

I RESTARTED A JOKE: A BORGEAN APPROACH TO HUMOUR TRANSLATION

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Abstract: Reflecting upon literature and literary translation, one can conclude that the autonomy Borgean critique bestows the latter functions perfectly vis-à-vis the requisites of humorous discourses and of their effects in other contexts. If there is no way to separate literature from the locale wherefrom it emerges, the same could be said about literature when (re)produced in a distinct chronotope. The literary is attached to the material just as the mind is inseparable from the matter. Literature, when translated, operates as the snowball effect. Since the departure, on the top of the mountain, the snowball moves forward, enhancing its broadness and its impact, while every place it goes through both affects and is affected by it. The hill whereby it slips does not have a bottom; the communication of literature never stops.

Keywords: Literature; Translation; Joke; Jorge Luis Borges.

Resumen: Al pensar en la literatura y la traducción literaria, uno puede concluir que la autonomía ofrecida por la crítica de Borges para traductores funciona perfectamente en vista de las exigencias de los discursos del humor y sus efectos en nuevos contextos. Si no hay manera de separar la literatura de su contexto original, lo mismo puede decirse de la literatura (re)producida en un cronotopo distinto. El literario tiene que ver con el material, así como la mente es inseparable de la materia. La literatura, cuando se traduce, se porta como lo hace la bola de nieve. Desde su salida, de la cresta de la montaña, la bola de nieve continúa su camino, aumentando su escala e impacto, mientras que todo el espacio por lo que pasa se convierte en otra cosa y hace con ella lo mismo. La colina no tiene fin; así como la comunicación literaria no se interrumpe nunca.

Palabras clave: Literatura; Traducción; Chiste; Jorge Luis Borges.

Resumo: Refletindo sobre literatura e tradução literária, é possível concluir que a autonomia oferecida pela crítica de Borges para os tradutores funciona perfeitamente tendo em vista os requisitos de discursos de humor e os seus efeitos em novos contextos. Se não há como separar a literatura do local de onde ela emerge, o mesmo pode ser dito sobre a literatura (re)produzida em um cronotopo distinto. O literário se conecta ao material assim como a mente é inseparável da matéria. A literatura, quando traduzida, opera como um efeito bola de neve. Desde sua partida, no topo da montanha, a bola de neve segue adiante, aumentando sua amplitude e seu impacto, enquanto todo espaço pelo qual ela atravessa é afetado, afetando-a de volta. A colina por onde ela escorrega não tem fim; bem como a comunicação literária nunca é interrompida.

Palavras-chave: Literatura; Tradução; Piada; Jorge Luis Borges.

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A medida que uno se acerca, esas líneas borrosas se convierten en letras y las letras se enciman y se mezclan, las palabras se transmutan, cambian, el texto es un río, un torrente múltiple, siempre en expansión. Leemos restos, trozos sueltos, fragmentos, la unidad del sentido es ilusoria. (Ricardo Piglia, El Último Lector, 2014, p. 18)

Introduction: “A work to be completed”

When we, humans, tell jokes, we generally find sense in nonsense. However, and even though “the importance which our views attach to the factor of ‘sense in nonsense’ might lead to a demand that every joke must be a nonsense joke” (FREUD, 1991, p. 88) this is not necessarily the case. This is so because it is the playing with thoughts that inevitably leads to nonsense. The other source of pleasure in jokes – to play with words – gives that impression only occasionally. Since playing with words would be comparable to a verbal experience of humour, and playing with thoughts to a conceptual experience of humour, such processes operate through different means and with different purposes – although, in my view, they might be often interconnected. Such distinctions demonstrate how intricate is the emergence of laughter, inasmuch as “[t]he twofold root of the pleasure in jokes makes it perceptibly more difficult to arrive at a concise formulation of general statements about jokes” (FREUD, 1991, p. 89). This distinction between conceptual and verbal pleasure in humour is not fundamental for my proposal herein, but it is an interesting one to have in mind as to understand the directions that jokes enlighten. This is to say that any researcher whose goal is to place humorous categories into closed boxes and define them concretely, based on straightforward definitions, is liable to carry out an unsuccessful study.

On the other hand, as we grapple with textual material, it is important to bear in mind that “the work in movement is the possibility of numerous different personal interventions, but it is not an amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation”

(ECO, 1984, p. 60). So, interpretive freedom is not analogous to interpretive lack of restrictions – readers, like the authors, cannot impose meanings to the texts. The text shall inform both author and reader, to inflict an objective opposing direction would be unfavorable for the reader and writer to experience what is there in the literary material that goes beyond their own control. The text is, and shall always be, sovereign – what one needs to bear in mind is that this is a liquid sovereignty, one that needs amends and active interferences. In other words, the author offers the interpreter “a work to be completed. He does not know the exact fashion in which his work will be concluded, but he is aware that once completed the work in question will still be his own” (ECO, 1984, p. 61). In the case of translation strategies, it is exactly this issue that demonstrates how it would be dodgy to respect either the source or target contexts as opposing and isolated structures; both “sides” deserve respect, and, for the work to be completed, one needs to look at them both.

