

“Echoes over the lake”: Literary translation and the paratext/ “Ecos sob o lago”: a tradução literária e o paratexto

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ABSTRACT

The problem investigated in this article regards the reconstruction of laughter through literary translation, whose necessary “pre-interpretation” is deemed by many critics detrimental to the very emergence of comic effects. The overall context, therefore lies in humorous discourse, as I set off from the premise that humour is one of the first glimpses of how complex human interactions are. But, besides humour, the locale of this study is also that of literary translation; as my reflection upon the emergence of laughter in Leacock’s novel *Sunshine sketches of a little town* (1912) is also accompanied by my proposal to translate its comic effect. Theretofore, I have included a paratext to the Brazilian version of the narrative, where I elaborate, through footnotes, on the exaggerated intertextual analogies set in motion by Leacock’s (1912) narrator. My hypothesis is that such references are crucial for the exaggerated tone that is loaded in the narrator’s assertions, as they serve to the incongruous approximation between the town described in the story (the fictional Mariposa) to cities, peoples, institutions, and events of global impact.

KEYWORDS: Intertext; Literary references; Exaggeration.

RESUMO

*O problema investigado neste artigo concerne à reconstrução do riso através da tradução literária, cuja necessária “pré-interpretação” é considerado por muitos críticos prejudicial para o surgimento do efeito cômico. O contexto geral, assim, é o do discurso humorístico, já que parto da premissa de que o humor é um dos primeiros sinais da complexidade das interações humanas. Mas, além do humor, este estudo discute a tradução literária; afinal minha reflexão sobre a manifestação do riso no romance *Sunshine sketches of a little town* (LEACOCK, 1912) é acompanhada por minha proposta de traduzir seu efeito cômico. Logo, minha escolha foi por incluir um paratexto para a versão brasileira da narrativa, onde eu elaboro, em notas de rodapé, sobre as analogias hiperbólicas e intertextuais feitas pelo narrador criado por Leacock (1912). Minha hipótese é a de que tais referências são cruciais para o tom exagerado que as alegações do narrador transmitem, já que servem para a aproximação incongruente entre a pequena cidade descrita na estória (a ficcional Mariposa) com metrópoles, povos, instituições e eventos de impacto global.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Intertexto; Referências literárias; Exagero.

Às vezes, a madrugada o surpreendia se altercando com retorcidas soluções para seu romance, que não era exatamente um romance, mais parecia um livro de recortes ou de anotações. Não queria, na verdade, escrever um romance; queria simplesmente encontrar uma zona nebulosa e coerente onde amontoar as lembranças. Queria enfiar a memória numa mochila e carregar essa mochila até que o peso acabasse com suas costas. (Alejandro Zambra, *A vida privada das árvores*, 2013, p. 37)

1 Introduction: “Back in Mariposa”

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Crying and laughing are attitudes that have been accompanying us throughout evolution, before we learn to speak this or that language, before we realise we are autonomous beings and not just an extension of our progenitors' bodies. We learn to laugh as soon as we are born; and I hope not to forget, even on my deathbed (where I shall laugh for the last time). The humorous nature of our existence, if I can say so, is thus precisely the focus of this text; but, besides humour, the context of this study is also that of literary translation, as my reflection upon the emergence of laughter in Leacock's novel *Sunshine sketches of a little town* (1912) is also accompanied by my proposal to translate its comic effect. Therefore, my choice has been that of including a paratext to the Brazilian version of the narrative, where I elaborate, through footnotes, on the exaggerated intertextual analogies set in motion by Leacock's (1912) narrator. There is nonetheless not a single choice for recreating the intertextual relations of a source text, since the intertext is everywhere, and so the way translators decide to grapple with them varies depending on their purposes and/or personal opinions.

