

## The Oxen of Joyce

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### *Abstract*

Based on the belief that in many (most) important senses the translation of a literary text is “the *same thing*” as the original text it seeks to (re)produce, this paper analyzes some problems involved in a particular effort to translate James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (an effort which culminated in the third Brazilian translation of the book), with special attention being given to *The Oxen of the Sun*, considered from the very beginnings of Ulyssean criticism to be particularly demanding on readers and, consequently, on translators.

Although Mr. Eco has recently published a very interesting book in which he claims (rather convincingly) that the main idea behind any project of literary translation will always be the production of *almost the same thing*, or the same thing with a difference, as musicians would put it, it is my private belief that in many, most important senses all literary translations are indeed—or generate indeed—pretty much *the same thing*. I intend to argue for that in another work, which I have only started. But, for my purposes here it is enough to say that one of the central reasons that may lead me to believe that is the simple fact that any reader of, say, Russian literature in translation (just to think of a literature that has far more readers than its language has speakers), when asked if he has read, for instance, *War and Peace*, will never answer by saying *no, I’ve only read the translation; but that’s good enough, isn’t it ...*

Though some such answers may indeed be possible when we deal with poetic translations (proving that in this case there may be no reason for contesting Mr. Eco), I still think it could only be found among prose readers of a very special kind, unkind specialized readers, most probably translators themselves, or academic critics.

For most readers, the status of the translation as *the same thing*, for *all* purposes and objectives, will not be questioned when we are dealing with, say, novels. And that truth should

not be downplayed. For it does matter. For, as Mr. Wittgenstein so forcibly put it, it may come in handy, instead of trying to probe into the unknown with ever stronger lenses and tools, at least in this our field it can indeed be thoroughly useful to stop for a while and listen to what people really say: our only way of seeing what people see. And if there is a field, in the human sciences of these days, in desperate need of a tangle-clearing, mess-ending Wittgenstein it must surely be Translation Studies. This firm belief in the fact that the writer of a translation is indeed writing the same novel its author once wrote (and, though I have to limit myself to pointing to the difference here and now, I must stress the distance between this *writing again* and the *re-writing* of some theories), this idea of writing *the same thing* was one of the central, though tacit, tenets of my project of translating *Ulysses*.

When I began working on my translation of *Ulysses*, in 2002, Brazil had produced only one version of the novel, that by Mr. Houaiss, a book by then some forty years old. There was another Portuguese translation, produced by Palma-Ferreira in Portugal. It may be uncalled for to explain here the differences between European and American Portuguese, as well as unnecessary. Suffice it to say that it is basically SOP to have books translated independently in both countries. Suffice it to say that, whenever it may be possible, a Brazilian reader will avoid Portuguese translations, and vice versa. As a matter of fact, almost all readers in my country were absolutely oblivious to the existence of this second, more recent, version of the novel. Therefore, what I had in my hands was the possibility of writing the second Brazilian *Ulysses*. And that, I kid you not, really tickled me. But this possibility quickly vanished when I received the news that another scholar, Professor Bernardina Pinheiro, from Rio de Janeiro, was already ahead of me, with a new *Ulysses* ready to go to printing in a few months. As it did, but to somewhat mixed reviews (as always) and a huge editorial success. In this scenario, I could concentrate on what had been my original goals.

From the very beginning, I was focusing on what would become my PhD dissertation, which was a part of a larger project of, naïvely putting it, understanding better a book universally considered difficult and rewarding. My dissertation was to deal with the representation of discourse, the mixing of voices in *Ulysses* and the subtly refined mechanisms its narrators and its *arranger* employed to give life to a construction of infinite complexity based on the successive overlaying of voices, speech patterns, discourse, *personae* and world-

views. From the beginning I had come to understand that no matter how much I could read of the real *theory of the novel* that criticism had built over and around that book for the past decades, the only thing that could give me an adequate feel of the degree of complexity I was contemplating would be actually writing the book. I needed to experience the difficulties the author had set himself (with the obvious difference that I needed not to be the one conceiving the plans, inventing difficulties and solutions), I needed to try and write that book in what would in a great measure amount to the same thing a small kid could do when trying to understand his favourite mechanical toy: I had to tear it apart and build it again.

With the conspicuous risk of ending with a dead *copy* on my hands.

Limp.

Useless.

Lifeless.

On the other hand, even though this—let's call it *creative*—part of the task I had set myself, could really end in nothing but tears and failure, I knew the process would be academically rewarding. I knew I would have proved myself to be a hideous writer (something I have to tell you I already suspected and something everybody will agree becomes quite inevitable when the rule that you are going to be measured by is James Joyce), but nevertheless I would have become a better-informed scholar. I would have a better grasp of what it was that made me fail, what it was that should be reproduced and could not be recreated, I should have a slightly better understanding of whatever it was that made *Ulysses*'s heart tick. At least on this matter.

Which I had serious reasons to believe to be vital to the book.

I had next to nothing at stake, since I was producing a translation that would become part of an academic thesis, with no short term possibilities of actually getting published.<sup>1</sup> A translation made primarily and specially with private goals and desires.

Probably the best way to do it.

For all I knew, it would boost my academic analyses and give me a different kind of relation with the book. As in *relationship*. Take it to the next level.

The idea of taking the novel apart, verifying the challenges Joyce had set himself and trying to come up with satisfactory answers to those same problems in another language, in

another century, in another world, for all I cared, soon began to show its teeth. And pretty soon, as a matter of fact, it was my particular version of what Stephen Dedalus would think of as *la vieille ogresse aux dents jaunes*. It frightened me. But at the same time it was of course (as all translators who have ever worked with Joyce's books probably know) an exhilarating process, a breathtaking experience of following the steps of a genius.