Readers experience each text in a distinct fashion, but the text is, materially, the same. The book is physically static and, through interpretative dialogue, a form of itself shall be configured – from the outside and uncontrollably. When a book is translated it is no longer materially the same, and it most often shall be taking directions that the author could never have imagined. Reading is like having many other sorts of experience; the source of such experience might seem to be the same, but the results of it are never equivalent. Any reading is already responsible for transforming a given text; and the literary translator, before being that, is firstly a reader. Hence the inevitability of transformation: the text is guided to a particular direction, which is the idiosyncratic way the translator understood it. There is no opting for what is universally best and for what is universally worst; there are not such things, what is good to one person might not be for another: this is not what translation or literature are about. This is why translating the Canadian humorous novel, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) depends on my autonomy for making choices; for deciding when to foreignise and when to

domesticate, for judging how the comic effects can be maintained, enhanced, or adapted. My purpose herein is to reflect upon such autonomy, relying on a conceptual scrutiny on the subjective nature of humour and the abstract idealization of authorship. Thereby, I withdraw the self-sufficiency of original texts and boost their metamorphosis through translation.

Such approach is not my fault; after all “the author is the one who presupposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organised, oriented, and endowed with specifications for proper development” (ECO, 1984, p. 62). That is the spot wherein I expect my translation to fit: as one more step towards the proper development of these possibilities. Despite these possibilities, my hypothesis is that, although several books from the most varied origins are translated nowadays, readers’ awareness and respect regarding other cultures have not really benefited from this process as much as one would imagine. This, I believe, is because literature has been gradually disparaged by technological society, and does not seem to represent a sociopolitical tool any longer inasmuch as Western culture, looking for a reason for literature to coexist with its main axioms, has ultimately turned it into a commodity. Although many literary texts are successful in subverting hegemonic values, hence “stimulating innovation and cultural change” (VENUTI, 1998, p. 335), much translated literature might have the opposing purpose if its main motivation is pure profit – many times reaffirming Western dogmas and institutionalising or exoticising that which deviates from them. In a way this research concerns, then, in an attempt to put together Leacock’s (1912) critique and my ambitions regarding the annotated translation of his sketches, Western never-ending commodification of values – aiming at hegemonising those representing its own – which seems to result in the homogenisation and/or institutionalisation of marginalised regions and peoples.

Exoticising and marginalising the “other as to effectively mitigate their possibly ground-breaking discursive potential, nationally and/or internationally, hegemony

reaffirms its status. The problem of cultural identity is therefore pivotal for my critique and positioning when translating the novel, especially in what concerns the idea – illusion – of national homogeneity, either in Canada, Brazil, and/or in any other nation. In the opinion of Stuart Hall (1996, p. 615) the national cultural story is often responsible for concealing “a struggle to mobilize ‘the people’ to purify their ranks, to expel the ‘others’ who threaten their identity using the nation as the form in which to compete with other ethnic ‘nations,’ and so to gain entry to the rich ‘club’ of the West”. It would be thorny then to discuss and evaluate the contemporary status of “Brazilian” or “Canadian” literature without questioning its optimum commoditisation. Behind extraordinarily vehement assertions of aesthetic values, like those of artistic manifestations such as national and/or translated literature, may stand political conflicts, “and the struggle over the power of what one might label the ‘public institutions of singularisation’; in liberal societies, these institutions control society’s presentation of itself to itself” (KOPYTOFF, 1986, p. 73). These public institutions of singularisations are worried about controlling society’s presentation of itself to itself. The translatability of marginal discourses into mainstream Western tradition and, thus, the insertion of distinct views on the world in the core of this rather questionable structural system of discourses, that has already been institutionalised in the discussed systems of hierarchy, are surely important steps. Only then can the singularised temporal and spatial chronology of hegemonic culture be questioned and, perhaps, reconsidered. So why don’t we give it a try?