As such, and although in this translation project my choice has been to use footnotes so as to guide my readers through references that, according to my interpretation, play a significant role for Leacock's humorous discourse to surface, someone else could have chosen a completely different method (including me). Even the decision to use paratexts can be dismembered in distinct possibilities, as this word gives us, translators, a wide array of opportunities to add information to our versions of texts. It is possible for one to think, *grosso modo*, of two different sorts of paratexts. After all, the word is used in the field of translation studies "to denote threshold or liminal devices and conventions both within (peritexts: e.g. titles, subtitles, prefaces, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, notes, afterwords) and outside (epitexts: e.g. interviews, private letters, reviews) the book" (GENETTE, 2002, p. 88). As I have mentioned, however, even though all these paratexts effectively mediate between book, author, and reader, for this research I shall focus on those that take place within the translated narrative, more precisely my footnotes. As one could expect, any strategy that grants the translator with a space to be objectively occupied by him/her is doomed to be thoroughly questioned as, thereby, the interpretive and manipulative nature of translation is unveiled, and, hopefully, surpassed in many levels. In other words: translation paratexts only make us see what is actually always there: the perspective of this previous reader and interpreter, called translator, who had to inevitably recreate meanings for new readers to get in touch with the original text.

When we are making out meanings such discovery (rather than “recovery”) of “what is being said” can only occur successfully through a process of constant adaptation; and, in the case of translation, such adaptations do not take place without the active influence of a central agent. This is someone whose role is to accept the part played by his/her target context and, by the same token, be willing to exert the power this very same role has given him/her to stimulate the target context to move in a different direction. This is creative infidelity: the conscious awareness that there is no problem in accepting and empowering the manipulative character of translation. Having said that, I get now to the general objective of this study, which is to analyse what is the role played by the references done by the narrator of Leacock’s (1912) novel and reflect upon my attempt at recreating their humorous effects in my translation. My hypothesis is that such references are crucial for the exaggerated tone that is loaded in the narrator’s assertions, as they serve to approximate the town described in the story (the fictional Mariposa) to cities, peoples, institutions, and events of global impact – what needs to be noticed, though, is that, as readers gradually find out, the comparison makes no sense, as Mariposa seems to be much less important than those instances that the narrator tries so hard (but ineffectively) to mitigate. That, perhaps, is the main point of *Sunshine sketches of a little town* (LEACOCK, 1912): to ridicule the endeavour of provincial values that are bombarded with the seemingly indispensable need to enter the globalising world map, the everlasting eagerness to transform one’s town into the picture-perfect city.

By the same token, within the narrative, despite this recurrent drive shared by various characters, including the narrator him/herself, it is only after “losing” Mariposa as it once was – before, for instance, the appearance of train stations – that the two characters of the last sketch get to know that their busy daily lives and their modern ambitions and necessities in the city would never be able to provide them with what they never realised they had in Mariposa: “The real tragedy is that of the old boys who have left and, in their prosperous old age in the city, long for small town life. *Sunshine sketches* in fact ends on this unhappy scene, with their dissatisfied dreams of a better way of life back in Mariposa” (FEE, 1992, p. 39-40). Paradoxically enough, after many people leave Mariposa to the city, never to return, its inhabitants realise the station is not such a big deal – perhaps they should have just stayed there, in the place they now miss. This is so for the intangible but ubiquitous impression that “the city” is where everyone must aspire to be and that the countryside deserves neither respect, pride, nor attention if it is not transformed into a huge emulation of city life. This is thus the view of an observer blinded by a developmentalist linearity as, to some extent, none

of us can say we are not. It is apropos to this emulation of city life that I have chosen to address, in the following analysis, a handful of historical (plus rather farfetched) references provided by the narrator to investigate how they contribute to these reflections on humour and literary translation, as well as to ponder upon the impact of bringing paratexts to reclaim them in my “as original” version of the narrative.

2 Discussion: “Between cause and effect”

Leacock’s (1912) portrayals of Mariposa and Mariposans, which take shape through the eyes of the nameless narrator, are not only humorous when his/her ironic tone emerges, but actually due to many other factors. Hypertextuality is one of them, as the narrator tends to make several external references to the sake of laughter. These references, in such cases, work for his/her overestimation of Mariposa and its inhabitants. Of course such issue is only a confirmation of the narrator’s great admiration and affection regarding the town whereto s/he seems to feel attached from top to bottom, but the references are so exaggerated that, most times, they leave readers with no doubt that the comparison makes no sense at all. It is such exaggerated exaggeration that provokes laughter and that allows humour to be constructed in the readers’ response to the narrator’s descriptions. If s/he simply explained things as they happened we, readers, would have no reason to laugh. Not that the sketches are not already funny enough *per se* – indeed they are –, but if I can try boosting such character of his work in my infidel translation, why would I not? After all, given the abstract condition of literature, no institution shall be able to handle it; similarly, “translation necessarily subverts its own institutionalisation” (GENTZLER, 2001, p. 48). Translation does indeed subvert its own institutionalisation for institutions are not enough for grappling with the complex nature of translating.

