

“THE POSSIBILITY OF CREATING NEW RELATIONS”: LITERARY TRANSLATION AS AN ASSOCIATIVE EXCHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to reflect upon the inter-textual character of humorous discourse as developed in Stephen Leacock’s novel *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), whose translation into Brazilian Portuguese integrates my PhD project. Aware that I am grappling with a comic piece, I try not to focus on the surface of the words, as to ultimately privilege the effect of laughter. In this sense, and even though the structure whereby humour is discursively constructed is, of course, crucial, the material enveloped within such structure should also be put in the spotlight. This is why, for this article, my attention is drawn to the references set forth by the narrator to enhance the impression of incongruity and exaggeration, which is a common mechanism of humorous discourse. More specifically, I guide my discussion on the narrative incongruous and exaggerated artefacts by analysing and recreating its hyper-textual nature.

Keywords: Stephen Leacock. Comic effect. Incongruity.

RESUMO

*O objetivo deste artigo é refletir sobre o caráter intertextual do discurso humorístico como desenvolvido no romance *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912), cuja tradução para o português integra meu projeto de doutorado. Ciente de que estou lidando com uma obra cômica, tento não me prender à superfície das palavras, para, assim, privilegiar o efeito do riso. Neste*

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sentido, e ainda que a estrutura através da qual o humor é construído discursivamente seja, claro, crucial, o conteúdo imbricado dentro dessa estrutura também deve ser enfatizado. É por isso que, neste artigo, minha atenção se volta às referências feitas pelo narrador para potencializar a impressão de incongruência e exagero, mecanismo comum do discurso humorístico. Mais especificamente, guio minha discussão sobre os aspectos exagerados e incongruentes da narrativa analisando e recriando sua natureza hipertextual.

Palavras-chave: Stephen Leacock. Efeito cômico. Incongruidade.

A minha imagem é o que desejo multiplicar, mas não por narcisismo ou por megalomania, como se poderia facilmente pensar. Ao contrário: é para esconder, em meio a tantas imagens ilusórias de mim mesmo, o verdadeiro eu que as faz mover-se. Por isso, se não tivesse receio de ser mal interpretado, não me oporia a reconstruir em minha casa um cômodo inteiramente forrado de espelhos, conforme o projeto de Kircher, onde eu me veria caminhar no teto, de cabeça para baixo, e levantando voo das profundezas do assoalho (CALVINO, 1990, p. 167).

INTRODUCTION: "KNOWLEDGE, MEMORY, AND IMAGINATION"

The main project carried out by this article is to articulate a reflection upon the hyper-textual character of humorous discourse as developed in Stephen Leacock's novel *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912). Cognisant of the fact that I am grappling with a humorous piece, I tried not to focus on the surface of the words – as to ultimately privilege the comic effect. In this sense what matters both for my analysis and translation is not necessarily what Leacock "meant" when the narrative is by him conceived – but the potential of such narrative. Mastering the author's intention is not a feasible task, neither is trying to reproduce such intentions in the translated version of his/her work. It is worth mentioning that my statements and expectations on translation, both in this article and my thesis, do not really refer to Translation Studies *stricto sensu*, but rather to the task of the translator as subjectively and abstractedly developed by the notion of creative infidelity (a hyperbolic articulation on translation as recreation). The translation is not the revenant ghost of the original; it is an original work, creatively unfaithful, whose essence depends only on itself. Leacock's (1912) voice is still there, mixed with my own and with the voices of my readers, this not to mention the other works which I have read and that are part of each readers' background context – translation, in this sense, is for itself a hypertextual activity. My reproduction of the author's voice, however, is but a reproduction of the way such voice sounds to my reading; and no reading can be deemed in parallel to further interpretations that would, on their turn, depend on the gaze of another interlocutor. This is also to say that it is my reading of Leacock's novel, and not the novel itself, that is available in both my analysis and translation of it, as I hope to clarify in the following paragraphs.