Discussion: “Just one and the same crowd”

Transformations are the cornerstone of much of what occurs in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912), since the onset of the novel, when reality is linked to imagination and stasis to kinesis. Mariposa, the town where events occur is a character in motion – the mobile sketch of a place whose development gives the narrator an opportunity to elaborate upon the most varied issues. My

analysis and translation, in this sense, have never aimed at finalising what the author had started – I wish, on the contrary, to provide his discourse with another paragraph, knowledgeable that there is still room for many more paragraphs to be written after (or at the same time) my own. There is neither beginning nor end, these are interpretations of a continuum where everything is connected. The tragic exists due to the comic, as well as there is pain because there is also beauty. As it happens in literature and translation, then, so it does in the case of humour – and the social and political statements unveiled behind apparently silly jokes evince that. The sketches' narrator observes, for instance, the chauvinist representation of women or poor characters being deceived; through irony, humour is deployed as a tool for social criticism. Translating such criticism means allowing humour to keep moving in the direction it is intrinsically amenable to follow. In tears or in laughter, everything is political – universally political. “There is no possessing here, no conserving or hoarding; laughter can be no one's property, tears belong to no one's destiny” (KRONICK, 1999, p. 179).

The tragic and the comic consist in essential aspects of our existence – polarities that do not fight against one another, but that engage in an intense dialogue never to be finished. In translation, both source and target audiences engage in such dialogue; both are amenable to laugh or to cry (sometimes to do both at the same time) – and if such feelings arise for distinct reasons, such reasons are what consist in the objective of my personal quest. Thereby, it seems thus of paramount importance for us to have in mind that, even though source and target audiences laugh, they might do for different reasons. Looking for the effects of words, thus, in many occasions might surpass an attempt at translating their meanings. Meanings are not static – they change from the moment they surface from a word or a sentence; in such sense, this is a fine image of translation, as conceived by Borges: “telling the ‘same story’ but in a slightly different way. For him, as for so many characters in his own fictions, the creator of a literary work is inevitably a re-

creator or an editor”. Kristal later discloses how such parallelism between translator and editor occurs for Borges, who believed that a fine translator “changes the emphasis or recombines elements of other works” (KRISTAL, 2002, p. 138) – which is what I have tried to do in the case of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912). Notwithstanding translators’ inferiority complex, such autonomous view on translation allows one to trespass the invisible line of fidelity. Of course the translated work does not belong entirely to the translator. But the question we should be asking is: does any text belong to anyone whatsoever?

There is nothing impossible for those who understand what the task of translation entails. In the end, such task is only impossible for the ones who are not willing to embrace the array of possibilities at their disposal. Regardless of the long history of animosity between original and translated, what Borges’ idea of creative infidelity (1967) implies is that the source text is not as original as it is usually deemed. This is, after all, how the writer used to see his own fictional productions, as he does when it goes to the pieces he translates: “Borges’s achievements as translator are a tribute to his humility and craftsmanship; they are like the masterpieces of Pierre Menard – invisible” (KRISTAL, 2002, p. 139). If the arguments that are brought in to discredit the autonomy of a translation are brittle, so are the ones used to reject researches on comic pieces – commonly categorised as inferior and/or minor when compared to tragic ones. Humour is purported to be unintentional and unconscious: “unintentional because in the majority of cases it is produced by extraneous circumstances that can afterwards disappear, and unconscious because those who produce it generally do so involuntarily” (BILLEREY, 1997, p. 79). Besides its being considered unintentional and unconscious, and besides the circumstances that produce it be deemed amenable to disappear, if the function of something is to make an audience laugh the features related to and responsible for causing such laughter are overtly misconceived as innocuous and/or irrelevant.

It is as if all ambitious and higher purposes belonged to tears, whereas laughter could never reach anything more significant than itself – tears, in this sense, would be taken as the means for an end (generally an admirable one) while laughter would be means and end, nothing more than that. Notwithstanding our ignorance regarding the strength of humour to activate complex mental processes and the comic's ability to reposition our views on social and political matters, our orthodox belief on humour obviously “does not invalidate the studies regarding the processes that create the comical” (BILLEREY, 1997, p. 81). Of course our common knowledge on humour needs to be revisited; and deeper studies in comic pieces contribute for the field to become more robust and consequently prepared to alter the flawed perceptions regarding laughter that have for long been disseminated. When many people laugh at the same thing, it is because they are facing a joke that meets their expectation – because they share something, which, on its turn, is also shared by the author. Individuality, therefore, gives way to collectivity – and such process takes place when it goes to telling a joke and/or in what concerns the conception of a work and obviously of such work's translation. It is indeed a crucial step one takes when s/he finally becomes “aware of being a member of a continually growing and renewed people” (BAKHTIN, 1990, p. 90).

