

de la Torre, Cristina, trans. *A Single Numberless Death*. By Nora Strejilevich. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2002. 176p.

In close collaboration with the author, Cristina de la Torre has crafted a fluid and graceful English rendition of Nora Strejilevich's testimonial narrative, *Una sola muerte numerosa*. Appearing five years after the original publication through North-South Press, *A Single Numberless Death* finally makes available to an English speaking readership the gripping survivor's tale that chronicles human rights abuses committed during Argentina's last military dictatorship (1976-1983). This regime not only sought to eliminate so-called "subversive elements" from society but also emulated the extreme anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany by applying specifically cruel treatment to Jewish detainees. Through an extraordinary blend of fact and fiction, Nora Strejilevich details her experience as a *desaparecida* - as one of an estimated 30,000 people abducted, detained, tortured, and assassinated by paramilitary personnel.

Strejilevich poetically renders her personal tragedy against an intricate backdrop of analogous cases, providing a complex narrative space that gives voice to fellow survivors. These anonymous testimonials credibly illustrate Argentina's violently unstable social and political climate of the *1970s* and *80s*, while successfully contextualizing the author's personal ordeal within the country's national history.

At the same time, Strejilevich incorporates myriad citations and references- both oral and written, popular and scholarly- throughout the novel. In reviewing the original Spanish text, Ileana Rodríguez notes that the many linguistic registers present in *Una sola muerte numerosa* "cuentan la historia [no solamente] en los testimonios, pero también en los periódicos, en los decires, en las partes, en los juicios, en los documentos de migración, en *Nunca mas, Dossier Secreto, Rebeldía y esperanza*" (*Letras Femeninas*, V 01 XXVI, 204). It is precisely such intricately linked and often culturally specific material that makes the translation of this work such a complex task. One of the many challenges facing the translator was, in effect, how to preserve cultural nuances while at the same time making the text accessible and

comprehensible to an international audience.

In "The Translator as Tamer: The Case of Nora Strejilevich's *Una sola muerte numerosa* (*Translation Review*, Number 60,2000), Cristina de la Torre self-consciously examines the translation process- reflecting upon her personal relationship with the author and listing specific complications that arose as together they sought to "tame" the text. This rare insight into the collaborative project between translator and author offers a valuable point of departure from which to consider the final version. As de la Torre indicates, "the strategy was to bring the readers to Argentina as much as possible, rather than the text to the United States" (*Translation Review*, 41). Thus we learn that a primary concern was providing an explanation to an English-speaking target audience for the rich cultural nuances readily accessible to an Argentine readership.

Cristina de la Torre avoids disrupting the novel's narrative flow with cumbersome footnotes. For this reason, the addition of a foreword, penned by David William Foster, characterizes the historic period of the "dirty war" and resists the temptation to contextualize the work within the artistic milieu of cultural responses to the dictatorship. Likewise, a short glossary provides a brief explanation for essential lexicon -from broad, universally recognized terms (including the dirty war, El Proceso or the Process, and the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo) to more specific, localized references regarding particular militant leftist groups (Montoneros), specific torture centers (Club Atlético, ESMA), and individual Jewish organizations (AMIA and DAIA). An attentive reader further notes the more subtle results of careful editing - together the author and translator have incorporated corrections and amplifications to the original text (for example, the insertion of a more complete transcription of the author's CONADEP testimony which remained highly condensed in the Spanish) as well as more conscientious bibliographic documentation for the numerous citations.

An even more daunting task for the translator of *Una sola muerte*

*numerosa* was how to capture the rhythm and spirit of lyrical fragments derived from nursery rhymes, popular songs, and tangos. From the opening paragraph the novel presents the difficulty of locating a satisfactory English equivalent for "pisa pisuela color de ciruela." As de la Torre relates, following intense deliberation "Mary had a little Lamb" was rejected in favor of the more violent "Step on a crack/break your mother's back" (*Translation Review*, 41). In contrast, other rhymes received direct translation rather than substitution: "Corto mano/corto fierro/cuando te mueras/ te vas al infierno" was rendered as "Bring the knife/ring the bell/when you die/you'll go to hell." The translation of music is treated in similar fashion. Lyrics from Pink Aoyd's album *The Wall* replace the words to a popular Argentine song from the same decade. Although slightly anachronistic (for *The Wall* was released in 1979, a date subsequent to Nora's detainment), "Goodbye Cruel World" effectively captures the original tone and meaning of "Adiós mundo cruel." In contrast, the colloquial language of a classic tango, "Cambalache," was rendered through a literal translation rather than seeking an English equivalent.

One lamentable but unavoidable loss incurred with the translation is the (often humorous) juxtaposition and linguistic play between languages employed throughout *Una sola muerte numerosa*. The original text remains punctuated by episodes that build upon the contrast between English and Spanish. For example, the faltering and highly-accented Spanish spoken by a foreign journalist adds to her characterization as a naïve outsider who fails to perceive the inherent danger in her undercover investigations. Likewise, the protagonist's bewildering and alienating experience of emigration and exile is made more explicit through a confusing exchange (transcribed in English) with a governmental functionary. While the use of English further alienates the Spanish speaking reader, thus placing her in a position similar to that of the Argentine protagonist, this rhetorical device becomes impossible in the English version.

As with the translation of any text. the informed reader who possesses

adequate awareness of Argentine history and culture as well as sufficient linguistic skills to appreciate Nora Strejilevich's remarkable poetic style will inevitably derive greater satisfaction from reading the original text. Nonetheless, this recent publication offers an inspiring approximation for the non-specialized audience.

Janis Breckenridge

University of Chicago