

# WORLD WORLD VAST WORLD OF POETIC TRANSLATION

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They say it is impossible to re-create a poem in another language, and perhaps it is. It is also irresistible.

Translators may attempt the impossible because they want to share their enjoyment or because they need versions for teaching or because they like word games—translation is as much fun as Double-Crostics. My own reason is the challenge of the irresistible; I am like the mountain climber who says, “Because it’s there.” And in fact, mountain climbing and poetic translation have some points in common. The translator and the climber may find smooth stretches on their rough paths, and they both struggle upward, but at the goal the similarity disappears, for the climber may succeed absolutely. There are no absolute successes in translation, which John Ciardi calls the art of failure.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the translator will never find himself in the anticlimactic position of having climbed Mount Everest. He always has more worlds to attempt to conquer, and his old worlds to improve.

Literary translation is an addiction. A happy few are able to surrender their lives to it. We others sacrifice our precious free time and our social lives to this irresistible addiction. It is a useful form of self-indulgence, however, and P. E. N. American Center does not wish us to be cured: “Our culture, and indeed all cultures, are thoroughly rooted in translation, and the translator is the unacknowledged vehicle by which civilizations are brought about. . . . Most of what we know of the past has come to us through translation, and much of our future will inevitably depend on translation. We are the heirs of all the cultures of the past only because the translators have made these cultures available, and without the translator, the lost child, we are all lost.”<sup>2</sup>

“Transferring a poet’s creation from one language to another is an impossible thing; but also impossible is relinquishing that dream,” says V. Briussov. Cassiano Nunes calls translation making poetry leap from one trapeze to another.<sup>3</sup> Illogical but true, there are degrees of impossibility. Some poems are really impossible to translate because of their form, because of special references that would require a battery of

footnotes, and so on. And we may have to take a shot even at these, to illustrate a critical article. Much of Cecília Meireles's work is impossible because the short rhymed lines give the translator no room to turn around.

All my experience has been with the Romance languages, chiefly the Portuguese of Portugal and Brazil, and within this field I concentrate on the medieval period and the twentieth century. This gives me everything from the strictest forms to free verse to experimental poetry. Concrete poetry ranks high in impossibility, and translating song lyrics is a refinement of torture. And yet I've come to realize that poetic translation is not necessarily the most difficult kind. Suzanne Jill Levine has described how she translated Guillermo Cabrera Infante's novel, *Tres Tristes Tigres (Three Trapped Tigers)*, written in Cuban Spanish of the 50s, and Manuel Puig's novel, *La Traición de Rita Hayworth (Betrayed by Rita Hayworth)*, written in provincial Argentine Spanish of the 30s and 40s.<sup>4</sup> She not only had to choose English forms that would reflect these dialects; she had to maintain them throughout an entire book. This makes poetic translation seem positively easy. Unless we undertake epic poetry, we work with much shorter pieces and with fewer levels of language.

The poetic translator, unlike the scientific translator, exercises much freedom of choice. Nobody is going to make a living at this work, so we can concentrate on the irresistible unless material is needed for some special project. And working to order may bring unexpected gains. I never dared to tackle Fernando Pessoa until Américo da Costa Ramalho asked me to make some versions for a lecture he was giving in English. Two of them turned out among the most successful I have ever done<sup>5</sup> and now I am preparing an anthology of his work. Unfortunately we are sometimes asked to translate bad poems and they are always harder than good ones, without the reward of excitement.

Much breath has been expended on the relative desirability of literal and of free translation. But nobody really translates literally and nobody would read such a version. Take this simple line from Carlos Drummond de Andrade's "Congresso Internacional do Mêdo": "Provisòriamente não cantaremos o amor"; that is, "Provisionally not we shall sing the love." There is a third course, the faithful. This means an accurate reflection of the poem even if different words must be used. My ideal is to breathe in the Portuguese and breathe out the English.