The ability to laugh at the same thing and/or to read the same text is, one could say, a manifestation of such awareness – it is the assertion that an individual is liable to respond to social expressions and withal someone able to provide society with further collective expressions. Individuality, here, only exists when inserted within a community. In this sense, the autonomy and individuality of processes is exchanged by the collectivity such processes entail – and it is here that we return to the notion of creative infidelity, which puts the notion of several readers and writers in the spotlight. “Borges himself argued in favour of literary practices that were collective and impersonal and often expressed scepticism with respect to the individuality of any author, including himself” (KRISTAL, 2002, p. 13). Again we have

another glimpse of creative infidelity: the traditional status of an original work as personal and individual is replaced by his idea of collectivity, the very same collectivity that allows us to laugh at the same jokes. In this sense, to grasp the complexity of the comic one must pay special attention to how such comic behaves in the whole of a community (and not only through the reading of a single individual). The same goes to the translation of the comic – if just one of my readers laugh at my version of Leacock's (1912) narrative I might have a problem (or not, after all at least my text would have worked for one of them).

According to Bakhtin since medieval times one could notice that “laughter is not simply a subjective, individual and biological consciousness of the uninterrupted flow of time; it is the social consciousness of all the people” (1984, p. 21). Instead of laughing alone, as if time and space existed only in what regards one's conception of them, the subject “experiences this flow of time in the festive marketplace, in the carnival crowd, as he comes into contact with other bodies of varying age and social caste” (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 22). The carnival crowd and the festive market place are concrete illustration of human collectivity – of places where the comic emerges as a virus capable of infecting everyone. But, actually, humour operates everywhere, inasmuch as there is nothing singular, individual, or idiosyncratic in our nature and our art. In the carnival of Mariposa, the narrator of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) puts the generosity hypocrisy of some characters in the spotlight, ironising the fact that some people help others as to, in the first place, benefit themselves. Smith's characterisation makes that clear: “In terms of philanthropy versus selfishness, every instance of Smith's ‘philanthropy’ illustrates his self-serving material ambitions” (LYNCH, 1984, p. 11). Philanthropy is defined as the altruistic concern for human beings as manifested by donations of money, property,

or work to needy persons or institutions advancing human welfare.² Suh word shall permeate many pages of the sketches, mainly regarding Mr. Smith.

At a certain point, Smith starts developing an eager will to assist financially many Mariposans, apparently with no reason. As the novel develops, though, we learn that Smith is clever enough to know he can use such benevolence as an important first step to open his café in the town, and later, as he will discover, to be elected as mayor. Stereotypical as it may seem, for implying that most philanthropic enterprises are not as selfless as they seem to be, I dare say that such a critique is rather capable of being applied in our contemporary society, even though the book was originally written more than a century ago. Philanthropy, at least in the way I see it, did not suffer as many alterations from 1912 to the 21st century as one might be willing to believe. Smith is used by Leacock (1912, p. 97) as a prototype of what stands for this future whereto we have supposedly already gotten; and his self-centred philanthropy is like most of the philanthropy any of us is able to see around – e.g. when media organises national television shows in order to collect money to be directed to supporting centres (since there are quite a few people behind the curtains who have their share of profit as a result of that, of course). People found non-governmental organisations, supposedly motivated by philanthropic interests, that gradually materialise as a crowd of volunteers working pro bono for the enrichment of the owners of such organisations. Some subject gives alms to the poor more because s/he wants to go to heaven and less because s/he is sympathetic.

The reader is capable of noting that everything addressed in Leacock's (1912) narrative is not there by chance, but impersonate the author's foreshadowing of social functioning. In fact, any sensible person shall conclude that "real" philanthropy does not fit very well in a world which, as time passes, becomes much more based on selfishness than on selflessness. Intriguingly, Mr. Smith seems to match the contemporary society with perfect accuracy. Smith, obviously, is the archetype of the

² The Free Dictionary. Copyright © 2013 Farlex, Inc. <http://www.tfd.com/philanthropy>

business man; and Leacock (1912) uses such stereotype to suggest that most of those who see business, money, market, and profit as the answers for every social problem are potentially and inevitably fitting in the mould where Mr. Smith is forged. This notion pervades the atmosphere of the sketches, for, consecutively, “the narrator remarks with only a hint of condescending, mitigating irony, that, after all, the capitalists of the world are just one and the same crowd” (LYNCH, 1984, p. 10). This was Leacock’s (1896, 1908) positioning, and he is repetitively addressing the matter of the involvement between politics and economy, that he understood as a very intricate one, by using Smith to stand for what he understood as the capitalist most prized values – materialism, greed, industrialism, profiteering, development, etc. – coming mainly from the U.S.A. (Smith himself being from the U.S.) to affect directly the construction of the Canadian identity, a fact that was thoroughly addressed by Leacock (1912). The author understood the central tenets of global capitalism as immoral, filth; for him the explanations and arguments for this economic system’s thriving status were inaccurate and unfair.

