish historiography.

Most of the translations that appeared in *Helios*, and later in *Renacimiento* (among other important journals of the time), were the work of María Lejárraga, "although she never signed them [...] neither she nor her husband" (Coletes 2001: 50). However, this was not strange in those times. The collaboration between the two Martínez Sierra also included the trans-

lation-adaptation of plays by classical and modern English playwrights, for staging at Teatro Eslava (Madrid) between 1917 and 1923 (*ibid*.: 126). This fact further favoured the anonymity of these translations, which was common in the theatrical translation of the time. All these translations/adaptations were almost exclusively made by María Lejárraga.

The correspondence between Gregorio Martínez Sierra and J. R. Jiménez, documented by Ricardo Gullón as early as 1961, also gives a good account of Lejárraga's work in this field. Gregorio reportedly wrote the following to J.R.J.: "You can be in charge of translating several works of 'Vers et Prose'. María will take care of the English translations, and I will do the Catalan translations" (Gullón, 1961, p. 48). Therefore, it is considered that Lejárraga was the author of the translations that were published in *Renacimiento* of the following texts: *The Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam (based on the English version by Fitzgerald), *Walden, or Life in the Woods* by Thoreau, some poems by H. W. Longfellow ("The Rainy Day", "The Day is Done" and "Hymn to the Night"), Mallarmé's prose poems ("The Future Phenomenon", "The Pipe", "Autumn Lament", and "Winter Shivers"), as well as Verlaine's poetry ("Serenade", "Forgotten Songs", "Gaspard Hauser Sings", "The Song of the Naïve", and the famous "Spleen"), and the essay *Philosophy of Composition* by E. A. Poe. This last work ("a jewel of inestimable value, not so much for its intrinsic quality as for its historical and archaeological interest", Montes 1994: 46) was complementary to the Spanish translation of "The Raven", published in *Helios* in 1904 by Viriato Díaz Pérez. All these works were very important and influential for the formation of the new modernist taste and were translated for the first time into Spanish by Lejárraga in accordance with a fully conscious and anticipatory project of openness to foreign influence, and a fine critical sense and orientation towards the consolidation of the new modernist aesthetic in Spain. Lejárraga was able to carry out this fundamental project, despite being hidden by anonymity and veiled by what was clearly a great imposture in the Spanish literature of the time.

To conclude, we are therefore faced with an unusual case of what we call "author translation", carried out by a writer in parallel to her own literary production, linked to her own works, and clearly essential to the evolution of the target literature. "Unusual" because of the way the translator hid herself. These translations deserve much more attention. Research into these translations is very relevant for understanding many literary figures of the Spanish Silver Age, and reviewing the Spanish literary canon.

References:

Aguilera Sastre, J. (coord.). (2002). *María Martínez Sierra y la República: ilusión y compromiso. II Jornadas sobre María Lejárraga*. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos.

Alonso Valero, E. (2016). *Machismo y vanguardia. Escritoras y artistas en la España de preguerra*. Madrid: Devenir.

Ayén, X. (2000). "Esposa y negra en la vida", *La Vanguardia*, 17 November.

Blanco, A. (1987). "Reading Gender and Authorship in Twentieth-Century Spain Through the Autographies of Maria Martínez Sierra", SAMLA (7 November).

Blanco, A. (1999). *María Martínez Sierra (1874-1974*). Madrid: Ediciones del Orto.

Blanco, A. (2003). *A las mujeres: ensayos feministas de María Martínez Sierra*. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos.

Blanco, A. (2006). "María Martínez Sierra: hacia una lectura de su vida y su obra", *Arbor. Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura*, CLXXXII (719, May-June): 337-345.

Celma Valero, Mª P. (1991). *Literatura y periodismo en las revistas del Fin de siglo. Estudio e índices (1888-1907).* Madrid: Júcar.

Chamberlain, L. (1988). "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation", *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*, 13(3): 454-472. Currently in: Venuti, Lawrence. (ed.). (1992). *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*. London-New York: Routledge, 57-74.

Clavería, C. (1970). *Unamuno y Carlyle. Temas de Unamuno*. Madrid: Gredos.

Coletes Blanco, A. (2001). "Más sobre Tagore en España: una traducción olvidada (inglés-español) de Martínez Sierra", *Archivium: Revista de la Facultad de Filología*, vol. 50-51 (200-2001): 119-148, Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo.

Englekirk, J. E. (1934). *Edgar Allan Poe in Hispanic Literature*. Nueva York: Instituto de las Españas en los Estados Unidos.

Englekirk, J. E. (1942). "Notes on Longfellow in Spanish America", *Hispania: A Quaterly Journal devoted to the interests of teachers of Spanish*. Santanford: Stanford University, III (25): 295-308.

Felski, R. (1994). "Modernism and Modernity: Engendering Literary Histori", in: Rado, Lisa. (ed.). *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, New York-London: Garland, 191-208.

González Ródenas, S. (2005). *Juan Ramón Jiménez a través de su biblioteca. Lecturas y traducciones en lengua francesa e inglesa (1881-1936).* Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla.

