

Sánchez-Blake, Elvira. *Spiral of Silence*. Trans. Lorena Terando. Evanston Illinois: Northwestern U P and Curbstone P, 2019. 159 pp. ISBN: 9780-8101-3916-9

*Spiral of Silence* is the title of the recent translation of *Espiral de Silencios* written by Elvira Sánchez-Blake and published in Spanish in 2009. Lorena Terando's translation brings the novel to the English-reading public with strength and an understanding of the world portrayed by the novel. Debra Castillo's prologue contextualizes the novel, giving the uninformed reader a framework for understanding Colombian history and the complicated human landscape that its ever-changing and constant war has created.

This novel in its original Spanish publication seemed directed to a narrower public, already familiar with Colombia's violent situation and the complicated relationships between military and paramilitary forces (*paracos*), the various guerilla organizations, the *narcos*, and the *sicarios*. Sanchez-Blake creates a narrative covering almost fifty years of the troubled history of Colombia, showing how these forces interacted with the existing social class and economic divides, corrupt or weak governments, a powerful Catholic church, and racial and gender inequities. Starting with the government of Rojas Pinilla, which we see through back-flashes into some of the character's histories, the novel weaves a tapestry of voices that do not follow a strict chronological order but provide us highlights of crucial moments in Colombian history up to 2004.

The value of such a narrative is achieved foremost by the voices of the women who tell the story, move the narrative, and let the reader know how it feels to be a woman in a historic juncture that is mostly dominated by a male perspective. In Sánchez-Blake's novel, men are husbands, brothers, lovers and sons. While it is usually the case with women to have their role in history depend on the connections they have with men who are the protagonists, here we find the reverse. As we read the novel, we learn about the ways in which this war affected women and how they decided to assume leadership roles that required great sacrifice but were crucial to the resolution of the conflict.

Terando's translation not only helps to publicize this novel that was not broadly known at the time of its publication, but also detaches the language from the original, tied to regional and local dialects across social class. While she creates the voices of each of the women with veracity and strength, the filter of standardized English lets the reader encounter Sánchez-Blake's protagonists: Mariate, Norma, Amparo and the woman narrator, without needing to decide whether a person in that social class or in that town or city would speak the way they do. What might be a loss for the Colombian native-Spanish reader, is in fact a gain for the international or American public reading in English.

But this is not a domesticized translation, to put it in Lawrence Venuti's terms. To capture some of the dialect, Terando has included several Spanish words and expressions in her English version. While sometimes these words seem out of place, mostly they manage the desired effect of bringing the reader to the source language culture. Such is the case with some food items or objects that are named in Spanish and paraphrased in English to make the word intelligible. For example, consider the following passage: "What powerful message? Mariate asked, while she pat-pat-patted into shape some *arepas de choclo*, his favorite cornmeal cake, made with special Andean corn" (67). The original Spanish "¿Acción contundente? Le preguntó Mariate mientras preparaba unas arepas de choclo"(73) is contextualized by the description of the patting, which indicates to the reader the flatness of the corn cake. The explanation about the "Andean corn" adds to the Spanish words and forces the American reader beyond their own experience of sweet corn to imagine a confection different from anything they have tasted before. In another instance:

Mariate exclaims: “Nora! Hermana, my sister, this is a miracle” (79). In this case the word “hermana,” not only reminds us of the Spanish original but brings a cultural insight into the type of relationship the two characters formed while in jail. Terando also keeps the cultural context by leaving the quoted words to songs in Spanish, even when those words somewhat help tell the story. Again, in this case, she leaves a seed of resistance to force the reader to learn something about the culture and remember where the novel comes from.

In Sanchez-Blake's Spanish-language text voices shift from chapter to chapter. Each of the women protagonists gets to tell her version of what is happening to her and to those around her. These voices emerge in a non-linear sequence, as explained above, and the reader needs to figure out from context, who is speaking each time. The novel is organized in two larger units or parts that are divided into short chapters, each labeled with a thematic title. Terando’s translation of the title of each of these chapters adds a subtitle announcing who is speaking. For example, from the first chapter, “El Comandante,” Terando adds the subtitle “*Amparo*.” As many of the clues given to the Colombian reader to identify the timing and the character of each segment may not be available to the English reader, adding this information guides the reader through the different segments. Also useful in this sense is the chart included at the end of the book with a chronology of events in Colombian history as they relate to the events in the novel.

As I learned recently when I taught this novel in my Latin American Women Writer’s course, the English version of *Espiral de Silencios* opens the narrative beyond the Colombian borders. My students in that class came from diverse backgrounds such Guatemala, Jamaica and Nigeria among others. Each student felt that in some way the novel represented their own country and circumstances they had experienced there. All my students felt the novel spoke to them. None of them was Colombian.

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