Without entering into deep discussions about theories of translation (precisely as I did when involved with the work itself), I can safely mention that some ideas began to clash against others since the very beginning. For a while I toyed, for instance, with the idea of producing a version of the novel that could correspond (in the measure of my poor gifts, *nota bene*) to what could have been produced in Portuguese in 1922. Or, as fiction would have it, in 1904. I even prepared myself to apply the spelling of the period and to limit my references and my vocabulary (and to this last decision I eventually stuck in a certain degree). After that I thought (and to be perfectly honest I still do) of producing a version of the novel as it would have been written *in* Brazil, in my time. I have even begun this *Ulisses 2004*, which would be set in my own town, etc.

In the end, especially because it all hinged on an academic work, especially since this translation should be less a servant of whatever *esprit artistique* I could have, or thought I had, than a faithful, *Jeevesy* servant of that decision to *understand* the difficulties involved in the production of such a book, I decided to tone down these *ego* efforts, trying to limit my experiments to what was necessary to reproduce the machinery, not necessarily the effect, in its entirety, of its working. That would leave me alone with the Portuguese language, and of course its literary tradition, to try and find solutions, vernacular solutions, to those Irish-made problems.

That effectively meant going the distance in some cases.

Every reader knows that, from such a point of view, *Ulysses* may be adequately regarded as a series of controlled experiments with the prose form. Joyce knew what he wanted to do, what he had to do, and he set out to find the most fitting means to the accomplishment of that task.

Those two first steps are given for free to the author who *writes again*.

Both the finding of the task, the definition of the goal and the posterior detection (and, more often than not, creation) of the means to solve that conundrum are discoveries made by

Joyce; discoveries that can now be iterated in many a language, in many a social and historical context.

But the final step, the moment in which both authors would have to soil their hands, so to speak, is something rather different in every language and in every socio-historical context. That would be the true definition of that *writing again*, and that would make it perfectly clear that, in this case, as in so many others, *Ulysses* sets a new degree of complexity, both because of the uncommitted way it has of probing very deep, of searching the limits of all expressive forms and because of the simple fact of its multifariousness.

Again, *Ulysses* is many books. And, from this perspective, it defines itself as a series of ever more complex experiments to be reproduced by the translator. But the interesting point is that this reproduction will never be a mechanical process fully determined by the two preceding steps. It is not as if one could count on them to define constantly all one has to effectively do as a translator. When Joyce established his goals and conceived a way of reaching them, he was setting himself problems that he had to solve based on his knowledge of the English language, its history and its literary tradition. But those same problems, when we have to solve them for another language, in another language, with another language, will present different faces, different sides. What could have been an easy task in English may become a huge, unsurmountable hurdle to the Polish, Romanian, Urdu translator. And that will imply not only a difference of detail, but a true qualitative reevaluation of the problems previously defined.

It is as though the translator could really count on Joyce to establish the goal (with the giant *proviso* that he should also count on the fact that he has read properly, that he has properly understood what Joyce meant to do), but as for the matter of the definition of the ways and paths to reach it, he could take Joyce's choice as a guide and companion, a Virgil that would always suffer small corrections and qualifications that would make him able to speak another language. And it is then, only then, that the translator would be left alone with *his* problem, finding a way of making these new, calibrated means of solving *that* particular expressive problem really work in *this* particular language, *this* particular tradition. To this end, a selection of what would be chosen as central to any given moment of the book's technique should be of the utmost importance. If any translation will (and indeed it will) involve some kind of loss (along with some kind of gain), we should be prepared to admit that,

in any given list of parameters, of conditions to determine the success of a given *experiment*, there would be items which travel well, so to speak, as well as those which won't be transported at all, in any recognizable way.

How any particular translator will define her own set of *core* parameters will of course give her final work its ultimate characteristics. And also of course this definition, and her ability to follow through and execute what she has conceived, will to a great measure determine the ultimate success or failure of that work. With, again, the additional circumstance that those *core* parameters, along with pretty much everything else, will change continually (or at least will have to be *corrected*), from episode to episode. So much so, that a true, successful translation of *Ulysses* could even be considered as variable, not necessarily maintaining any consistent large set of parameters from the beginning. As a matter of fact, as the last French edition of the novel has proved, it could be even done by different translators, working in isolation, one on each episode.

Personally, I think such an idea, though possible, risks obliterating another singular characteristic of the novel, perhaps one of its main characteristics: the fact that all change, all mutability is, in *Ulysses*, moored to the rhythm of that day, to that peculiar *going forth by day* that gives the book its pace, its movement, its cohesion as a structure.

All choices should obey the technical moment (as well as the technical *momentum*) in which it was created. Nevertheless, *Ulysses* was never a fragmentary novel and all choices should carry something, should pick up some kind of torch that must be delivered, or else all may fail. Again.

Perhaps those central choices involve things I mentioned in the beginning, though not reducing themselves to them, major stylistic choices of the kind that can even touch on orthography are definitely part of that process. In addition, we find the immensely difficult question, hardly broached on when I mentioned the idea of setting my *Newlysses* in my city, in my own time, when to stop translating?

If all translation is a manifestation of a desire, of a need to possess, to share, a manifestation of even some kind of cupidity, the translator of such a generous work as *Ulysses* is permanently confronted, along with those other questions presented with each new episode, with the Faustic need to take it to the end, to commune with the book, to grab it and make it his own once and for all. And that is most clearly envisaged as gliding through the line that

leads from the *distant* original, the *irreproducible* original (the point at which J. L. Borges' *Pierre Menard*, father of all translators, must have originated) to a point that, to me, used to be identical with that Brazilian *Ulysses*. And it is a continuous line, based on the decision of *when to stop translating*.

If Mr. Steiner has competently argued that what we call translation (and he would have rather called it interlingual translation) is but one of many kinds of translation, this line establishes this fact in a direct and obvious way.