Gullón, R. (1961). *Relaciones amistosas y literarias entre Juan Ramón Jiménez y los Martínez Sierra*, San Juan de Puerto Rico: Universidad de Puerto Rico-Ediciones de la Torre.

Johnson, R. (2003). *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Kirkpatrick, S. (2003). *Mujer, modernismo y vanguardia en España*. Madrid: Cátedra.

Lanero, J. J.; Santoyo, J. C. & Villoria, S. (1993). "50 años de traductores, críticos e imitadores de Edgar Allan Poe (1857-1913)", *Livius: Revista de Estudios de Traducción*, 3: 159-184.

Lanero, J. J. & Villoria, S. (1996). *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882). Literatura en traducción. Versiones españolas de autores americanos del s. XIX*. León: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de León, 145-162.

López Martínez, Mª I. (2006). *María de la O Lejárraga: la voz suplantada. Teatro y mujer en España. De los años 20 a la posguerra. Actas del Seminario Internacional, Bérgamo, 2 de diciembre de 2005*, Margherita Bernard. (ed.). Bérgamo: Bergamo University Press-Sestante, 19-33.

Lozano Marín, L. (2017). "María de la O Lejárraga: uso del seudónimo y sus contradicciones". *Tonos digital: revista de Estudios Filológicos*, 33: 1-15.

Mainer, J. C. (2000). *Historia, literatura, sociedad (y una cosa española), de la vanguardia*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva.

Martínez Sierra, M. (2000). *Gregorio y yo: medio siglo de colaboración*, edited by Alda Blanco. Valencia: Pre-textos.

Martínez Sierra, M. (1989). *Una mujer por los caminos de España*, edited by Alda Blanco. Madrid: Castalia.

Montes, F. (1994). "A propósito de una traducción de Henry David Thoreau a principios del siglo XX", *Livius: Revista de Estudios de Traducción*, 5: 145-152.

Nash, M. (1999). "Un/contested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform and the Modernization of Gender Identities in Early Twentieth-Century Spain", in: Enders, Victoria & Radcliff, Pamela B. *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, Nueva York: State University of N. Y. Press, 25-49.

Obiol, M. J. (2000). "La autora oculta", *El País*, 23 de septiembre de 2000.

O'Connor, P. W. (1987). *Gregorio y María Martínez Sierra. Crónica de una colaboración*. Madrid: La Avispa.

O'Connor, P. W. (1977). *Gregorio and María Martínez Sierra*. Boston: G.K. Hall.

O'Connor, P. W. (2002). "Sortilegio de amor y los trágicos triángulos en la vida y la obra de María Martínez Sierra", in: Aguilera Sastre, J. (coord.). (2002). *María Martínez Sierra y la República: ilusión y compromiso. II Jornadas sobre María Lejárraga*. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 15-34.

O'Connor, P. W. (2003). *Mito y realidad de una dramaturga española: María Martínez Sierra*. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos.

O'Riordan, P. (1970). *Helios, revista del modernismo (1903-1094). Ábaco. Estudios de Literatura Española*. Madrid: Castalia, 57-150.

Pérez-Romero, C. (1979). "Raíces norteamericanas en la obra de Juan Ramón Jiménez: E. A. Poe y la poesía juanramoniana". *Anuario de Estudios Filológicos*, II: 211-229. Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura.

Pérez-Romero, C. (1987). "Juan Ramón Jiménez, poeta-traductor: historia de un 'proyecto'", in: *Fidus Interpres: Actas de las primeras jornadas nacionales de historia de la traducción*. León: Universidad de León, 120-128.

Pérez-Romero, C. (1992). *Juan Ramón Jiménez y la poesía anglosajona.* Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura.

Reyes, A. (ed.). (1971). *Antología*, Madrid: Visor.

Reyes, A. (ed.). (1998). *Cien años de Mallarmé. Igitur y otros poemas*. Tarragona: Igitur.

Rodrigo, A. (1994). *María Lejárraga. Una mujer en la sombra.* Madrid: Ediciones Vosa.

Rodríguez-Moranta, I. (2011). "Nuevas luces sobre María Lejárraga (1874-1974). Unas traducciones *en la sombra* de 1907", *Triangle: Language, Literature, Computation*, 4: 45-68.

Salinas Díaz, R.P. (2014). "Silencio y censura sobre María Lejárraga", in: Greco, Bárbara & Pache Caballero, Laura (coord..). *Variaciones de lo metarreal en la España de los siglos XX y XXI*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 309-320.

Sánchez-Nieto, Mª T. (2017). Reseña de "Dolores Romero (ed.). Retratos de traductoras de la Edad de Plata, Madrid, Escolar y Mayo, 2016, págs. 248". *Hermenéus* 19: 406-411.

Umbral, F. (2000). "Las escritoras", *Tiempo de hoy*, 27 November 2000.

Zaro, J.J. (2007). *Shakespeare y sus traductores. Análisis crítico de siete traducciones españolas de obras de Shakespeare*, Berna: Peter Lang.