One of the imperatives of faithfulness that we must strive for is fidelity of thought, or verbal accuracy, which does not mean mere literalism. Dudley Fitts, a former advocate of extreme literalism, has handsomely recanted that position: "Good translation involves more

than the communication of ideas and images. . . . It is an act of poetry." Poetry is not merely subject matter; it has a fourth or even fifth dimension and this is what Robert Frost said gets lost in translation.<sup>6</sup> The translator must always walk an uneasy tightrope between verbal accuracy, the original form, and poetic quality.

Some writers on translation have downgraded verbal accuracy as less important than other elements, and certainly verbal accuracy is not all. However, the reader of a supposedly factual article who finds glaring errors of fact may well doubt the whole article, and we may view a whole translation with suspicion when Drummond's title, "Os Ombros Suportam o Mundo," is published as "Shadows Bear the World." The translator may have been thinking (if at all) of the French "ombres." Our suspicion is justified, for having decided that shadows bear the world, he twists another line to fit his thesis:

Teus ombros suportam o mundo  
e êle não pesa mais que a mão de uma criança.

Your shadows bear the world  
And weigh no more than the hand of little child.<sup>7</sup>

My knowledge of Portuguese is not perfect. Poetic translation was a minor hobby until Ernesto Guerra Da Cal dragged me kicking and screaming into the field, and since it's a moonlighting activity, I've never had time to acquire the depth of knowledge needed by professors. But knowledge of a foreign language, in itself, has little to do with the quality of translation; many bilingual persons are incapable of translation. The literary translator must write his own language well; the poetic translator must be a poet or have a grasp of poetic techniques. If I have "dúvidas" about Portuguese, I can always ask someone, but *my* task, the task that I must do all by myself, is to produce a poem in English. My Portuguese is constantly improving and I am not advocating ignorance; I merely say that those American poets with no knowledge of Portuguese who contributed to the anthology of Brazilian poetry sponsored by the Academy of American Poets created better translations, working from literals, than a bilingual person with no poetic talent could have done.<sup>8</sup>

It is generally agreed that literary translation should be made into the native language that is in our bones and brains and hearts with all its connotations and complications. A recent proof of the wisdom of this policy is a bilingual edition of Henriqueta Lisboa's poetry with the English versions done by a Brazilian professor of English who has no feeling for nuances. The awkwardness begins with the title: *Poemas Escolhidos/Chosen Poems*. This verse of "Adeus à Lua" is a characteristic example of his style:

Da cornucópia os filtros  
de Circe feiticeira se esgotaram  
por antiquísimos.

From the cornucopia the filters  
of the bewitching Circe dried out  
for being too old.<sup>9</sup>

If the translator does not know the foreign language perfectly, he should recognize the fact; he should ask for help; he should at least listen to what he is saying. What trust can we put in translators so ignorant of Portuguese, so indolent with dictionaries, so oblivious of what they are saying, that they publish such howlers as “chicory coffee” for “chícara de café”; “whispered to the creaking of a sofa” for “cochichado ao canto dum sofá”; and “child” for “ninho”? Fernando Pessoa is made to say of Álvaro de Campos: “An uncle taught him Latin, when he was verging on becoming a priest”; that is, “Ensinou-lhe latim um tio beirão que era padre.” As Rolfe Humphries says in another connection: “This kind of a translator should be locked up in a cage with an original author, preferably carnivorous.”<sup>10</sup>

No effort is too great when there is a question of accuracy. We should read the foreign language as much as possible in order to learn painlessly by osmosis. Knowledgeable friends are invaluable. Long ago I was baffled in Drummond’s “Morte no Avião” by “placas estelares,” which surely did not mean such improbable objects as stellar metal plates. A Brazilian friend suggested that “placas” are also brooches. “Starry brooches” makes sense in the context, and the meaning of “placa” as brooch or cluster later appeared in dictionaries. Background reading is helpful too. If the poet mentions Antinoüs or Piero della Francesca, I want to know something about them. This reading hardly ever affects the translation but it gives me a feeling of security.