Hence Mr. Smith. Indeed, when profit gets in the game, no player is selfless any longer – everyone starts thinking about some advantage for their moves to go through this or that direction. Question is: how can we be laughing at it? The thing is not to laugh or not to laugh, but who we are laughing with, and who we are laughing at. In this sense it is curious that it is exactly because of the narrator’s bias that we can identify such bias; in humorous literature, what something means is, generally, the very opposite of what it says. We are supposed to understand the unfairness and hypocrisy going on, that is what might allow Leacock’s (1912) voice to be effectively heard. In this sense, the reader is not simply laughing at something that should make him cry, he is laughing at the fact that something so preposterous was taking place, still is, and shall always be. This as long as we keep feeding the capitalist charlatanism that corrupts any chance of a really unselfish society, motivated by social needs to the detriment of commercial and political ones. One of the pillars of

the economic and inevitably social system he is criticising is the idea of a parallel between the political and economic functioning of society with the course of nature. Leacock (1896, p. 113) did not believe the gradual removal of state power and the emergence of market and business as responsible for what was once but no longer strictly regulated was a good move for the Canadian insertion in the global sphere. In the sketches we might interpret some of his criticisms against Smith's attitudes as attempts to demonstrate how the notion of the "natural order of society" is seen as just one more euphemism to allow unfairness and lack of liberty to thrive.

Leacock's position (1908, p. 133) is crystal-clear: "The 'natural' order of society, based on the 'natural' liberty, does not correspond with real justice and real liberty at all, but works injustice at every turn. And at every turn intrusive social legislation must seek to prevent such injustice". Thus, here one can see how Leacock (1896, 1908, 1912) strongly believed "social legislation", which was being erased in Canada by the time he wrote his *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), to be essential for any society to fight against the injustice that accompanies those who are benefited when a more "natural order" replaces such legislation. It seems to be no doubt then that Leacock's (1912) humorous devices might be multifaceted. Within the narrative humour operates through diverse manners and for distinct purposes, causing the most varied effects as a result. This is the reason why "we shall not aim at imprisoning the comic spirit within a definition. It is, above all, as a living thing" (BERGSON, 1914, p. 9). It would indeed be detrimental for the agenda of humour if one attempted at encompassing its attributes within a narrow category. After all, no Cartesian division applies to that which causes laughter, inasmuch as, "however trivial it may be, we shall treat it with the respect due to life. Passing by imperceptible gradations from one form to another, it will be seen to achieve the strangest metamorphoses" (BERGSON, 1914, p. 10).

Andrea Cesco (2004, p. 81)³, by the same token, would say that even though Borges has set forward brilliant insights regarding translation, such reflections are far from methodical – and it would thus be hazardous for one to claim thereby that he has developed a concrete theory on translation, regardless of the several essays, prologues, interviews, and fictional works addressing such issue. If, for Bergson (1914), there is no way for us to imprison the comic spirit within a definition – given that it is a living thing – for Borges (1966, 1967, 1969, 1974, 1979, 1982, 1998, 1999) the same would be true in what regards the spirit of translation. This parallel drawn between creative infidelity and humour should not make us forget, though, that “to understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the utility of its function, which is a social one” (BERGSON, 1914, p. 13). Raising one’s awareness regarding the locale of Leacock’s (1912) narrative proves to be crucial for both its analysis and translation, inasmuch as no narrative, notwithstanding its autonomy, operates per se. It is actually the fact that it is situated in time and space that makes it so idiosyncratic and germane in terms of the ideological contributions literary discourse carries.

In the journey of literature translation plays indeed a “Borgean” role. “Borges’s main goal as a translator was to create a convincing work of literature; this principle is at play in his literal translations and recreations, as well as in his faithful and unfaithful ones” (KRISTAL, 2002, p. 85). For (re)creating Leacock’s sketches, it would then be appropriate for one to grasp how the literary discourse is interjected within its environment. Translation entails such interjection to be reclaimed and re-established within another environment, which is, again – and as always – a social one. The reflections proposed so far provide us with an arena open to many debates, even though the claims of creative infidelity are overtly put into question by many critics and researchers. In the end, “Borges’s most common practice as a translator

³ “Podemos dizer que não existe uma teoria, propriamente dita, borgiana da tradução, mas lendo os seus ensaios, resenhas, prólogos, entrevistas e ficções críticas, podemos encontrar observações brilhantes sobre a tradução, mas que não são absolutamente metódicas.”

was to remove what he once called the ‘padding’ of a work: words and passages that seem redundant, superfluous, or inconsequential” (KRISTAL, 2002, p. 86). Besides, creative infidelity invites the removal of textual distractions, supposedly present in the original text, by “cutting part of the content of a literary work that might distract attention from another aspect Borges would prefer to highlight” (KRISTAL, 2002, p. 87). Complicated? My apologies, but not for me. One can conclude that this autonomy and sovereignty that the Borgean critique bestows translation seems to function perfectly vis-à-vis the requisites of humorous discourses and of their effects on the new context whereto such discourses are taken when translated.