Therefore, and rather aware that there are no definitive texts, I see translation as one specific reading of a text that shall never be reached again. Texts as we read them only exist within our heads – no one reads them in the same fashion (not even ourselves, when we reread things we had previously read). Translation comparisons would thus be consequently hopeless inasmuch as both images compared, the original and the translation, are nothing but inventions, they only exist in our mental conception of them (an objective only becomes meaningful as I experience it). Discussing “how a text should be translated” is, to me, equivalent to discussing which god is the real one and which is not (the former and the latter interrogations are never answered through reason, they are much more likely to depend on the contexts). The inter-textual character that I consider inherent to my object of analysis and translation is per se a token of hybridity, and a sign that dichotomous and antagonistic thinking take us nowhere at all. If it is true that, even though many artists might produce ground-breaking discourses which are capable of making a great difference here and there, what really matters in epistemological terms is the fact that, before such discourses were conceived there had been many others, not less important. Every work would thus be in process, so translating does not need to be seen as analogous to picking up a finished text, nor would it have to do with finishing such text in another context; the work is in progress, and all the translator is being asked to do is to keep it flowing – to give it continuity, not an end.

In this sense, and even though the structure whereby humour is discursively constructed is, of course, of paramount importance, the material enveloped within such structure should also be put in the spotlight. This is why, for this article, my attention is drawn to the references set forth by the narrator as for him/her to boost the impression of incongruity and exaggeration, which is a common feature of humorous discourse. More specifically, I shall guide my discussion on the narrative incongruous and exaggerated artefacts by analysing and recreating its hyper-textual character – i.e. the fact that the literary space and time of the novel and its characters can only be constructed by turning readers’ gaze to other times and spaces, transgressing its own boundaries. To that end, I rely on Jorge Luis Borges’ theory of creative infidelity, a concept that has served me well for granting me with autonomy to elaborate on translation as I believe it to be: an autonomous and inventive mechanism, amenable not only to identify and reclaim such hyper-textual references, but also to create brand-new ones. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that Borges is not acknowledged as a translation theorist, as he has never formally described a methodology to translate, even though many of his narratives do, in my view, indeed dialogue with the tradition of translation studies. It is, apropos, precisely by reading Borges’ literary productions that one might find out how such productions contribute to the field of translation studies and theory – but, unfortunately, this could not be done hereinafter for space and time constraints. Like Borges, I am also aware that the translator’s understanding of a text involves not only finding out what words mean, but also trying to grasp the other implications they might have, depending on the conditions of their verbal manifestation – which is also true for any other reader. But, before delving in my analytical hypotheses, I must firstly present the corpus I am working with.

Stephen Butler Leacock (1869-1944) was an English born Canadian teacher, political scientist, writer, and humourist. His academic legacy includes an array of scientific treatises dealing with economic and social matters of Canada, but one could say it was his literary production that has made his name worldwide. As a matter of fact, for ten years, from 1915 to 1925, Leacock was considered the best-known English-speaking humourist in the world (with his works drawing the attention of names such as that of Fitzgerald and Charlie Chaplin). It was in 1912 that he’s written his most acclaimed work, a collection of short narratives bringing together scenes and characters developed in this little town called Mariposa, a micro-cosmos of his contemporary Canada. Both

scenes and characters are stereotypical and tokens of anti-climax; it is a story about subjects who try to fight inertia and/or to move forward, but are eventually restrained and compelled to stay where they are. In the final pages of the book readers realise that "moving forward" (in time and space) does not necessarily mean a good thing, as it is the very simplicity and generosity common to rural life shall be ultimately longed for. We, readers, get to know Mariposa at the beginning, when the narrator presents its main figures and how they have established their enterprises in the town, and, by the end, it is impossible not to miss it, as we see ourselves sitting alongside the narrator in a train which is going back in time and back in space, to Mariposa. Generally nonlinear and autonomous, such small narratives are often referred to as short stories, and/or simply sketches – but getting together in a unified whole by the end, it is also possible to consider it a novel, which has been herein my choice.

In the novel's preface, Leacock (1912) presents himself almost as a character and, veiled by his seemingly transparent discourse, the tone of the narrative is introduced to readers. Thereby, "as an imaginative work of fiction, *Sunshine sketches* enacts that which so concerns its 'narrators': a 'correct' perception of 'Mariposa' which is to be achieved by means of sight, knowledge, memory, and imagination" (LYNCH, 1984, p. 10). There is, in this sense, no way to instil our reading within the time and space constraints of this fictional town called Mariposa if not through a nostalgic gaze – by moving backwards towards a lost context, ontologically unavailable even for the characters it describes. As a humorous piece, the fact that this incongruity emerging from the novel configuration itself is critical in humour production and appreciation is also a clue for readers. After all it is because sometimes the narrative moves towards directions that would once have seem impossible that we might understand how symbolic our response to such incongruity is for the novel's objectives to be achieved successfully. First of all, however, we should pay critical attention to why we believe a certain manner for presenting events or for putting them into words seems uncertain or incongruous to those who are getting in touch with such narrative. After all, it is indeed because incongruity proves to be this lawless element, also marking the emergence and maintenance of humour, that one can infer no humour needs exactly to fit perfectly in the period and region where it has been thought to exert certain functions.