No one can be an authority on all special vocabularies in English, let alone foreign languages. Willard R. Trask has spoken feelingly of the occupational vocabularies he had to learn while translating Casanova’s memoirs, the work that won him a National Book Award. Here we may find it necessary to turn to the specialists. For instance, a staff writer on *Field and Stream* helped me with a phrase about a pointer dog. The advisor to the artillery units of the Second United States Army Corps assured me that shrapnel is a word still in common use; I investigated this because I had been told it was only a First World War word. “Gralhas” in a poem by Egito Gonçalves stopped me short, since the dictionaries offered a choice of crows, daws, rooks, jackdaws, magpies, and other fauna. Fortunately the poet had also used the Spanish “grajos,” the Spanish encyclopedia supplied the Latin name, and the National Audubon Society told me that these birds were rooks.<sup>11</sup>

Asking the poet, unless one is already in constant contact with him, is a last resort. Although my attitude is that poets can be better

employed than in writing to me, Haroldo de Campos, Joaquim-Francisco Coelho, Ferreira Gullar, Cassiano Nunes, Silviano Santiago, and many others have worked patiently with me to bring out all the connotations of their poems.

Of course we should verify facts, such as names of people or places. Where Cassiano Ricardo says Edgard Poe, we will say Edgar Poe, without comment. Names may be Anglicized if a form already exists, like the Amazon River; otherwise they should usually be left in the original. However, in Manuel Bandeira's "Evocação do Recife," I translated Rua da União and other street names to make them easier for the reader. One of the few criticisms to be made of Elizabeth Bishop's work is that in Bandeira's "Tragédia Brasileira" she confusingly translates some place names into the names of well-known American cities like Boulder and Glendale.<sup>12</sup>

A useful rule for faithful translation is the law of comparable effect. In Drummond's "Poema de Sete Faces," it was possible to reproduce the echo in the equivalent words: "Para que tanta perna, meu Deus, pergunta meu coração" and "Why so many legs, God, begs my heart." Perhaps we can't use alliteration where the poet did but we can manage it in some other line. Or perhaps he deliberately used bad spelling or grammar that we can reproduce in another place, like Jorge de Lima's "Loteria de Minas Gerá" becoming "Minas Gerais lotry." In one of Mário Dionísio's poems he gives an example of hackneyed rhymes, "olhos e abrolhos / paixão e coração." How flat it would be to say, "eyes and difficulties / passion and heart," even with a kindly footnote. The comparable example is "moon and June / love and dove."<sup>13</sup>

Concrete and experimental poetry demand a good deal of comparable effect rather than literal translation. Haroldo de Campos's untitled poem below begins with a reference to the famous first line of "Autopsicografia" by Pessoa, "O poeta é um fingidor," which I have published as "The poet is a feigner."<sup>14</sup> It was an amusing game to render "dactilospondeu" as "dactylrespondeesign" (dactyl-respond-spondeesign).

o poeta é um fin	the poet is a fane
o poeta é um his	the poet is a hiss
poe	poe
pessoa	pessoa
mallarmeios	mallarmeans
e aqui	and this
o meu	my
dactilospondeu:	dactylrespondeesign:

entre o	between the
fictor	feigner
e o	and the
histrío	histrío
eu	[15

The translator should not explain an idea if the poet does not. Explanation may have the effect of homogenizing, a practice that infuriates me. Homogenizing (I believe this meaning of the word is my own invention) is removing the poet's special flavor for fear of tainting the air with anything new or foreign; reducing his language to an inappropriate dead level of colloquial or literary speech; in fact, grinding everything up into instant pancake mix and with just as much flavor. Homogenizing is not only a literary crime; it's an impertinence. We should humbly assume that the poet has more genius than we have and that he knows more about writing than we do. Helen Hayes says of theatrical production: "I like my Shakespeare straight. I am sick and tired of everybody imposing his own smaller talent upon the much greater talent he is interpreting, of trying to put his own stamp on what someone else has created."<sup>16</sup> One example of homogenizing is turning Ovid's chariot races into modern horse races. Another is translating a line by Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa), "vivemos juntos e dois," into "nous vivons ensemble, et séparés." The sense is the same but surely Pessoa's phrase is more telling; here as usual the poet knows best. Bandeira's "Evocação do Recife" is a recollection of childhood with many childish turns of speech, so "Uma pessoa grande" should be "A grownup," not baldly "A man."<sup>17</sup>