If there is no way to separate literature from the locale wherefrom it emerges, the same could be said about literature when (re)produced in a distinct time and space. The literary is attached to the material just as the mind is inseparable from the matter. Literature, when translated, operates through the snowball effect – it moves forward, enhancing its character and empowering its impact, while every place it goes through both affects and is affected by it. Like the snowball, every space literature passes through, because of translation, leaves something in the translated work and receives something back from it. The hill does not have a bottom; the communication of literature never stops – since its onset, on the top of the mountain, its potential only grows and its speed is only raised. There is, in this sense, nothing to be antithetical to nothing else – and, by the same token, nothing to be considered completely synonymic. Literature obliterates difference and equality; it destroys the monstrous other as to make ourselves aware of the monsters within ourselves. Consonantly, the logic of laughter is such that the illusions of difference between mind and matter, self and other, appearance and reality, essence and existence, all the strain of dichotomized faculties and the angst of alienation and estrangement, “simply collapse under their own weight” (KRONICK, 1999, p. 181). When humour enters the game there is much more at stake; dichotomies are put into question, and the social vs. individual supposed antagonism is, literally, laughed at.

On the verge of making our certainties collapse under their own weight, by exposing how hybrid language operates when irony transform words into something different – questioning our ontologies when it makes fun of what is generally taken seriously – humour transforms us. In its translation, there is no image to be recovered, only pieces of glass to be put together. “The reflex of laughter explodes the reflect of mind. The mirror of nature shatters and there is only existence, a spirit rejoicing in a moment of self-affirmation which excludes nothing” (KRONICK, 1999, p. 182). The mirror has already been shattered – now it is time for me to put the pieces together and give shape to a new mirror, one whose reflected images are bound to be even more distinctive. This is to say that, although every mirror, to some level, deforms the original image, the translation emerges as this mirror constructed with shattered pieces of glass, resulting in even more distorted reflections. In what concerns both literature and translation, images are never the same – as a matter of fact they have never been, not even in the purportedly most faithful mirrors. In this sense, and hoping that my theoretical approach is tantamount to the demands of a careful reading of Leacock’s (1912) narrative, I conclude my conceptual reasoning asking for my readers’ open-mindedness. After all, both my analysis and translation are far from having anything to do with affirming that *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) shall be read today as it was when originally published – or that target and source texts are perfectly coherent with one another.

Leacock’s (1912) novel is singular: a unique mirror producing specific images equivalent to nothing. My translation is a proposal for a new mirror, one whose reflected images reminds us of the source narrative – but by no means operates in parallel with it. A translated piece is divested of its essence and given a new one: it gives the body of literature another clothing. Distinct contexts require distinct texts, just like distinct seasons require distinct wardrobes – and when it goes to humorous pieces such fact is actually intensified. After all, when one thinks of humour in English, how can we tell, today, “how the Anglo-Saxons experienced laughter?”

Perhaps more importantly, did they display laughter or these other emotions in a similar way, using the same symbolic codes to achieve the same social effects?” (WILCOX, 2000, p. 12) Symbolic codes are not straightforward; their results do not depend simply on themselves, essentially, but also on every contextual detail affecting and influencing the milieu of their production. Regardless of how often we might surmise in the dark that “this was funny” or “this was not funny” in a given space and time, “these questions are not easily answered; the history and ethnography of emotions is a very large book that remains unwritten – no matter how alert we may be to their social construction” (WILCOX, 2000, p. 17). Mastering with perfection how such emotions are set forth and how they might be reclaimed and restated is an expertise we are still not privy to.

What one can imply nonetheless is that, no matter if enveloped by this or that temporal and/or spatial borders, the right joke is amenable to make any human being achieve laughter – even though the right joke for me might be the wrong joke for you. “Think of any other group of *Homo sapiens* as at least grossly analogous to us. They, too, ought to laugh when you tickle them. They ought to grieve when they suffer loss. They must have fun, feel shame, rage, boredom, and so on” (WILCOX, 2000, p. 13). My laughter is mine, but it is isolated in time and space; humour, like literature, is an erratic stance – it has no consistency, no fixed or regular course. Having said that, I hope this article to guide my readers through Leacock’s (1912) trenchant wit, one that manifests how commendably he has tickled his group of *Homo sapiens* and highlighted the inconsistency of its regular course. I expect, with my translation, to do such tickling with another group of *Homo sapiens* whose emotions are basically the same, but operate differently. I say “expectation” because it would not be possible (nor necessary) to make out what the expectations of the original author would be; my only evidence is his text, and that is the one thing I wish to rely and hang on as my version of it is shaped. Back to the clothing metaphor, translating a book is sometimes much like buying used clothes: we might have to make amends given

time and space effects on the material, transforming the original clothing into something different, but not poles apart; and we may try to infer and/or imagine for what end it was originally thought, what the person who purchased needed it for, to what places s/he would go wearing it – but we shall never know anything for sure. And that is the only thing we can be sure.