I change English words for Portuguese ones simply because my new reader (who, as a matter of fact, does not exist as such at the moment I am working, but rather, is created by this very process) is not able to understand English. Or at least not able to understand English as well and as fully as he can comprehend Portuguese. But, come to think of it, what do I do with all the musical references? All the moments in which characters start humming to themselves or are reminded of the lyrics to certain songs by what they hear or see around them? And what about the moment (think about the opening of *Lestrygonians*, for instance) in which even the rhythms of such songs may invade the page.

Presumably the ideal reader of *Ulysses* should be able to recognize those songs and even to attach some sentimental value to them. But what about my Brazilian reader, member of a different musical tradition, oblivious to almost all the music present in *Ulysses*?

What about topical, geographical allusions? What do I do to permit the reader to have a minimal sensation of the labyrinth of *The Wandering Rocks*? When the *arranger* carefully mixes the name of an abbey and the name of a street, how can I try to make this even remotely *alive* to my reader, across the ocean, across one century?

And all the Irish history?

And personal names? Could I call Bloom *Flores*? Should I find a way to make clear to the reader that Molly's first name, as well as her maiden name, Tweedy, are full of possible Homeric correspondences?

Of course these problems will be part of any reading of any novel, anywhere. That is, as a matter of fact, the essence of what I dare call the *myth* of Pierre Menard. It's clear that all the allusions in *Ulysses* would be understood solely by Mr. Joyce himself. Or by those hundreds of years of scholarship he predicted. It is even clear that only a small coterie of Irish people would be able to understand *most* of those references.

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Even Joyce needed help. An attentive aunt here, a street guide there.

And those Irish potential readers are obviously long dead.

The way of all fiction.

It ages. It loses touch with *reality*. So much so if that fiction tries to simultaneously substitute and defeat reality in its own field. Any British citizen of today will find much the same difficulties when trying to approach that peculiarly Irish version of a reality long dead to many of us, a reality that has never existed for most of us.

Nevertheless, I believe there is a major difference between the pact of compliance established by the reader of an *original* work and the one *signed* by the reader of a translation. This last reader is ready to read a book in which all those Irish people speak flawless (even with its necessary flaws) Portuguese. That would seem to be a huge concession. Nevertheless, the subsequent steps (music, culture, history, geography) that could be considered as further degrees of coherence are not, apparently, of the same nature. So much of our Western culture has been the fruit of reading of translations (*interlingual* translations) that this pact seems to have attained a different status, of almost unquestionability. To the point that it can be fruitfully employed, for instance, even by the movies, that can make Caesar speak English with no need for further explanations. And that can be carried to degrees of exaggeration hardly imaginable, as when Oliver Stone decided that all Macedonian characters, in his *Alexander*, would speak with a distinct Irish accent, thus separating them from the more purely English Greeks.

Languages, this idea seems to say, are indeed interchangeable.

After all, languages (the common sense and the pub-table reader would agree) are only labels stuck to reality. Change the labels, maintain that reality underneath them and you will have a translation. A *faithful* translation.

On the other hand we all know that from Humboldt to Sapir-Whorf there is a tempting idea that languages, and any language as a singular phenomenon, can be much more than that. That it can be more of a mould that shapes whatever reality I have in front of me. The mess this does with the sweet idea of label swapping has no end and brings us closer and closer to the proposition of solutions that take this possibility all the way to its inert, natural end, solutions that give us a *translation* akin to that mentioned above. A translation that recognizes



languages and worlds as mutually shaping identities and tries its best to transport all it can to the language-world of its reader.

Could this be called a *translation* by the standards of literary translation we have nowadays? I would personally think so. But I wouldn't be able to predict what would effectively be said.<sup>2</sup>

In the middle of this road, every translator of every major work of fiction has had to chose his or her way, from the beginning. And that is why I think small details (as some would evaluate them) about those different choices in different periods and places definitely do amount to important stances and attitudes. If a culture at a given moment chooses to systematically translate or adapt characters' names, for instance, we are closer to one end of that *continuum*. If, on the other hand, a literature, or a particular individual, decides to keep things like the words *street* and *square* next to their respective names (or *rue* and *place*), we should be definitely closer to the other end of that cline.

When I faced *Ulysses* I had made up my mind not to push that envelope to its extreme. The most radical ideas and propositions were already behind me when I first sat down to work. Nevertheless, some of those minor choices still kept buzzing in my ears through successive revisions of the material.

What if I chose to maintain *Mr. Bloom* instead of opting for the Portuguese *Senhor Bloom* (which I ended up doing) precisely and almost solely to enable me to begin Part II of the novel with that capital M so many people consider to be integral to the scheme of the book, together with the S and the P of the first and third parts? Quite a temptation, which would avoid a rather awkward turn of phrase I had to perpetrate in the end to be able to begin with that selfsame letter.

But I would like to focus on slightly larger themes and problems. Especially those that confront not only geography and history as successions of facts, but traditions and literary schools and developments.

Joyce's experiments draw heavily on the traditions of the European novel, and, more than that, on the traditions of pretty much all of the literature written in English. Although Brazil is a kind of surreptitious member of that same tradition, following, usually with some delay, all the fads and fashions of European movements and great authors, that process (which

culminated in the figure of Machado de Assis, a true member of that line of great writers) began only, and then only timidly, in the eighteenth century. And only grew up and formed something resembling a true national literature when the nineteenth century was already on its way.

It is obvious that we can count also on all the literature produced first in Portugal (since the thirteenth century, at least) and recently in the other former colonies. But even so, we are talking about a distinctly smaller pool of writers and of *classics*. And, what is even larger as a problem, they do not match exactly. They do not, by necessity, correspond, on a one-to-one basis, to the relevant members of any other tradition.