Cognisant of such particular functions, one could say that incongruity operates in many events by doing precisely what Leacock's (1912) narrator is so often worried about: linking the context s/he describes with other events or figures preceding them. This cyclical linking of Mariposan particular situations with general aspects of a more global culture might be interpreted as an attempt of the narrator to expose how the local colour of the scenes s/he is able to draw in Mariposa can also be pondered upon from a broader perspective – a hypertextual perspective. That is, s/he advocates for the lack of boundaries dividing such imaginary realms from one another, as if what happens in Mariposa were inherently comparable to what happens in global and more credited historical and cultural traditions. I have decided thus to focus on such attribute of the novel precisely because, even though these allegories might seem preposterous for the reader, for the narrator they make total sense, and for the translator they are essential as a narrative strategy. It is worth mentioning, however, that although I advocate in my analysis for the usage of footnotes as a rich arena responsible for allowing contexts to interact, informing one another, my purpose is by no means to describe my strategy as an ideal one. The intellectual operations conceived and carried out by translators are not here discussed in terms of domestication and foreignisation – I shall direct none of my reflections towards such utopian translation ambivalence. These operations go beyond the frontiers that – we think – restrain the meanings and effects of words. As I see it, to think of effects is not analogous to domesticate or foreignise: it is analogous to translate.

The past is not dead, but actually permeating the atmosphere of every scenery that had been in the background of our paths. What the author says does not depend on his intention nor in the words he writes, but on how readers – and every reader is different – respond to such words; eliminating meanings, therefore, results in eliminating readers' possibility of reading a literary piece with the idiosyncratic interpretations it usually entails. A book does not exist if it is closed; and, after opening *Sunshine sketches of a little town* (LEACOCK, 1912) to provide it with my translation, I shall never close it any longer. That is exactly how a translator can be characterised: as someone who has opened a book, but who has, later, forgotten how to close it. Leacock's novel provides several possibilities for such multiplicity of idiosyncratic interpretations to be effectively achieved; and it does that through the narrator's confusing flashbacks and prolepses. To my literary translation project, guided by creative infidelity, the interference of the translator is indeed a significant part, but, as a matter of fact, no one is immune to the vicarious experience of literature: we just really learn how to read fiction when we allow such fiction to transform our reality.

BOOKS WITHIN THE BOOK: BOOSTING THE NARRATIVE'S INTER-TEXTUAL LIBRARY

Unconsciously and automatically, our minds have been programming us to follow a certain sort of factual logic, so that there are invisible rules which are somehow followed by everyone around us. Logical thinking allows us to build an argument, and make some plausible inferences; and it is in this sense that Leacock's narrator line of reasoning might often be contrary to readers' expectation, as s/he emphasises the achievement of a town that has seemingly achieved so little and undervalues metropolitan achievements. As such, it makes us laugh through incongruity. "Humour occurs when a rule has not been followed, when an expectation is set-up and not confirmed, when the incongruity is resolved in an alternative way" (VANDAELE, 2008, p. 148) – our expectations are all far from being confirmed in the novel, and that is precisely where all fun is. This alternative way whereby humour goes through almost always deviate from any possible hypothesis the reader could think of, since every overemphasis on Mariposan greatness seems rather implausible and is liable to be understood as an evidence that there is some rule somewhere which is not being followed. Setting rules aside is, therefore, a vital first step, both for literary translation and even more importantly to literary interpretation. If the translator does not permit him/herself to go through this process of displacement and replacement, inherent to the literary experience, that shall be detrimental for the readers of his/her translation, because it totally hampers understanding – let alone the comic effect, so pivotal in the narrative. My hypothesis it that the narrator talks about Mariposa overtly privileging the town's environment to the detriment of more cosmopolitan regions and peoples – even when that makes no sense whatsoever. Doing so, the narrator fights the battle by harming his/her own body.