Furthermore, as far as literary translation is concerned, notwithstanding the idea of the hypertext, of this endless web of interwoven meanings, institutions require that an open structure be enclosed, oblivious to the fact that this need to define destroys the defined object. This raises a question: if my translation is, at the same time, not a brand-new text as well as an original text, what sort of text is it? Well, it is a text able both to dialogue not only with the source narrative, but also with the many texts that surround it, through the discursive re-creation of the translator, which is as personal and exceptional as the original. There is no essence to be unveiled; the only thing that translation discloses is an innovative perspective on

the inessential, i.e. not the nature of things, but a new gaze upon them. The predictable response of tradutology to the ideas entailed by de-constructivism, post-modernism and, afterwards, post-colonialism was to debunk dualisms, for the binary logic helps us with nothing. This is, apropos, precisely why I believe it is useless to think, for my project, in terms of privileging the source culture to the detriment of the target and vice versa. There is no way for one to come up with separations, definitions, and generalisations regarding each of them. If Borges is right when, through creative infidelity, he privileges translation effect to the detriment of meaning, then, within such context, I should be less worried about the humorous meanings of Leacock's (1912) original text and more preoccupied with its humorous effects as, thereto, intellect and body work together rather intensely.

Even though the original meaning might never be accessed, once "original meanings" shall always consist of a remote subject, effects might be empowered if creative infidelity is summoned during translation. This simply means to keep respecting not the original transcendental condition nor its sublime aura, but its trajectory from such text's surfacing from its source time and space conditioning. The authority granted to the literary experience is, of course, already set in motion by the writer of the original piece. I reiterate: responding negatively to one's context does not mean we are not affected by our context; as a matter of fact, it means the exact opposite. It is not only the text that is unstable, the subject who writes a text also is. S/he does not need to fit perfectly in what readers might perceive as being "his/her personality". If the text has always been constructed and reconstructed, so are those who write and those who read it. After all, if translation is about power relations, so is laughter; sometimes the only way to fight our enemy (or the enemy which breathes within our deep selves) is by making fun of it. This is why it is so vital to analyse subjective effects rather than objective meanings in the process of making out Leacock's plot, for humour is not a clear-cut instance, and it is within its complexity that the core of the narrative resides.

Perhaps, inasmuch as laughter is among those things that really make us humans, my seemingly reckless behaviour in "explaining every joke" is just a symptom of my reading of Leacock's (1912) text. When I read it, I laughed precisely because of the connections hidden in-between the lines, so my translation is nothing but the disclosure of this uninterrupted effect. As Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1597) and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) demonstrate, sometimes it is exactly through humorous means that serious things can best be both said and eternalised, which also seems to be the proposal of Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches* (1912). The comic inversion consisting of allowing social rules

to be dismantled while the strength of one subject is given to another is what characterises the work of a writer who elaborates upon the premise that his “mastered moment, or the prevailing objective, is a way of winning something when you are actually losing” (ROURKE, 1959, p. 49). Leacock (1912) does indeed allow the winners to be turned into losers, and the losers to start winning, and he is successful in his enterprise precisely through an epistemological exaggeration of evident humorous effects.

An event when that sort of exaggeration occurs, to that end, is when the narrator portrays the landscape and the subjects accompanying during the excursion on the Mariposa Belle boat (event already addressed twice in chapter III). Once again his/her technique is to describe what s/he sees through rich images and, especially, through an extensive hypertextual comparison to other places and subjects. The images s/he brings are indeed very beautiful ones, and the reader is probably capable of portraying a nice representation of the setting s/he describes (as well as doubting his overstated observation).