One kind of literature (and I am thinking here of the most wide use of the term: the only one that would suit its employment as a source to Joyce) may have had more success in one country while another thrived in a second. And so on and so forth. That can create all kinds of disturbances for the translator of a work so heavily dependent on travesties, re-creations, ironic quotations. From the circumstantial difficulties presented by, say, *Nausicaa*, to the almost unsolvable problems posed by *Oxen of the Sun*.

In the former case, we have a distinct use of parody, or even satire of a *mode* of expression, as concretely obtained in certain fictions and certain organs of the *presse pour des femmes* of the late nineteenth century. And that is precisely the key, precisely the reason why *Nausicaa* should offer more fun than pain to its translator, even though he or she may be acutely conscious of these larger issues we are touching here.

Let's assume, as we have no reason not to, that *The Lamplighter*, by Mrs. Maria Cummins, is the source behind Gerty's style throughout the first half of the chapter. That is where she gets her name from (from the heroine, Gerty Flint) and presumably where she gets her language from. That, from all I will present when dealing with the *Oxen*, should create a problem for the translator, who would have to deal with this *template* in one of the ways we will analyze further, were it not for the simple fact that whatever is being satirized here, whatever it is that Joyce decided to ridicule or pay homage to when giving Gerty such a voice, was much less that particular novel (or any particular novel, for that matter) than a whole tradition of prose writing especially tailored for young women of all ages, especially designed for Gerties around the world and, or, to build the Gerties we can see around the world.

The fact that any reader would not be able to pinpoint this peculiar reference to the work of Mrs. Cummins would not alter the perception or the fruition of the episode in any significant way. The fact that any such reader (be she Irish, British, Fin or so on) could possibly have never heard of that book, or that author, in the moment of her reading of *Ulysses* would not deter her from getting what she could possibly get from the text. As a matter of fact, I, for one, think there can maybe exist some advantage in having a model not so readily identifiable here.

Since the target of the criticism is a *genre*, a *mode* rather than a text, an author, any reader can productively associate Gerty's voice to anything he or she is most familiar with. And, most importantly, to anyone outside the circle of Joyce scholars (and the translator is perhaps the only Joyce scholar who has to remember all the time that this reader does exist), it wouldn't make much of a difference.

Provided that that first half-chapter sent those readers to any particular version of that *fiction for ladies young and old*, it will have done its job. The Brazilian reader will not miss much, or miss anything specific, if (and that indeed is a big *if*) the translator has been able to anchor his vocabulary, his phrasing, his rhythm to any bad, sentimental, colourful version of whatever it is the young Gerties of that particular country should happen to be reading, preferably around that moment in time, of course. That kind of preoccupation did not leave my horizon, not with obvious and huge matters like this and not with somewhat *minor*, specialist details also. I have even tried, and for all I know I have done it, not to use one single word, in the whole book, not registered in dictionaries up to 1904.

For the sake of illustration, and to show how similar constructions and rhythms can be in such literature, here is the opening of my *Nausicaa*.

O entardecer do verão começara a envolver o mundo em seu misterioso abraço. Longe no Oeste o sol se punha e o último reluzir do dia fugaz brilhava ainda encantador sobre e o mar e a areia, sobe o altivo promontório do velho conhecido Howth, vigilante como sempre sobre as águas da baía, sobre as pedras cobertas de ervas pela praia de Sandymount e, com não menos importância, na tranqüila igreja de onde brotava por vezes no silêncio do ar em torno a voz das preces a ela que em sua pura radiância é um farol sobre o coração do homem, fustigado pelas tempestades, Maria, estrela do mar.

But everything changes when we come to the *Oxen of Sun*. This episode has represented a considerable *problem* for generations of readers; its endless succession of styles (though soon *understood*, thanks to the efforts of Joyce himself, among the first generation of critics)

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never ceases to baffle readers, critics and, obviously, translators. This moment of that day (that enchanted June 16<sup>th</sup>) reserves lots of information and even surprises for the patient reader. But, boy, he must be patient. Especially at a first reading and, in most cases, most especially if he is reading a translation.

In that maternity hospital we will see Dedalus sinking low and stealing a joke from his nemesis Mulligan, we will watch Bloom possibly delivering a condom to the lover-to-be of his own beloved daughter, some people even think we will get a glimpse of the identity (and her actual presence) of Bloom's epistolary *mistress*. But all of that is so thoroughly enveloped and, so to speak, hidden by the surface of the text, by the solo performance, the virtuosity James Joyce decided to employ here, that some readers (maybe all of the first-go readers) seem to think he may have gone too far.

Even Joyce, in a letter, recognizes that the *Oxen* is the part of the book which demands the most from its reader, as well demanding the most from the man who decided to build it. That carefully plotted structure, from which all of the technical wizardry seemed so concretely to have sprung (always and only) from the situation narrated, from the difficulties posed by the material and the effects desired, far from being a mere whim of its *creator* (and how this word seems inadequate to an effective analysis of whatever can pass for *style* in *Ulysses*), as some naïve criticism (usually before even tackling the book) affirms, that carefully plotted structure seems to many people to have its weakest point precisely in this episode.

T. S. Eliot, extending the Homeric metaphor of a crime against fertility, thought Joyce's exercise had the main objective of nullifying *style*, that it had the task of denying its importance, its main role in the history of literature, in a book progressively more and more concerned with literature, with the writing of books (though far, oh so far, from the direct childplay of some *post-modern* literature, some literature that may have sprung from O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*).

Again, that poses a problem, as it would be a motive set outside the narrated situation.