In the end, knowledgeable about how "local" the Mariposan context is, when the narrator says something that problematises such set-up, but not confirmed expectation, the resulting incongruity brings a funny confusion and incredulity, rather than solutions. There are several ways, though, to inflate the character of the town and the events occurring therein. In the novel, it seems that the narrator's superiority feelings regarding Mariposa are associated to what Vandaele names a form of "social play" when posing that "[h]umour [...] produces superiority feelings which may be mitigated if participants agree that the humour is essentially a form of social play rather than outright aggression" (2008, p. 149). There is, indeed, no outright aggression in the narrator's ove-

reemphasis on the local colour of Mariposa; the superiority feelings that s/he shares with the readers are, mostly, permeated by the inferiority feelings s/he cannot escape from exposing when his/her admiration for more metropolitan settings or for people coming therefrom is disclosed during the development of the novel. His/her attempt at resisting, at repeating how great and important Mariposa is, can be read not only as an endeavour to convince readers but actually, and perhaps mostly, as an endeavour to convince him/herself of what s/he is saying. In the end the narrator proves s/he is not an ignorant person, in intellectual terms (different from Mr. Smith, who lacks intellectual intelligence while his practical intelligence is the best in the town), for s/he sets forth a mesmerising background knowledge. In a very funny excerpt, s/he does that by alleging to be proud not of the things Mariposans have achieved (when compared with the metropolis and with those things the narrator should idealise as commendable), but of the things they could very well have achieved, even though they have not. This event, that incorporates the narrator's pride not for what Mariposa effectively *is*, but for what it *could have been*, takes place when s/he alleges that most Mariposans were not unimportant because they deserved to be, but because of the caprices of destiny that prevented them from gaining importance, as someone else somewhere else did what they would probably have done if given a chance to.

I believe that at the time when Rupert Drone had taken the medal in Greek over fifty years ago, it was only a twist of fate that had prevented him from becoming a great writer. There was a buried author in him just as there was a buried financier in Jefferson Thorpe. In fact, there were many people in Mariposa like that, and for all I know you may yourself have seen such elsewhere. For instance, I am certain that Billy Rawson, the telegraph operator at Mariposa, could easily have invented radium. In the same way one has only to read the advertisements of Mr. Gingham, the undertaker, to know that there is still in him a poet, who could have written on death far more attractive verses than the *Thanatopsis* of Cullen Bryant, and under a title less likely to offend the public and drive away custom. He has told me this himself (LEACOCK, 1912, p. 82-83).²

The exaggeration is evident herein: the narrator is emphasising and praising his/her fellow townspeople for everything that they could have been but are not. Real inventors and real poets are not the ones that the reader, who the narrator often addresses contemptibly, got used to see in New York (where Bryant has died, by the way) or elsewhere: "Of course if you come to the place fresh from New York, you are deceived. Your standard of vision is all astray" (LEACOCK, 1912, p. 6).³ In this sense, the narrator promises a sort of climax when s/he poses that many people in Mariposa are "like that" – i.e. with buried successful and ingenious minds unknown to the world solely for a "twist of fate". Nevertheless, as s/he tries to justify such twist of fate, readers realise that there is no concrete evidence for us to indeed believe in his allegations; his/her logic is incongruous, and the admiration towards the characters s/he mentions considerably exaggerated.

² Acredito que na época em que Rupert Drone recebeu aquela medalha devido ao seu domínio da língua grega, há mais de cinquenta anos, foi apenas por uma reviravolta do destino que ele deixou de se tornar um grande escritor. Havia um grande escritor enclausurado nele assim como havia um grande economista enclausurado em Jefferson Thorpe. Parando para pensar nisso, na verdade havia muitas pessoas assim em Mariposa, e pelo que sei, você mesmo poderia ter notado. Estou seguro de que, por exemplo, Billy Rawson, o operador do telégrafo de Mariposa, poderia facilmente ter inventado o rádio. Da mesma forma, qualquer um que ler os anúncios de Mr. Gingham, o empresário, conseguiria ver como há ainda um poeta dentro dele, um poeta que, mesmo morto, poderia ter escrito versos muito mais ricos do que a *Thanatopsis* de Cullen Bryant, e com títulos bem menos propensos a ofender o público e a incomodar os costumes. Foi ele próprio quem me disse isso. (My translation)