Final remarks: “Controversial to the natural standpoint”

My *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) is distinctive; its comic effects are other, its meanings are no longer the same. Translation does not mean the car literature drives has gotten to its destiny – it has just been supplied with another handful of gas. An automotive metaphor might sound laughable to some of you; but, well, so is my object of research. Automotive metaphors look capable of making language “convertible” – as convertible as humour requires it to be. Let me thus restate my point in a different manner (but not less unorthodox): if one is eager to pick the locks of metaphoric doors, still within the automotive context, it could be said that literature is the automobile and that the first driver is the original author, who then stops by at the gas station of translation and is exchanged by a new driver – the translator – who is summoned to keep up with the journey. The automobile has always been the same; authors, translators, their respective works and audiences (the passengers) are the ones who have been altered. But the car is always in motion, it never stops; once the literary discourse has left the garage it shall never get to any final destination, travelling permanently in the temporal and spatial inexhaustible and boundless unfettered road of artistic communication. Back to the past and back to the future, literature is a never-ending channel for dialogues that transit through distinct places and generations, providing a rapport among people who could never be materially and/or objectively connected to one another. The fastness of our internet is meaningless; it is literature that has always really connected us.

Nevertheless, and coming back to a less allegorical language (wherein words recover their ability to mean more or less what they objectively mean and no longer beat around the bush), it is worth shedding a light upon this time and space facet that obstructs translation practices and compels it to trespassing. If it is the author's work that results in his/her immortality, it is translation that embalms its corpse – no matter how eerie such process might seem if taken like this. Literary spacelessness and timelessness has to do with the fact that, if the writer is an indissoluble compound of his/her work, translation is what makes such indissolubility alliance perennial. Translation evinces that the war is eternal; through translation literature conquers other spaces – by deploying brand-new troops in the unit of art. Conscious of the temporal constituent of translation processes, and given the fact that it simply consists in another detail among all of those that intercede literary trajectory (which has no clear departure and arrival points), any translation is amenable to respond not only to its given project, but also to the context wherein it is located. Translating is playing a new song, but with the instruments we have learned how to play – just like playing Bach in the piano, even though he wrote his songs for harpsichord. In the music of literature, no melody shall stop. Humour, translation, literature... the adherence between all of them is indeed rather musical. As a matter of fact, the poetics developed by Borges' creative infidelity operates in parallel with what was happening to tango in his country while such poetics was developed – and it is possible that his ideas have been affected by that detail.

Many songs, in Argentina, had only a melodic line – designed initially as instrumental music. Carlos Gardel had nonetheless no worries regarding artistic copyright when he provided the melody of certain songs with lyrics – giving shape to his own version of creative infidelity. Translation, therefore, might be seen as new lyrics that use the information provided by a given melody, adhering to such melody – the original – creatively and to the degree that the musician – translator – deems aesthetically appropriate. Like the musical and technical apparatuses applied by his

contemporaries, that were responsible for both capturing and later producing the sound that has been captured, translation operates as a tool that captures the effects of the original and bring forth a new version of such effects. Within such process, it is thus up to the translator to judge to which degree the translated text must adhere to the original one – how the music goes is up to him/her. I am not going to play the same music I heard to my listeners, I shall provide them with my own version of it. For me, hitherto and hereinafter, comic effects and creative infidelity shall always go hand in hand. The infidel and the ironic both invite us to move towards the unknown. Irony means flexibility in choosing a point of observation, to “change the focus of observation, to extend the possible horizon of experience or even move beyond it – irony is always controversial to the natural standpoint” (STATES, 1971, p. 171).