As a matter of fact, that is precisely what we can expect of the evening *Ulysses*. Not yet the *Evening Word* of *Finnegans Wake*, but a progressive degree of confusion, of mixing mimesis, of melting the narrated into the narration. *Ithaca*, though perhaps the most effective episode in its way, will have its technique coming, not from a *whim*, but from a project, a desire to create an effect; something that can even determine what should not be told, seen,

heard. Something, in the end, that makes us re-read the book just to confirm that this presence (this *arranger*?) had always been there. He only conquered more and more space as time went by. As the night went on.

In *Penelope*, for instance, it may be over simplistic to think of the surface of the text as representing, first and foremost, orality. To begin with, oral language *is* segmented in periods and clauses. As a matter of fact, as everybody knows and Joyce certainly did, it tends to be cut up in *shorter* units than the ones we find in written texts. If Joyce decided to get rid of punctuation, it had much more to do with his *stripping* Molly and taking off her pins than with any attempt to represent speech. It should be iconic besides being symbolic. It should signify but, also, represent. And that's why in my *Ulysses* Molly has no punctuation and no diacritics. Along with her Irish accent she has had to lose all her graphic accents. She should be naked, no matter how much it would cost, and I don't have to tell you that the cost of losing one's diacritics in Portuguese is pretty high.

Take a peek at her. (She lost eight marks here).

Sim porque ele nunca fez uma coisa dessas de pedir pra ganhar o cafe na cama com dois ovos desde o hotel City Arms quando ele ficava fingindo que ficava de cama com uma voz de doente se fazendo de sua alteza pra se fazer de interessante pra aquela velha coroca da senhora Riordan que ele achava que tinha bem na palma da mao e ela nunca deixou um tostao pra gente tudo pra missas pra ela e a alma dela a maior maodevaca do mundo sempre foi tinha medo ate de gastar 4p pro alcool metilado dela me contando todas as mazelas ela tinha era conversa de velho demais sobre politica e terremotos e o fim do mundo deixa a gente se divertir um pouco antes

But, beside this assumption that something else is at play in the evening *Ulysses*, something peculiarly literary, the *Oxen of the Sun* bothers its translator for one more reason.

At least one more.

For when Joyce decided to iconize fetal development through a succession of different prose styles, representing the development of the English written language and of English literature, he took another measure. In accordance with the same *mythical method*, the same procedure that made him equate the cunning Odysseus and the cunning Bloom, resulting in a revaluation of the importance of both characters, he decided to choose important landmarks of that prose history and write travesties of their style. If he wanted to nullify style, he also wanted (with a vengeance) to nullify *specific* persons, *specific authors*, precisely at the moment he celebrated them.

That is the whole spirit of parody, of travesty.

That double-edgedness, that ambiguity.

And the whole effect of this choice risks being absolutely lost in translation. Different from Gerty, who had a voice based on travesty, but not necessarily with *one* fixed model, and also different from Molly, who had a voice represented according to a convention that sprung from an iconic objective, external to her voice (a mechanism which had, nevertheless, different consequences and different *prices* in every language, as we saw), the narrative voice of the *Oxen* has an aim, has a target, has a mission.

If I could argue that not even the original Irish reader would lose much of the general effect of *Nausicaa* by not recognizing *The Lamplighter* as its main source, no translator would be able to say the same thing about this episode. If the author in the limelight should happen to be Dickens, then, yes, the reader who had some knowledge of Dickens's style (and their name is of course legion) would be in a privileged position. He would *get* the in-joke. And everything would fall into place even though this hypothetical reader may not recognize all the references, all the targets. Since he understood the *process*, he would be in for some treats. Therefore, the idea of the *pastiche* (present in all the book, in one way or another) here is taken to its purest degree. It is not *the sentimental novel*, it is not *sports journalism*, it is not *juridical language*. Here we are dealing with travesties of Mallory, De Quincey, Pepys. And although we might rightly argue that these and other authors are indeed *universal*, they are so in a much different way. Every culture that has ever reached that level we are used to calling civilization will have a juridical system, sports, press, and even sentimental literature. It will probably also have Dickens.

But he would have to be translated.

Those other phenomena could of course be said to have been imported, adapted, but Dickens would remain a stranger in ways, we hope, quite different from those.

I can ridicule *my* juridical language and hit pretty much the same spot Joyce had targeted. But the whole problem of translating *The Oxen* is determining what on earth *my Dickens* is. What the dickens is *my* Mallory?

To rephrase something said right at the beginning, what I should be trying to do is not *write* the same thing Joyce wrote, that would amount to the impossible task of M. Menard, what should be my goal is to *do* the *same thing* Joyce did. Or to try and do it. And that would

surely imply much more than direct, simple *translation* in this peculiarly difficult case. After all, translating the sentences present in the text, with not much else in mind beyond the classical rules and principles of literary translation, could indeed mean *killing* that episode. The translation of a travesty is basically the same thing as the translation of a pun. If you kept things literal and straightforward, you would end up with a Hamlet that said only he felt sunny when his uncle asks why he wears black clothes. You have to make the text work for itself, on its own in your own language. And that should mean re-doing the work, identifying the task and trying your best not to be so much worse than Shakespeare, or Joyce. It is based on this kind of reading that we can assume that this re-doing, this trying to do the same thing is done in the interest of the reader, of course, but also of the original text, of the image this reader will be able to form of the ideas and the techniques behind that original text.

If we know for a certain fact that *Ulysses* forces us to reevaluate all classic postulations of the theory of the novel, it should come as a real surprise if it did not do the same to the theory of translation. And that means, among other things, that the unavoidable paradox of conspicuity will have to come into question. The more the translator tries to erase the marks of his presence on the final text the more it will look like a *translation* (in the weak sense of the term); the more he affirms his choices and his *authorship*, the more it will seem to the reader that she is reading an original text, which she will, most correctly, from this point of view, attribute to the original author.