An awkward situation concerns flora and fauna. What shall we do when there is no English equivalent? This problem has come up many times in Brazilian poetry because of the great variety of local words. Quite a satisfactory solution, which Gregory Rabassa says he uses too, is to combine the native name with the general English word, as in this verse by Cassiano Ricardo:

Abaixo os papagaios em geral, araras, canindés, maracanãs, tiribas, araguarís, periquitos. <sup>18</sup>	Down with parrots in general, arará macaws, canindé macaws, maracanã macaws, araguari macaws, tiriba parrots, parakeets.
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Or in this one by Bandeira:

Terra da castanha  
Terra da borracha  
Terra de biribá bacuri sapoti

Land of Brazil nuts  
Land of rubber  
Land of biribá fruit bacuri fruit sapodilla fruit<sup>19</sup>

Then there is regional usage. Brazil has a background of slavery much like that of our South, so it is quite easy to translate Brazilian references to slavery days in terms of southern usage. Although Jorge de Lima's title "Pai João" has been rendered as "Papa John" and "Old Joe,"<sup>20</sup> in speaking of a trusted old slave it is more natural to say "Uncle John." "Sinhô" is the equivalent of "Massa," and so on.

The translator must know the usages and connotations of the foreign language. A phrase that looks picturesque may really be so, or it may be a standard phrase, and a faithful translation depends on our knowledge of the difference. Jorge de Lima speaks of the slave laundress as "agarrada num / ferro de engomar," and this has been rendered as "fastened to / a pressing iron," truly a searing experience. Of course this standard phrase only means that she was always at the ironing, and since the poem is written in colloquial language, I said just that. Cassiano Ricardo uses the intriguing title, "Casamento de Rapôsa." For some reason this means an alternation of sunshine and rain, so I called my version "Sun and Showers." Another writer has pointed out that *¿Águila o Sol?* by Octavio Paz should not have been rendered as *Eagle or Sun?* because it means *Heads or Tails?*<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes the poet invents a word where he needs a special effect, and then we too will have to invent a word, hoping it will not sound like a bad translation. And if the poet repeats words or phrases, so must we. Exercising our "superior" sense of variety will only destroy his effect. Other linguistic difficulties have been discussed in one of my recent articles.<sup>22</sup>

A second imperative of faithfulness is fidelity of form. Much translation these days is in free verse regardless of the original form. One translator tells me that he prefers free verse because he considers that rhyme gives a stilted effect. Louis Untermeyer calls it taking the easy way out and William Jay Smith calls it doing your own thing, roughing up the original as much as possible, and dispensing with any metrical arrangement. Richard Wilbur is grateful to translators "who don't water me down to free verse" and believes that the prevalence of a period style and aesthetic in contemporary American translation "might

persuade the unwary that Syrians and Chileans came out of the same Midwestern workshop."<sup>23</sup> Here we have homogenizing again. The poet knew the form he wanted, and who are we to change it?

In addition to these protests by American poets, a statement by P. E. N. American Center stresses the importance of form: "Since the time of the first translators, they have always agreed that their task was to make a faithful rendering of the works they are translating. They know that it is not enough to convey the substance of these originals accurately; they must employ all their gifts of imagination and resourcefulness to make versions which mirror the original rhythms, assonances, structure and style. . . . Translation is therefore reconstruction and re-creation, a creative act of immense difficulty and complexity. A translator . . . must somehow suggest the rhythm and structure of the original, and write in a style that conveys the style of the original." Anne Sexton is in the minority: "Literal translation is best. When I am translated I want just the images, never mind the syllables and the rhymes. I'm proud of them, of my images."<sup>24</sup>

Form is supremely important in the sonnet because a sonnet has a peculiar impact not found in fourteen lines of free verse or even in fourteen lines of blank verse. Every time I translate a sonnet, I wonder how I ever got into this predicament. But one of my strongest convictions is: If you can't turn it into an English sonnet, leave it alone. Translation has been compared to other arts, like arranging a symphony for solo violin or harmonica, or reproducing a marble sculpture in bronze or plastic. Translating a sonnet into free verse is like reproducing the Venus de Milo in wet sand.