Out on the lake the last thin threads of the mist are clearing away like flecks of cotton wool. The long call of the loon echoes over the lake. The air is cool and fresh. There is in it all the new life of the land of the silent pine and the moving waters. Lake Wissanotti in the morning sunlight! Don't talk to me of the Italian lakes, or the Tyrol or the Swiss Alps. Take them away. Move them somewhere else. I don't want them. Excursion Day, at half past six of a summer morning! With the boat all decked in flags and all the people in Mariposa on the wharf, and the band in peaked caps with big cornets tied to their bodies ready to play at any minute! I say! Don't tell me about the Carnival of Venice and the Delhi Durbar. Don't! I wouldn't look at them. I'd shut my eyes! For light and colour give me every time an excursion out of Mariposa down the lake to the Indian's Island out of sight in the morning mist. Talk of your Papal Zouaves and your Buckingham Palace Guard! I want to see the Mariposa band in uniform and the Mariposa Knights of Pythias with their aprons and their insignia and their picnic baskets and their five-cent cigars! (LEACOCK, 1912, p.41)¹

¹ No lago os últimos e tênues fios de névoa se dissipam como flocos de algodão e o canto longo dos *Loons* ecoa por sobre a água. O ar é puro e fresco e existe em tudo isso a rejuvenescedora vida nova dessa terra de pinheiros silenciosos e águas em brando movimento. Ah, o lago Wissanotti sob o sol da manhã. Não me venha falar sobre os lagos italianos, sobre a Tirol Austríaca nem sobre os *Alpes Suíços*. *Leve-os para outro lugar, eu não os quero*. Dia de Excursão, às seis e meia em uma manhã de verão! A bordo de um barco todo enfeitado com bandeirolas e com todas as pessoas de Mariposa no cais, e a banda com seus chapéus pontudos e suas cornetas amarradas nos seus corpos, prontos para tocar a qualquer minuto? Eu repito! Não venha com suas conversas sobre o *Carnaval em Veneza ou Delhi Durbar*. Não! Eu nunca os visitaria, e, se fosse preciso, fecharia meus olhos para não vê-los. Já vejo toda a luz e cores que preciso toda vez que me junto a essa excursão que parte de Mariposa e desce o lago até chegar na *Indian's Island* quando o barco se perde de vista na névoa da manhã. Grande coisa seus *Papal Zouaves a sua guarda do Palácio de Buckingham!* Guarde-os pra você, eu quero ver a banda de Mariposa com seus uniformes e os *Knights of Pythias* de Mariposa com seus aventais e insígnias e todas suas cestas de piquenique com seus charutos de cinco centavos. (My translation and emphases)

When the narrator refers to the long call of the loon, s/he is already making things rather challenging to me. The “loon” is an aquatic bird resembling a duck that is natural to Canada and to the U.K., known in Portuguese as “*gavia*” or “*mobelha*”, but far from being as common as it is in the source context. After s/he mentions how the call of the loon initiates the journey through Lake Wissanotti, the narrator attempts several farfetched comparisons. The narrator now is not only exaggerating, s/he is actually sounding almost as a fanatic, alleging, for instance, that s/he is unwilling to meet other possible remarkable landmarks such as the Delhi Durbar and the Swiss Alps or having other experiences such as going to the Carnival of Venice. More than that, s/he avers s/he would actually shut his/her eyes to everything supposedly “better” if compared to what s/he is describing. In his/her view, all the light and colour s/he needs to see is present in the excursion out of Mariposa down the lake in the morning mist. The message is: no need to go to other places, Mariposa has everything one needs. Apropos, if s/he had already emphasised its *sui generis* beauty when comparing that scene to well-known landmarks, here we also have nonetheless two references that, different from the Swiss Alps or the Carnival of Venice, might not be so well-known for the contemporary Brazilian reader and should thus be addressed in one more content note.

That is when readers get to the narrator’s comment on how s/he esteems the Knights of Pythias of Mariposa with their aprons and their insignia. The knights consisted of a real but secret U.S.A. fraternal organisation founded in 1864, half a century before Leacock’s (1912) novel was written. This fraternal organisation was idealised by Justus H. Rathbone, the major founder, whose inspiration for such title is likely to have been the legend of Damon and Pythias. The legend emphasises, on its turn, the concepts of amity, respect, and fidelity. Initially limited to the U.S. context, the order has not only survived until contemporaneity but it has actually spread its roots throughout the whole planet. Eight years after its foundation the order would also get to Canada where it was first institutionalised in Ontario. The narrator regards these knights as greater than The Papal Zouaves and the Buckingham Palace Guard, for as farfetched as that may seem. The Papal Zouaves, an initially only Italian organisation, was founded in 1861, three years before the Knights of Pythias, to provide a more effective defence mechanism to every state in the pope’s name (which explains its name). Different from the fraternal and peaceful Knights of Pythias, though, the Papal Zouaves were a military organisation of unmarried Catholic males willing to voluntarily die in the name of God.