That leaves the translator with a problem. And we have yet to face the possible solutions. If we want to keep the basic technique alive, if we decide that the experiment should be reproduced and not re-told in our language, there is a set of basic premises we have to follow. Talking scientifically, I thought it was precisely as if Joyce had produced a certain result in his language lab, and had left on it all the clues you needed to deduce the steps involved in the experience. To check its validity, to check its translatability (in a very strong sense of the term), you could not avoid the necessity to reenact the experiment and see what it would yield.

I think the translator facing this task has two honest ways of tackling the job. But beforehand I beg your forgiveness and essay to discuss a third one.<sup>3</sup> A kind of a way *out* that seems to have been employed many times over, with differences in degree and commitment to

its principles.<sup>4</sup> This solution is an extension of the way translators (usually stuck to very tight deadlines, etc.) tend to deal with the larger problem of translating time.

How to deal with a novel written in English but, not only that, also written in the nineteenth century, for instance? As I mentioned about my own ideas when beginning my *Ulysses*, you may feel tempted to produce a nineteenth century version of that novel in your language. But I doubt very much it could be thought of as anything but a personal exercise, a personal statement, at least these days, with our market.

What you do is keep the final text quite close to your reader, but not too much so. You do not want to have Sherlock Holmes uttering the equivalent of “it’s wack” in your language. And then what you end up doing is putting some kind of aging make-up on the surface of your text: some old expletives, some dated expressions, and you keep the rest pretty much neuter. Unmarked. Curiously enough, this is precisely why translations tend to get old so much faster than the original. They tend to belong to a fiction of past. And those fictions, as history has always told us, change with time. The true past of fiction does not get old. It only, nobly, ages.

When deciding to approach *The Oxen of the Sun* in such a vein (if there is any conscious *decision* involved in the process), obviously the translator has closed her eyes to all we have been discussing, has denied the specificity the text so intently demands.

The outcome of such a process would be a kind of a fake text, a *simulacrum* of the passage of time and, most of all, a *simulacrum* of the original.

And it has been done.

But, back to what I would still call the two *authentic* possibilities of working with the episode. The first one would be more *straightaheadish*, though perhaps less effective and certainly less feasible. We know (though it may be always a matter of debate) the list of authors ransacked by Joyce. We even think we know he based himself mainly on two selections (Saintsbury, 1912; Peacock, 1903). A translator, if he decided to go this way, could look for the translations of these authors (and possibly even of the same fragments) in his language to try to copy those mannerisms to which a reader of such authors would be used to in that country/language.

And again, not even discussing the eventual merits of that choice, we come to the problem of the incommensurability of literary traditions. And here it rears its ugly head



signifying total defeat to the Brazilian reader, and, obviously, to the Brazilian translator as well.

For not all of those writers have been translated. Not all of the extant translations have survived for more than a few years on the market. Not all of the translations still published are widely read as *the* version of a book. As a matter of fact, this problem created for the translator by other translations (by their absence or their canonical irrelevance) is something the person working on a new version of *Ulysses* already knows quite well. For when a reader of English sees on the page the phrase “Ay, very like a whale,” though it may not be a classic quotation, she quite promptly recognizes (or should) its Hamletian origins. And Joyce is rather fond of those compact quotations. They seem to act like the sounding of a Wagnerian *leitmotif* that does not rely on semantics to state its origin. Well, as that first sentence holds no great syntactic mystery it will probably be also understood, and understood as reference, by any reader of *Hamlet* who sees it in her native language. But what do we do with another of those somehow cryptic quotations, quite distant from that one in the book.

When the narrator of *Eumaeus* says “how to get there was the rub,” what guarantees the Hamlet overtones is pretty much one single word, present in the ever-present “To be or not to be” soliloquy, aptly avoided and indirectly alluded to by Joyce. That word *rub* with all its rareness and its association with that play and that scene, works as a trigger, firing a series of associations that, in *Eumaeus*, tend to accumulate with others to produce that tedious weariness (or bookishness in the apparent opinion of its *narrator*) that was the main theme and objective of the episode.

But it is hard to believe that any translation, to any language, (I can speak for mine) has ever reached such a degree of stability over the years so as to make this kind of allusion possible. We do not have an unquestionable Portuguese *Hamlet*. And, if we do not have it by now, it is pretty much useless to keep waiting for it. Time is of the essence. Besides that, Joyce himself used some *translatorese* as a target, when he reproduced what looked like a translation of Tacitus right in the opening of the episode or when he pointed his gun at translators who artificially tried to make English more *German* in order to reproduce rhythms and sensations of the oldest forms of English prose. In such a way, that translator would soon be translating the translation of a translation. As a travesty!

And, what is even more serious: such a text would lose any referential possibility. To *any* imaginable reader. And what kind of meaning (subversive, questioning) can the travesty of the unknown have? What can the objective be of this satire of an absent model?

What I considered to be the sole possible, feasible alternative of honesty towards the book I was writing and towards the possible readers it should have, was the choice of a set of *templates*, coming from the history of Portuguese-language literature, that in some measure corresponded to the historical periods, the genre (epistolary writing, travel narrative, chronicles, prose fiction) and the representativity of the authors of all of the Joycean fragments. A list that, although it could not offer a point by point correspondence, at the very least could compensate for it when compared to the original in its entirety. That is what the process of translation is all about, most of the time. A series of controlled and conscious losses that do not annul the fact that there can be some gain when we consider the work as a whole. Doing this, I could consider I was effectively answering Joyce, trying to reproduce his *experiment* in my language, trying to prove (at least to me) it was possible and productive not to try to merely *respond* to the original, but effectively to *answer*, to propose a dialogue.

If he produced, installed in the core of the English tradition, a list of targets, of tones he would modulate his text with, all I could do in my work was to produce such a list from the possibilities of my literature, my language. That would of course mean some correspondences could not be found. For different reasons and motives. The first of which being the problem in the length of the prose histories of both literatures.