When Alceu Amoroso Lima was teaching at New York University, he complained that Cruz e Sousa (1861–98) had not been properly appreciated. In response, I translated "Vida Obscura." Although the result is not a great English sonnet, I am convinced that it is better than a free-verse translation. Considering the last line an anticlimax, I transposed the last two lines. This impertinence can be excused, I trust, by my belief that Cruz e Sousa's arrangement was rhyme-induced.

#### VIDA OBSCURA

Ninguém sentiu o teu espasmo obscuro,  
Ó ser humilde entre os humildes sêres.  
Embriagado, tonto dos prazeres,  
O mundo para ti foi negro e duro.  
Atravessaste no silêncio escuro  
A vida prêsa a trágicos deveres  
E chegaste ao saber de altos saberes  
Tornando-te mais simples e mais puro.



Ninguém te viu o sentimento inquieto,  
Magoado, oculto e aterrador, secreto,  
Que o coração te apunhalou no mundo.

Mas eu, que sempre te segui os passos,  
Sei que cruz infernal prendeu-te os braços  
E o teu suspiro como foi profundo!<sup>25</sup>

#### OBSCURE LIFE

No other sensed you, shuddering, obscure,  
oh meek among the meek fraternity.  
The world of pleasure-mad debauchery  
for you was black and bitter to endure.

You passed through life in darkness to immure  
yourself in tragic duty, silently.  
In you the height of knowledge came to be  
what made you but more simple and more pure.

No other glimpsed the passion unappeased,  
appalling, hidden, secret, and diseased,  
by which your heart was in this world impaled.

But I who always walked behind you, I  
alone can know how heavy was your sigh,  
to what infernal cross your arms were nailed.

Rhyme, of course, is one of the great challenges in English. Six centuries ago Chaucer was complaining about translating poetry:

And eke to me it ys a gret penaunce,  
Syth rym in Englissh hath such skarsete,  
To folowe word by word the curiosite  
Of Graunson, flour of hem that make in Fraunce.<sup>26</sup>

And Chaucer had more latitude than we have. Here he rhymes penance and France, scarcity and curiosity.

There is an aching lack of rhymes for words important in lyric poetry like "love," "life," and "heart," while "amor," "vida," and "coração" are rich in rhymes. With today's higher standards, we do not dare to use purely visual rhymes for "love," like "move" and "trove." Although this may sound like a statement of the obvious, the problem is ever present. That old standby, "dove," has become completely worn out and inadmissible except in the unlikely event that the poet is really talking about doves. Original poets have found such solutions as Wordsworth's "Beside the springs of Dove," and Oscar Hammerstein II's "Her skin is tender as DiMaggio's glove."<sup>27</sup> We translators must make do with an occasional "above." The gamut of "life" rhymes is

short and unhelpful: My wife plays the fife like a knife, so my life is rife with strife. The "heart" rhymes are slightly more numerous and slightly more helpful. We might be able to use "art," "apart," "depart," among others, but how often can we work in "chart," "mart," and "smart"?

Although it is a truism that English is far poorer in rhymes than the Romance languages, it is seldom mentioned that many of the rhymes we do have are of little use in lyric poetry. As we pore over the rhyming dictionary, we sigh at our own problems and realize the opportunities for original humorous verse. Look how brilliantly Tom Lehrer used the "ility" rhymes in his song, "When You Are Old and Gray."<sup>28</sup> He used sixteen of them, and he might have gone on for several more verses, seeing that the rhyming dictionary gives eight columns of "ility" rhymes. When will the translator ever have such a chance? Portuguese can rhyme not only the "ilidade" words but the "ade" words too, whereas we cannot rhyme "ability," "proximity," "pity," "lucidity," and so on.