Even though the group was limited to Europe, because of the influence of the British crown in Canada many Canadians were once sent to fight for the organisation (135

Canadians, when there were, curiously, only 50 British volunteers) against the Risorgimento, including specially francophone and Catholic men from the province of Quebec. According to the narrator, almost everyone belonged to the order just as they did to everything else in Mariposa. It is precisely given such influence of the U.K. in Canada that Leacock's (1912) references to The Papal Zouaves and the Buckingham Palace Guard are so significant; after all, they regard a particular topic experienced by many Canadians during the early twentieth century. At that moment, the chief logic of colonial control exerted by the United Kingdom started to be revisited. Many amends needed to be brought into the sphere of Canadian interaction with Britain, even though not all chains were broken given the complexity of their political composition and the remaining pride of Canadians regarding the connection. As a matter of fact, even in the contemporaneity, the bonds with England are still consistent, although Canada is considerably autonomous to follow its own interests. This overall context enveloping *Sunshine sketches of a little town* can also be read as part of this analogy whereto the town and the City might be understood as in parallel to the colony and the coloniser.

Additionally, we would learn a posteriori that one of the most pivotal issues in the sketches is the importance of “the city”, the idea that those communities larger than Mariposa (places where commerce, industry, and business flourish continuously) are essentially distinct from the town, that these are places to be taken as models to Mariposa. These comparisons and analogies provided by the narrator are thus an indication that s/he wishes us to look at Mariposa as if it represented values much higher than the ones it is indeed liable to set forth. This happens for the decisive factor in determining opinion is the will to evolve, to grow, to be inserted in the globalising world map. Nevertheless, “the Mariposans are forever looking ambivalently toward ‘the City.’” (LYNCH, 1984, p. 2), and such ambivalence manifests both their satisfaction with the town wherein they live and their intentions to improve even more, in developmentalist terms. In the end, what is to be ridiculed in Mariposa is not its configuration in itself as a small town, but its inhabitants' naive admiration and feeling of low self-esteem caused by the metropolis and their never-ending attempt at being put in parallel with groups and institutions that, to be fair, have actually nothing to do with them (and that is precisely what makes it so funny). How perfectly sane and free would a place where those things that focus on something not necessarily connected to that region's history deserves to be ignored? Why is it so relevant to make Mariposa look like something else, through comparisons that actually only enhance its inferiority?

Either the narrator is being ironic, or s/he is blinded by his/her will to love Canada as a concrete nation with fixed identities in the first place, even though such idea of nation is crumbling in front of his eyes – after it has drown with the ship *Mariposa Belle*. As an intellectual who was a lover of literary fiction of any kind, Leacock (1912) seems to be reckoning on having apt interpreters of ironic discourse as his readers, captivated by his narrative, but autonomous enough not to be deceived by it. His narrator does here the opposite of what s/he alleges, ironically putting into question the illusion of a national ideal, so common in North America, historically and today. Also, the description of the boat is but a description of such rather questionable overestimation of his/her space. Such overestimation is nothing but a sort of violation, and humour consists perhaps of one of the best forms of violation. Moreover, regardless of the different moral commitments of the target context reader, notwithstanding their probably increased distance and decreased emotional involvement with the source text, my hypothesis is that laughter still encounters a channel whereby it can successfully emerge. Therefore, I do not feel troubled at all for writing such kind of thing more than a hundred years after the humorous piece I propose to translate was written.