Portuguese has been registered (in the form of what is called *galego-português*) since the end of the twelfth/beginning of the thirteenth century. But all these first texts, or at least the literary ones, are poems. As a matter of fact, it was a rich and original tradition that at that moment became a standard for poetic production even in Spain. All the prose texts we have from the beginnings of the language are bureaucratic or personal documents, and although they can be excellent as linguistic documents, they fail our test in what is precisely the most important fact. They are not samples of characteristic *styles*, they do not come from recognizable *stylists*, individual artists creating singularities with the common material of a language.

Poetry would have to do.

That *shrinking* of our prose tradition meant also that, at times, Joyce's choices would be further apart than mine could ever hope to be. My authors, then, would somehow resemble one another more closely at times. But even before that, the mere fact that I was writing in a romance language took its toll on the job I had ahead of me. It is a well established reading of the introduction of the episode to think of it as a metaphor for the process of fecundation. Joyce himself said that in what we could call the contents plan, the entrance of Bloom in the maternity hospital should represent the same thing. After those mystical twice repeated invocations, that basically mix English, Irish and some Latin (not an occasional mixture for an Irish writer), and that stayed on its own in my version (the Irish was kind of o.k., since Portuguese itself had a Celtic background).

Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus.  
 Envia-nos, brilhante, luzente, Horhorn, fertilidade e frútero. Envia-nos, brilhante, luzente, Horhorn, fertilidade e frútero. Envia-nos, brilhante, luzente, Horhorn, fertilidade e frútero.  
 Upsa, meninim, upsa! Upsa, meninim, upsa! Upsa, meninim, upsa.

The text offers a long bit inspired, as mentioned above, by the strange *patavinitas* of Livy or, to be much more precise, by what would amount to a totally inadequate, servile translation of an English Tacitus or Sallust still breathing the air of Latin lexicon and syntax. Such a *morceau*, asking, by its own nature, for a straight, *literal*, almost word for word translation, of course offered no great problems to the translator, though its effect should in some tiny measure be diminished by such a syntax, though not natural to Portuguese, is a little bit less *foreign* than it ever was in English. And the same goes, of course, and in pretty much the same measure, for its vocabulary. Here it is.

Universalmente o daquela pessoa acume é estimado muito pouco percuciente no tocante a quaisquer questões que estejam sendo sustentadas como as que com mais utilidade por mortais de sapiência dotados se pode aprender que se mantém ignorante daquilo que os mais em doutrina eruditos e certamente em razão daquilo que neles alto da mente ornamento de veneração meritório constantemente sustentam quando por geral consenso afirmam que sendo iguais circunstâncias outras por nenhum exterior esplendor é mais eficazmente a prosperidade de uma nação afirmada do que pela mensuração de quão adiante possa ter progredido o tributo de sua solicitude para com aquela prolífera continuidade que dos males origem se ausente quando felizmente presente constitui certo sinal da incorrupta benevolência da onipolente natura. [...]

The text follows with what could be called the *development*, the flexibilization of that Latinate English as it approaches medieval chroniclers. Another easy match.

Nevertheless, after that comes a small bit forged by Saxon vocabulary and demonstrating that terse syntactic quality every reader has come to expect from the Germanic world. Joyce has made a point of not employing long, Latin words in this text to make sure he could generate such a contrast as would be capable of suggesting these two immiscible languages that, a moment later, would be finally united, symbolizing the birth of the English language as we know it.

Well, Portuguese comes from the superposition of Latin on the Celtic language spoken in the peninsula, afterwards filled with Germanic words and, most especially, Arabic influences during the centuries of Arab occupation. I still feel that making this last paragraph abundant in Arab terms could have been the best choice. The point, though, is that most Arabic loanwords are so deeply rooted in Portuguese everyday vocabulary that recognition can be a matter reserved to linguists. On the other hand, we have a set of words, those that have incorporated the universal article of Arabic (al-) as its first syllable, that seem to be recognizable as Arab in origin by most cultivated readers.

Nevertheless, I have not felt so convinced of the feasibility of yielding to the necessary reconfiguration of the text it would demand.

Losses.

Facing the poetry/prose question proved to be less of a problem. Though it did force me to *change* the original text in ways I had not allowed myself in all of the previous work, and would not again for the rest of the writing. Especially (what is most *criminal* in the traditional analysis of translation), I was forced to *add*. For if Joyce could emulate some procedures of the *cynghanedd*, trying to mimic those alliterative processes that gave unity to Anglo-Saxon poetry (and here he was also dealing with poetry, after all), the closest thing I had as a structural device coming from the *trovadores* was rhyme and repetition. Parallelism. A key ingredient of most of the songs of the Portuguese Middle-Ages.

And so I *added*.

True, but in point of fact what I really did was merely to repeat, with slight changes, sometimes. That gave me some of what could be the most charming moments of this translation. And, again, that was not due to me, or my capabilities, but to the resonance of an authentic model, with overtones of lyricism and a certain sweetness that have adhered to the formula of rhymed repetitions in the eyes of anyone who has ever read those ancient texts.

I was basing myself on true *models*, generating travesties that, even though certainly inferior to those of Joyce, nevertheless shared with them their main characteristic. They worked the same way, they had the same mechanics. In short, I think they worked. On their own.

Here it is. If you will excuse my giving you another example.