These words bring us to another problem, masculine and feminine endings. Masculine endings ("oxítonos") are accented on the last syllable, feminine ("paroxítonos") on the penultimate, and have nothing to do with gender. In theory, I claim that the translator should follow the poet in using these. In practice, I find that a serious poem can seldom go into English with all feminine endings. Even if we can find the words, they will give a singsong effect when constantly used. And many times we cannot find them, as when the impact demands that the line end with "death" or "life" or "soul" or some such word without a synonym. "Morte," "vida," and "alma" have feminine endings. In some cases I have been able to use all masculine endings where the poet used all feminine; in other cases they have to be mixed. The English vocabulary is one of the largest in the world and to me it is the most beautiful, but it cannot always equal the sound-effects of other languages.

Higher standards again increase our difficulties by forbidding us to use inverted phrases. Given the rigid rhyme-scheme of a poem by Jorge de Sena, I struggled mightily with a line that wanted to rhyme with the wrong line. "A love sincere" or "my country dear" would have solved the problem, however tritely, but I had to settle for "my native country will be dear." Do not think that I am complacent about this line: the translation went through fifty versions, or thereabouts, and the published form was merely the one that the poet and I considered least obnoxious.<sup>29</sup> Of course an adjective following a noun is not always a true inversion. I once used "a world abjured," feeling that this gave a special effect.

Another frustration is that foreign rhymes may resemble their English equivalents very closely and yet the English words do not

rhyme, as in the “ity” words. In the Romance languages, all words ending in the equivalent of our “tion” can be rhymed, while we must cope with “ation,” “ition,” “ection,” and who knows how many others. There are also rhymes like these pairs in a Galician poem by Ernesto Guerra Da Cal: “católico-apostólico,” “luterán-puritán,” and “peninsular-solar,” which with the same spelling in English becomes “peninsular-solar.” Or this trio in Dora Vasconcellos’s “Consular,” where only one letter is different in the two languages: “oficial-formal-longitudinal” and “official-formal-longitudinal.”<sup>30</sup> A common rhyme in Romance languages is this Portuguese example, “história-memória-glória,” which in English is not even assonance.

One of the most difficult works I ever translated is Joaquim-Francisco Coelho’s tone poem, “Mar Elementar.” He sent me the manuscript and although I admired it, I considered it untranslatable. Much later I came across it again and noticed that in the accompanying letter he had said: “Mark the sound structure. Mark also the decomposition of sounds & words, e. g. *marulhando*, *mar olhando*, etc.” At that moment “seething” popped into my mind, “seething,” “sea-see-thing.” In a state of intense euphoria, I made the first draft, using “s” and “ee” (sea) instead of “m” and “ar” (mar). The author had emphasized that the poem was intended to be read aloud, so obviously the sound was more important than the literal sense and with his approval I deviated a little from the text, as in inserting “antiphons” and changing “torre” to “fort.” This is another example of comparable effect.

#### MAR ELEMENTAR

*à lembrança Mário Faustino*

Era o mar  
com sua buzina de bronze,  
o mar que à noite ouvíamos de longe  
marulhando, soprar.

Mas era um mar em massa elementar  
preliando na barra,  
mar contra ponte, pedra, laço, amarra,  
mar ambulante—a girar.

Todavia era mar—ê ele explodia  
em solidão e espuma,  
concha e poesia.

Era o mar,  
o mar nos seus vagares,  
o mar lançado a úmidos cantares,  
o mar de olhos virados para o ar.

Era o mar.  
Um mar em moto,  
soante.  
Um mar em luta,  
soluçante.  
Um mar em fogo, sideral, solar.

Ele era o mar:  
o mar mugindo à tórre,  
o mar fugindo à terra,  
o mar miramirando astros,  
o mar molhando marinheiros mastros,  
o mar levando naves de alabastro,  
o mar olhando pássaros passar.

Foi-se na frágua—fluida magia  
murmurando seu mito  
milenar.

Fêz-se outro mar em manso movimento,  
mar no sereno, mudo e sem tormento,  
uma placa de aço  
no luar.