³ Claro que se você chega aqui direto de Nova Iorque é possível que se engane. Sua perspectivas estarão equivocadas. (My translation)

Besides the references to Rupert Drone (whose fate prevented him from becoming a great writer), Jefferson Thorpe (where there is a buried financier), and Billy Rawson (who could have invented radium), it is the last one that most draws my attention. William Cullen Bryant, who was born in 1794 and died in 1878, was a U.S.A. journalist with a high sense of duty and a poet who reflected persistently in his writings upon a panoply of social injustices. Among them are: slavery, corruption, lack of democracy, the rights of the immigrants, and the iniquitous labours of the common urban and rural workmen. Bryant also speaks in his work in support of several social revolutions – being one of the greatest supporters of art, especially music and literature, of his time. His sophisticated and tender verses, accompanied by loneliness and contemplation, are some of the first U.S.A. poetic instances that are devoid of references to the Pope. Bryant's historical importance in America as a whole is unquestionable; he is said to be the leading voice among the first American poets, notwithstanding the fact that he refused many of the awards he was offered due to what he called his aversion to public life – even though he himself admitted to enjoy watching the esteem of his fellow-countrymen. If his importance to America is incontestable, he was even more significant for the USA; and the city where he lived and worked, New York, is the place where most of his legacy can be found. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Central Park of New York (the place where he fell down during a ceremony in homage for Giuseppe Mazzini, accident that prompted his death) are only two of the many institutions that were founded due to Bryant's efforts for that to happen.

According to the narrator, Mr. Gingham could have written better verses than Bryant's poem "Thanatopsis" – which makes total sense for English-speaking readers from the early XX century. But, given the fact this title and author might mean nothing whatsoever for the common contemporary Brazilian reader, I believe another translator's note would contribute to Leacock's hypertextuality herein. The poem mentioned by the narrator, was first published in 1817 and was, most likely, indeed written by William Cullen Bryant – I say "most likely" because, in that period, many people doubted he was indeed the one who had written it given that its literary quality did not match his other works. Thus, and notwithstanding the lack of sufficient acknowledgment for "Thanatopsis", the author's whole career as a poet can be said to have emerged and to ultimately surround this poem, considered his best piece and one of the best ones in all U.S. poetic history, especially after it was republished in the book *Thanatopsis and Other Poems* (1821). This would become, according to many literary critics, the first major book on U.S. poetry. In terms of theme the poem addresses humans' interaction with nature through the contemplation and experience of being out in the woods as having a direct influence to soothing the physical and psychological soreness of the subject. Its focus is, more specifically, on the issue of death; the verses are directed to the demonstration of how nature can help us think of such moment less painfully and more thoughtfully. The poem's tone is theretofore actually much closer to Native American animist religions than Christianity, inasmuch as it replaces the fear of the death with the idea that we do not vanish thereby from physical life, but get blended with the life that surrounds us. Hence the emphasis on humans' connection with the environment, foreshadowing an ecocritical thinking and distant from the egocentric and Anthropocentric Christian notion that humans are somewhere above nature and other animals. "Thanatos" in Greek means death whereas "opsis" means "view" – i.e. "Thanatopsis" suggests a reflection upon death, an observation over it.

Ecocritical criticism provides us with a deeper discussion on the issue of the interconnection established between human and environment. "Through literature, ecocriticism can go beyond connecting readers with nature and analyse what constitutes those connections [...]; since its formal inception in the 1990s, the field of ecocriticism has experienced dramatic growth and dramatic

changes" (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 19); and this graduate growth of Ecocriticism, followed by its conceptual evolution, is essential for contemporary beliefs that disregard the connection human/nature to be evaded, possibly, retransformed. The effectiveness of literature surfaces though when it provides us with bridges to see how the world is interconnected, helping us fight anthropocentrism. One can write about nature as if from the outside, ignoring human connections with it—overemphasising the “uniqueness” of the landscape (as a romanticised space), what might be even worse. Notwithstanding the fact that other species work for their own survival to be guaranteed, humans must, from now on, look for answers “not only to ourselves and to each other but also to all those other ‘others’ that comprise what we usually refer to as ‘external’ nature – ‘external,’ that is, to us” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 213). Here the researcher problematises the idea of an internal and external nature (human nature and nature in general), suggesting that boundaries separating those realms are much more social than indeed natural. This, in his view, is a tendency of Western tradition: to direct our attention to the inner meanings of isolated things – as if in locked boxes – such as humans and the environment (such tradition has sagely convinced us that the more we narrow down our focus the better we can see). The meanings of both nature and human nonetheless cannot be understood without taking into account the interactive relationship that exists between such things. “[E]ach feature of a landscape must be understood with reference to the whole, just as the habits of each creature reflect, and depend upon, the community of life around it” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 581). Nature does not exist and/or live in isolation; it lives through death, and interaction.

