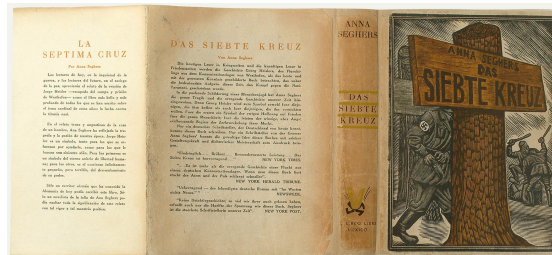


Sensitivities about Retranslating Transit

By Claudia Cabrera

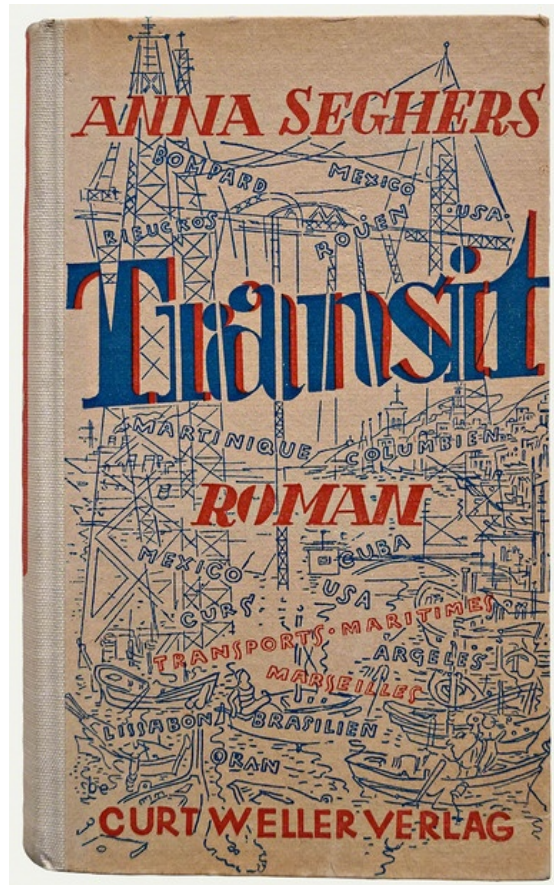
Translated from the German by Sinéad Crowe

I am currently working on new translations of Anna Seghers's works, specifically those that were published or written during her exile in Mexico. *The Seventh Cross* was first published in Mexico in 1942 by El libro libre (The Free Book), a publisher of German exile literature, appearing first in German and then in Spanish translation. Seghers completed *Transit* between 1941 and 1942 in Mexico, and the first Spanish translation of the novel was published here in 1944. Seghers was still in Mexico in 1944 when, after a near-fatal accident, she wrote the novella *The Excursion of the Dead Girls*.



Anna Seghers, *The Seventh Cross*

I battled a few doubts and indeed some *Berührungsängste* as I began work on the project. First of all, the author herself is an awe-inspiring figure. Would I be able to do her justice? Secondly, some of these books have already been translated into Spanish by numerous other translators, one of whom is a colleague I greatly admire. Would my work measure up to theirs? And was a new translation even necessary? Would I have anything to contribute? My answer to the last two questions was a resounding “yes” – for linguistic and political reasons. The books mentioned above have been translated into Castilian Spanish only; no Mexican Spanish editions have been published to date. I firmly believe that every Spanish-speaking translator should be allowed to translate into their own language variety, and not – as publishers often insist – into a supposedly “neutral” variety of Spanish. There’s no such thing as “neutral” Spanish; it’s a market-oriented construct. Given that they have such a direct historical link to Mexico yet are practically unknown here, with copies very hard to track down, Anna Seghers’s books are virtually crying out for Mexican Spanish editions.



Anna Seghers, *Transit*

It was against this context that I proposed the project to a publisher I thought would be a good home for Seghers's works. In response, the publisher raised the question of whether it was morally justifiable for me to translate these books. I was told that *Transit* had first been translated in 1944 by Angela Selke and Antonio Sánchez Barbudo, a married couple who had fled Spain for Mexico. *The Seventh Cross* was translated into Spanish that same year by another Spanish refugee, Wenceslao Roces. According to the publisher, any new translation would lack the lived, shared experience inherent in these versions. While this is undeniably true, it shouldn't render new translations completely off limits. I believe it's legitimate to present these works to today's Mexican readership in my own language – and in so doing, to integrate them into the Mexican literary canon, where they belong. Fortunately, I was able to find another publisher, one that was open to my proposal. This publisher may have other sensitivities, but thankfully, a fear of new translations isn't among them.



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Claudia Cabrera is a translator who lives in Mexico City. As well as Anna Seghers, she has translated German authors including Robert Musil, Heiner Müller and Monika Maron into Spanish. She has led the ViceVersa German-Spanish translation workshop on several occasions.

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Veröffentlichungsdatum: 18.12.2020

Stand: 24.04.2024

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