ELEMENTAL SEA

*remembering Mário Faustino*

It was the sea  
with its trumpet of bronze.  
The sea we heard at night from afar  
seething, breathing antiphons.

But it was a sea of elemental scope  
battering on the bar,  
sea against bridge, boulder, knot, rope,  
wheeling sweeping sea.

Still it was sea, explosively,  
in solitude and spume,  
seashell and poetry.

It was the sea,  
the sea drifting,  
the sea launched and drenched with chanteys,  
the sea with eyes airward shifting.

It was the sea.  
A sea churning,  
leaping.  
A sea mourning,

weeping.  
A sea in flames, sidereal solar sea.

It was the sea.  
The sea screaming away at the fort,  
the sea streaming away from the shore.  
The sea seeseeing astral masses,  
the sea moistening mariners masts  
the sea balancing shallops of alabaster,  
the sea watching passerines pass.

It flowed away in tragedy—fluid magic majesty  
murmuring its millennial  
mythology.

It formed another sea in easy weaving,  
silent sea, serene, ungrrieving,  
a sheet of steel heaving  
in the moonlight.<sup>31</sup>

Even where rhymes are concerned, the translator's life *can* be beautiful and sometimes a rhyme bustles up, begging to be used, as in António Nobre's "Purinha":

E seu cabelo em cachos, cachos d'uvas,  
E negro como a capa das viúvas . . .

Her hair in clusters, clusters of grapes,  
and black as the black of widows' capes . . .

Sebastião Diniz says in "Bestiário Africano":

Leão real  
repousando após a refeição  
(gazela ao natural)

Royal lion  
reposing after his repast  
(gazelle au naturel)

This is the refrain of Bandeira's "Belém do Pará":

Bembelelém  
Viva Belém!  
Nortista gostosa  
Eu te quero bem.

Ding dong bell  
Belém live well!  
Belle of the north  
I love you well.<sup>32</sup>

Another source of cheer is the growing use of assonance in English-language poetry. When I used to work on Spanish poetry, I had to choose between rhyme and nonrhyme. Now assonance and consonance are acceptable, as in my version below. On first reading Elizabeth Bishop's translation of Drummond's "Poema de Sete Faces," I thought she had accomplished a tour de force in the sixth verse:

Mundo mundo vasto mundo,  
se eu me chamasse Raimundo,  
seria uma rima, não seria uma solução.  
Mundo mundo vasto mundo,  
mais vasto é meu coração.

Universe, vast universe,  
if I had been named Eugene  
that would not be what I mean  
but it would go into verse  
faster.  
Universe, vast universe,  
my heart is vaster.<sup>33</sup>

Later I realized that "Eugene" ignores the important relationship between "mundo" and "Raimundo." Although I still prefer her line, "Universe, vast universe," to my own, the following preserves the relationship and is closer to the text:

World world immense world,  
if my name were Raymond World  
it would rhyme, not be an answer.  
World world immense world,  
my heart is immenser.<sup>34</sup>

As for meter, I have used strict meter in medieval poetry, in sonnets and other fixed forms, and in Horatian poems by Ricardo Reis (Fernando Pessoa). Generally, in modern verse, I find accentual meter more interesting to the ear. Length of line usually approximates the original with no special effort. We all know that free verse is not an arbitrary chopping up of prose. The translation, like the original, must contain poetic quality in order to stand without the help of meter and rhyme. I don't know any guide for this but the translator's ear. Rolfe Humphries says: "The translator should read every line aloud; he should saturate himself with the cadence and rhythms; is it asking too much of him to lend an ear? Or to have one?"<sup>35</sup>

The following poem by Cassiano Nunes begins with "Menino-moço," followed by "menina-moça." The poverty of standard English words for the stages of youth makes these phrases untranslatable. "Lad," "youth," "maiden," and "damsel" are antiquated. "Child-boy" and "child-girl," "little boy-big boy" and "little girl-big girl" have only the merit of repeated sounds. *Roget's International Thesaurus* lists a great many other words, chiefly obsolete or slang and all useless for this situation. "Boy-man" and "girl-woman" are the least unsatisfactory forms and in any case the English-speaking reader would not recognize the echo of the sixteenth-century Bernardim Ribeiro. "No palco" and "em cena" must both be rendered as "on stage." In the last two verses, "metamorfose" and "rosa" have assonance but "metamorphosis" and "rose" do not, necessitating a slight rearrangement of the words.