In this sense, when the narrator says that Mr. Gingham could have written *on death* far more attractive verses than the ones written by Bryant, that is precisely the context with which s/he seems to be playing; which reinforces how crucial hypertextuality proves to be here. Bearing in mind that “Thanatopsis” is a contemplation of death, a poem that enhances the value of dying, such argument could logically be taken as indeed rather plausible as it reinforces the narrator’s point of view, besides manifesting his/her laudable cultural expertise. Moreover, one could read the narrator’s last statement that Mr. Gingham would write a better poem and under a less offensive title as an evidence that what I mentioned as the not very Christian approach to death by Bryant was something regarded as dangerous by the common and provincial citizens of Mariposa. As the narrator says, such poem offended the public (maybe for its clear resemblance to the word “autopsy”, due to their roots) and drove away custom, the custom perhaps of fearing death and of not talking about it (let alone write a poem about it). Readers might never be able to access if Leacock’s opinion is the same of his narrator, in some cases of authorial intrusion I do have the impression they agree, although in others I imagine they do not, but I shall never know that for sure, and honestly I do not think it matters. As an intellectual and admirer of poetry, however, and given his knowledge about the author and theme of the poem, Leacock most likely admired Bryant’s piece and is here being ironic to expose the hypocrisy of this judgmental positioning regarding death. The narrator’s perspective, then, would be the reverse mirror of his own, and that is when irony comes.

As a matter of fact, “irony emerges as the very essence of opposition, and since oppositions [...] can be found everywhere, irony is everywhere” (ROURKE, 1959, p. 6). Linguistically, we know that a sign has no meaning if though in isolation; only when understood in relation with other signs that signs might mean something else. As such, there is no statement deprived of an ironic potential since every positive requires a negative. Meanings are all connected to one another, and irony incorporates the fact that, sometimes, sentences might mean the contrary of what they seem to mean at a first moment. In this sense Leacock seems to be here exposing how preposterous the

narrator's comparisons really are, especially when s/he says another subject could have written the very same poem that another person had written even though both author and readers are aware this is not true, let alone possible. As a matter of fact, one could read the narrator's exaggerated tone as an ironic demonstration of how unnecessary it is to judge people based on universal patterns, as if everyone needed to fit the categories that have already proven this or that person deserve attention and status. If such line of reasoning were taken seriously, no one would write any other pieces in English after Shakespeare, for instance. Coherent with my reflection upon ecocriticism, translation is also a space for acknowledgment of the interactive and never-ending status of epistemological life. Texts survive because they are reborn: and translators difficulties are turned into their greatest assets: "the language restraints imposed by the receiving culture are enormous, yet the possibility of creating new relations in the present are also vivid" (GENTZLER, 2001, p. 200).

FINAL REMARKS: THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF TRANSLATION

The brief reflection just presented focuses on a specific literary evidence from *Sunshine sketches of a little town* (LEACOCK, 1912) that manifests its hypertextual character. Thereby, it lays the groundwork for my reflection upon commented translation as a space and time transgression, a possibility of creating new relations. The integral translation, unprecedented in Brazil, is still in process and still unpublished (reason why I have refrained from including it in the bibliography), has provided me with the raw material for the development of my PhD thesis. My elaboration upon Leacock's (1912) reference to Bryant's poem is also a token of literary hypertextuality because it symbolises the enhancement of an intercontinental relation – a Canadian novel, mentioning a U.S.A. writer now to Brazilian readers. That is, what impinges upon the reading of a book is the reading of many books that precede it; and what affects my translation of Leacock's *Sunshine sketches of a little town* (1912) is also my previous reading and translating of many other works, just as it is true of the original. When, before theorising upon the task of the translator, one thinks about the fluid status of literature when reflections are directed firstly to the hybrid realm of effects and meanings which art (original or not) unavoidably entails – there is no doubt that his/her views on translation are inevitably broadened. The tradition that places centrality in the original text is not, however, still in vogue by chance; translating is also about power relations, and, when it gets to power, it is very significant to determine which text is less in rank. It is theretofore that I have opted to, in my translation of the sketches, provide Brazilian readers with footnotes including information such as the aforementioned one – and there are as many notes as I deem adequate, notwithstanding the fact that the original work has none whatsoever. The translation tool that I have cunningly selected fortunately endorses my petulance; which is precisely that of Borges' creative infidelity – the liberty he grants us, translators, when offering us immunity for inventing, creating, and transforming.