As a matter of fact, such a task is one I feel compelled to undertake, insomuch as my translation (which accepts literature as a mobile stance) is motivated by my idea to provide a channel whereby my readers are given a chance to place themselves within Leacock's (1912) narrative; a narrative that, given its timeless and spaceless character, still has much to say. "It is not overambitious to detect in the poetics of the open work – and even less so in the work in movement – more or less specific overtones of trends in contemporary thought" (ECO, 1984, p. 57). There are indeed specific nuances and overtones in the poetics of Leacock's (1912) narrative that are still breathing in the contemporaneity; and, as the open work it is, my aim as a translator is, among other things, to allow such nuances flow profligately. Apropos, and still on the poetics of the open work, Eco (1984) would later affirm that "[t]he notion of field of possibilities is provided by physics and implies a revised vision of the classic relationship posited between cause and effect as a rigid, one-directional system" (1984, p. 58). An innovative view on a less unilateral relationship between reader and text is indeed welcome so that this one-directional system is turned into a polyvalent experience. As we now know, the process of reading is a much more intricate one, which depends on the reader active participation as a giver and receiver of significations, as a symbolic crucial aspect of the whole literary poetics established during his/her objective insertion within the pages of a text.

3 Final remarks: The incongruous equivalence of translation

The aforementioned excerpt (encompassing the narrator's digressions on lake Wissanotti), as well as its analysis, regard one of the many moments when I have thus provided my translation of *Sunshine sketches of a little town* with further information to show Brazilian readers why the analogies of the narrator are relevant (to me). The reason why I have chosen to bring these brief explanations for each sensitive term or moment of historical, cultural, social, or political importance is then not because I want am eager to sound redundant herein, nor in my version of Leacock's (1912) novel. They are the result of my attempt to provide readers with some background information to situate them in a privileged position when such meaningful apparatus surface out from the novel's pages. This bears no relation with a supposed endeavour to compensate for what some would consider "translation losses". The spatial and temporal distinct configuration of the contexts wherein the novel was originally written has indeed provided source readers with a rather different set of tools to decode its meanings, but the same is true for target readers. That is, if the original time and space when and where the novel was written has given the source readers an opportunity to interpret the novel in a specific manner, what has changed since then has given contemporary Brazilian readers the chance to reinterpret such novel with both losses and gains.

As a matter of fact, and as already suggested previously, no translation would be possible if the idea of perfect equivalence were to guide any proposal to translate, for one can never extract meaning from the original words and reinsert such meanings without any deviations in connotation and in a distinct linguistic framework. This is why, in my view, the idea of a deconstructed translation contributes so much to that debate. Through deconstruction, the translation is eventually saved from the ivory tower wherein it had been locked, and writers, readers, translators, and readers are all in the very same tower. Our idea of reading can no longer be the idea of an isolated reading, without the contamination of what externalises the body of the book. It is high time one moved towards the opposite direction, letting what lies beyond the text to impinge upon it: to enter without having to ask. It is here that translation appears, as responsible for dealing with a text that is no longer a single text. It is thus the age and culture whereto a text has been taken that determines how much is foreign and how much is domestic. Translation, after all, more than a cultural transfer, adaptation,

reaffirmation, or reconstruction is but a cultural fusion. For such fusion to occur, many agents are involved, e.g. translators, proof-readers, interpreters, publishers, critics, readers.

By reshaping the social reality of the original into something else, according to their particular reading, these agents emphasise, diminish, and/or transform certain elements of the narrative as it is provided with a continuity – with an appendix: the target version. Deconstruction has helped researchers to dodge the idea of an equivalence between original and translation, as there would no longer be stable units to be rebuilt from scratch, but actually only one more text (among many) to be continued. Given the absence of the original, the translator can, if you will, do whatever s/he wants with the messages that s/he has built by his/her particular reading, destabilising meanings that s/he is eager to reconstruct, eliminate, and/or elaborate on. For a narrative to function effectively, it shall rely on specific stereotypical articulations as its ideas are developed in a unique manner, but often based on the knowledge common to the public whereto it was originally directed. Redirecting these ideas to a new public means such articulations are amenable to be transformed, as they might be accepted, rejected, and/or reconsidered by the translator who positions him/herself between this process of meaning (re)making. Such process, thus, consists in a journey, whereby cultures are transferred, exchanged, diffused, or, to summarise everything, translated. It is to such extent that I say, just as Leacock (1912) has written an original text in his context, I am using such text to write an original one in my own.

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