Gaio o menino na madre. Pois era sobejo amado. Pois era sobejo amado. Na madr'era, pequenino. Tôdalas cousas naquela vegada feitas, feitas foram bem feitas. Um carro seguido por parteiras com boas comidas prazeiras, coeiros louçãos bem limpos como se a prenhez já fosse a cabo e se homem avisado tudo guarnecera: mas tão bem com mezinhas avondo, que necessárias eram, e estormentos de cirurgia convinháveis a seu caso dela sem esquecer de rem dos brincos que trazem solaz, ofertos nos diferentes lugares de nosso globo terreal com imagens, humanas e divinais, que só de nelas pensar as mulheres apartadas são mais asinha emprenhadas, ou que fazem mais quedas as cousas no fermoso e alto e claro lar das madres quando, sabidamente adiantada e já pronta, chega lhe a hora de parir, findo dela o seu termo.

Like Joyce, also, I took the decision not to adapt my orthography to that of the periods I had to deal with. And that, of course, meant some kind of compromise.

I started my professional life teaching Romance philology, I had some grip of medieval spelling, which was enough for me to know that the potential for creativity and even fun only *arises* when you yield to the irregularity and instability of medieval writing patterns. But, in the name of my potential readers I thought I had not only to give up on writing those texts as they were written; another compromise was to employ only those ancient forms of words still registered in contemporary dictionaries.<sup>5</sup> With those criteria in mind, I was able to follow my list of templates, elaborated in close collaboration with my wife, Professor Sandra Stroparo, who teaches Brazilian Literature. A list that enabled me to *copy* the language, the style of the *trovadores* (to a certain degree translators themselves of the Provençal *troubadours*), the chronicler of the Salado Battle, the translator (!) of *Demanda do Santo Graal*, Bernardim Ribeiro, Gil Vicente, Padre Vieira, Mariana Alcoforado to finally see the beginnings of my country's literature, that would lead me to the mature Machado do Assis of *Memorial de Aires*, closer to the end of the passage.

By the very end, though, Joyce reaches a kind of dissolution of literary language (a kind of a moment of *labour*, if one may say so) in which a mix of Creole, black English and any kind of *lingo* he was able to find leads the way. This time it was real fun. For if the English language has diversity, in Portuguese we are dealing with variation also on a continental basis

## THE OXEN OF JOYCE

and with a history of Creolization so old that even the word itself originated in Portuguese, which came to English only through Spanish, and then French. Interspersing the text with words from Kabuverdianu, the Creole-based language of the archipelago of Cape Verde, and drawing heavily on Brazilian regional diversity, I could produce something that faithfully reproduced the essence of Joyce's project (or that was the idea, at the very least), once more keeping my feet firmly planted on Portuguese soil.

This is another sample of the chapter.

Amigo seu esticou as canela? Crendiospai! Coitadim do criolim! Cê não me diga uma coisa dessas, Poldo, meu comparsa! I êis chorô qui jorraro u'as lágrima uns chôru moiádu purquiúamígu Padney foi levádu num sácu prêtu? De todos os decôr, o sahib Pat era o mais bão. Nunca que eu não vi parelho desde que me conheço por gente. Tiens, tiens, mas que é bem triste, lá isso é, palavra, que é. Ora, convenhamos, uma baratinha acelerando a 11 por cento? Esse negócio de eixo livre está com os dias contados. Te aposto dois contra um que o Jenatzy vai raspar o tacho dele. Japas? Fogo de longo alcance, nêmesmo?! Entupidos de extras da guerra. Vai ser pior para ele, diz ele, ou qualquer outro cossaco. Relógios, por favor. Onze já se foram. Sumam daqui. Em frente, gente tonta! Noite! Boa! Que Alá, o Excelente, vossa alma nesta noite conserve tremendamente.

That way, mirroring Joyce's choices with examples from a paradigm that would be familiar to my reader (whoever she may be), I could hope to finally get where I wanted to be, for thus I could have a minimal certainty about what I was trying to do. And that was not to *translate* the *Oxen* in a straightforward, *classical* way. What I *had* to try and do was much more complicated and much more satisfying. I had to see if I could create my own cattle of the sun, following the strict, precise instructions of the original creator.

But mine would have to *low* in their own voice.

And that represents, in my way of seeing not only this project, but the whole enterprise of literary translation, that *doing the same thing*, that obedience to the main goals, the principal objectives of a work of art. My translation of the *Oxen* may still (and will, I hope) be judged as bad, inadequate, insufficient, according to any normal standard that the critics could usually apply to literary translations.

I may be a worse translator than any other.

But I try to find some comfort even in the idea of failing, but always trying to fight the good fight. Trying to re-create what made the original text have its impact, its importance to the original reader and the history of that original literature.

That will always seem to make sense.

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Notes

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<sup>1</sup> It was only five years later that I received a proposition from a publisher. And even then, only when the copyright expires, in 2012. By then, it will be a 10 year old project.

<sup>2</sup> Such an experiment has in fact been tried by a colleague, Mauricio Cardozo, who published at once two *translations* of the same German novella, *Der Schimmelreiter*, by Theodor Storm, one a standard, classical translation and the other a *paraphrasis* of the kind I have been mentioning, set in Northeastern Brazil and narrated through the styles of great regionalist Brazilian writers. Unfortunately this book has not received the attention it so evidently deserves.

<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact one can even argue for the existence of a fourth one, based on what the translators of the latest French version of the novel have done. Not to face it at all. As a *hommage* to the original translators, the team working on the new, collective version, decided to keep the episode from the original, 1929 translation.

<sup>4</sup> I have accumulated a decent collection of translations of *Ulysses*. Far from being total, it, nevertheless, allows me to check things in the languages I at least comprehend. I have to tell you, though, that I did not do any exam of the solutions of other translators prior to my beginning to work on this episode. I do not know if my solution is really unique (I seriously doubt it) and I do not know to what degree has this ideal eventually been followed before me.

<sup>5</sup> And there is even room for some irony here. The best dictionary we have nowadays is the one conceived by Antonio Houaiss. Precisely the man who made the first Brazilian translation of *Ulysses*.