I would like to stop here, then, by inviting my reader to imagine an individual walking on the surface of such vaporous ground while s/he realises that he is under the pressure of “an ironical doubt, a mental journey between ‘yes’ and ‘no’, between extremes of spatio-temporal simplicity and existential multiplicity – in this quality, irony can be used as a technique to monitor phenomenological reduction” (STATES, 1971, p. 172). The journey our literary automobile is going through is also a journey between yes and no, and thereby the translator steps onto the station to navigate even further. S/he does so while monitoring phenomenological reduction and restructuring artistic experience and consciousness. Making fun of something, like translating, is yielding another version of events in-between the extremes of simplicity and multiplicity that literature provides us with. It is playing with serious things – which is rather dangerous, but also much fun. The comic provides us with a tool to make us laugh and to open up our perceptions – and the translation of humour means the revival of its effects. The ultimate purpose, the catharsis, is indeed laughter, that seems to have been the focus of Leacock’s (1912) original text, and that is the main purpose of my translation project. Humour, in the end, is in parallel with freedom – those who are deprived from their liberty to laugh are enslaved by the

discourses that restrain them. Laughing means we can look at reality from another perspective, it means we can see what it hides, and it ultimately means we are capable of changing it. There are moments in one's life when everything resolves into laughter, and “it is in those moments that we become whole, free, sane, and fully alive” (BERGSON, 1914, p. 129).

Any plans to set humour aside during my translation are, if you will, all gone to the dogs now; my reading of the narrative has inspired my reshaping of it – and that is the reading I am shall share with you when my version of the text is published. As you may notice thereby, modifications are ubiquitous. However, Borges' concept of creative infidelity implies that “whether one endeavors to be unfailingly faithful or not, it is the translator who determines what is unfathomable, mysterious or poetic about a text, based on her or his own social and historical context in relation to that of the text, and its legacy” (LEONE, 2011, p. 44). Literature, of which translation is simply another genre, has revealed itself to Borges as “the Library of Babel, versions of versions of other texts—but with consequences both aesthetic and political” (LEONE, 2011, p. 179). Following such reasoning, it would be right to imagine *Sunshine Sketches* not as a concrete book resting on the shelves of a library – as a literary text, it is in itself a library of babel (every book is a library where other books are present). This is why – alongside the implications regarding the pertinence of studies addressing the issue of humour – this research also demonstrates how the Borgesian concept of creative infidelity proves to bestow the translation with the necessary autonomy for recreating humour. This is so for “Borges thought of the original as a text produced not by a superior being but by a fallible human, a text laden with possibilities and potentialities, attainments and failures” (KRISTAL, 2002, p. 2).

My translated version of Leacock's (1912) novel is surely rather different from what the author would expect me to do when he wrote the novel which, on its turn, was read by its first Canadian readers as rather distinct from how I read it and from how he probably wanted it to be read. Relying on Borges cold-shouldered views on

translation as the main scaffold for my (re)production of the sketches in Portuguese, though, resulted in the fact that I simply do not care. My conceptual tool is, I admit, not only a treacherous choice – it actually opens up a considerable space for criticism. But, well, honestly, I do enjoy a fight. The muddling of what is fabricated and what is original, of what is real and unreal, of what is maintained and what is invented, provides the translator with a very interesting groundwork. Such is the groundwork where peripheral texts are given a chance to manipulate central ones, where the margin deploys what dominates it to fulfil whatever needs it may happen to have. The point is that hegemonic traditions have always made use of peripheral texts to model its literary system; and it is high time the margin started doing likewise. Nevertheless, problematising power structures, notwithstanding how commending it might seem to be, should not be confounded with trying to provide the globe with new ones. No hierarchy is commendable, and translation is also about making that clear. Translating Leacock's (1912) text, a Canadian text, into Portuguese is, in this sense, a task that I do not need to embrace as if it were a means for me to emphasise when the original is supposedly more "effective" than the translation and vice versa.

Academia is not a place for such sort of judgmental reasoning, we need to be judicial, to evaluate what texts achieve, not to highlight how they are purported to have failed here or there. The translator is a chameleon whose colours change from the inside and from the outside. No one is holding the brush – the chameleon changes colours for the most varied reasons. As well articulated by Costa (1996, p. 184), "in the theory and criticism proposed by Borges, present in most of his legacy and throughout his career as a writer, one might find the germs of a new concept of translating – concept that new generations might implement in the future". To look at translation as a means to attempt to say the same thing in another language would be unreasonable, since even the same thing is never the same thing for two different people. I dare say that even for the same subject communication is never concrete nor stable and unilateral – when we are writing down something, this something is

also writing down us. Perfect homology can never be noticed nor proved. To say then that my translation of Leacock's (1912) novel (just like any other) is impossible – simply because two terms are never the same – would naturally imply that no communication is possible. All discourse, no matter if in the same or in distinct languages, is fundamentally monadic or idiolectic. I conclude this reflection by stating that, as a translator, I feel like a scientist doing experiments aided by the elements my original text has provided me with. I have no idea what the results shall be, as I am still testing hypotheses. Something is coming out of that process, and if it does not explode that is good enough to me.

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Recebido em: 25/02/2017

Aceito em: 05/10/2017