Rethinking meaning as an abstract, subjective, and liquefied attribute of literary discourse is crucial for utopian views upon its translation to be set aside, which is precisely what the analytical and translation approach of creative infidelity does. I am nonetheless well aware that my reasoning is not per se enough for the equivalence utopia to be abandoned – but perhaps it might enter a body of studies that, sooner or later, shall help us move on towards less damaging ideas. Changing tradition is no longer possible, but the fate of TS is far from being pre-given. That is, the only redemption available to the translator is for him/her to welcome his/her role as a re-creator – as the inventor of a new meaning – and what is the problem with that? For autonomy to be implemented one must understand such implementation as necessary; furthermore, for the translation of humour

implementing autonomy is a pivotal step, inasmuch as jokes can never be simply transferred – they can only be reinvented. Therefore, the idiosyncrasy of the sketches' narrator requires me to provide my translated version of him/her with another idiosyncratic observer – trying not to idealise his/her attributes (which is impossible), but to explore on the characteristics that, among many others, most draw my attention. Laughing at a joke is responding to an issue; and, as humour raises our awareness to what is ridiculous in our existence, laughter might be accompanied by our wish to transform such existence into something different.

After all, the power relation here is not one that requires domination or subjugation; it is one that entails transformation – the transgression of hierarchies for both margin and centre not to be replaced or inverted, but for them to eventually look less dichotomous. If there is no way for us to imprison humour within a definition, given that it is a living thing, for Borges the same would be true in what regards the spirit of translation. There is no better text, there is no context to be privileged – there is a book and my translation of it, whereby, in both, mistakes were made and things were lost. The truth is: no one should care. The meaning “losses” that occur in translation are apropos inherent to any artistic process, and are accompanied by their simultaneous recreation. Be it in footnotes, expansions, explanations, or adaptations, my interferences, when they do occur (quite often), are motivated by my longing to (re)produce humour and to reclaim the effects that the narrative has impinged upon me. Nothing unnatural; one must give up on a previous meaning for interpretation to surface. Literature, thus, transcends the borders of the fictional and unrealistic contexts showing readers that fiction and illusion cannot be separated from reality and truth. Such process ends up giving such readers the chance to look at these realms less passively than they would if not for the existence of literary discursive practices: fiction is not an endeavour to escape from reality – reality is an endeavour to escape from fiction.

Laughing at something may or may not be symptomatic of an alienating gaze being set upon such a thing – even though humour might indeed operate for such end. By the same token, it is also by letting the humorous discourse emerge that one is given an opportunity to dodge alienation through the process of contemplation: a moment to read between the lines, to observe those attributes of meaning that we are often oblivious to. But that is not a privilege of humorous narratives, for many other artistic genres gives us a chance to do just that. In this sense, focusing, in my analysis, on Leacock's (1912) intertextual reference to Bryant provides us with a rather fruitful analogy: that of poetry and humour. Some, however, might assume I am overemphasising the role of humour, and that its language is not liable to be deemed as poetic as that of more sophisticated (i.e. boastful) discursive means. To these people I say: shame on you. The quality of art can only be measured within its conceptual borders; nothing makes tragedy better than comedy such as nothing makes poetry better than prose. Translating poetry and translating humour are both impossible, and because they are impossible that these translations happen; impossible translations are necessary – perhaps there is no better description for the task of translating than that of doing what cannot and should not be done. The art of translating is the art of the impossible; consequently, the ultimate role of the translator – like that of the artist – is to ignore the prefix of impossibility.

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