## MILAGRE

*Roselândia* deu a um novo tipo de  
rosa o nome de Cacilda Becker.  
(Do noticiário)

Menino-moço,  
vi-te, pela primeira vez,  
menina-moça  
(mais menina que moça)  
e logo rolavas espetacularmente  
(meu primeiro pasmo)  
por longa escadaria,  
ao som fermentado da “Lenda do Beijo”.  
Mas tua decisão era sincera.

Partiste para outro tipo de bailado:  
o drama.  
E viveste o amor, o ciúme, o ódio,  
a ambição e a renúncia,  
no palco  
e fora do palco.  
Plenamente.  
Majestosamente.

Havia instantes  
em que, em cena,  
paravas, silenciavas—  
e um raio de luz,  
desconhecido dos eletricitas,  
perpassava, nítido, pelo palco.  
A Poesia.

Sem dúvida, lograste a glória.  
E uma glória ainda maior  
que desdenha a convivência  
da publicidade meretrícia:  
a serena aceitação do absurdo da vida,  
a certeza de Deus.

E ainda dizem que não há mais milagres!  
Nunca houve tantos.

Acho muito natural  
esta metamorfose:

Cacilda Becker  
transformou-se numa rosa.

MIRACLE

Roseland has named a new variety of  
rose for Cacilda Becker.  
(News item)

Boy-man  
I saw you for the first time,  
girl-woman  
(more girl than woman)  
and then you rolled spectacularly  
(my first amazement)  
down a long stairway  
to the saccharine strains of "Legend of the Kiss."  
But your decision was sincere.

You departed to another kind of dancing:  
drama.  
And you lived love, jealousy, hate,  
ambition, renunciation,  
on stage  
and off stage.  
Entirely.  
Majestically.

There were moments  
on stage when you  
stopped, fell silent—  
and a ray of light  
alien to the electricians  
flitted distinctly over the scene.  
Poetry.

Surely you achieved glory.  
And a still greater glory  
that disdained the connivance  
of cheap publicity:  
the serene acceptance of the absurd in life,  
the certainty of God.

And they say there are no miracles any more!  
Never so many before.

This transformation  
seems natural to me:

Cacilda Becker metamorphosed  
into a rose.<sup>36</sup>

Much foreign free verse is unpunctuated and this causes confusion in English, a language that can be ambiguous with its few verb forms, its



all-purpose noun-adjective-verbs, and so forth. Spacing is often helpful in the absence of punctuation. The translation of an African poem startles us with: "Your temple is full of merchants who sell your cross Christ." A glance at the French original shows that "cross" should have been separated from "Christ."<sup>37</sup> Another useful dodge for clarity is capitalization. When Antonio Machado says to a nun, "eres luz," we can say, "you are Light." To read "light" as an adjective would be disastrous. In two poems I have capitalized "Host" to show that it is the sacramental host, not an army or a party-giver. The season of Spring must often be capitalized in nature poetry where the word might be taken to mean a source of water.

In addition to fidelity of thought and of form, we must observe fidelity of tone. This means the reproduction of flippancy or earnestness, of colloquial or literary speech, and that kind of thing. Sometimes we will have to sacrifice an English word that is a perfect synonym, just because its tone is wrong. And when the word even rhymes, our sacrifice will represent the last full measure of devotion. Infidelity of tone is a hallmark of the inept translator. In Drummond's "José," one translator uses colloquial and literary English in the same verse, while the original is in standard Portuguese. One of Bandeira's most famous poems, written in very simple language, ends with a word that tolls on the ear, "Profundamente." Here our man goes all fancy with "Oh so profoundly."<sup>38</sup>

But even a poor translation may be helpful. If it is accurate, we can verify our interpretation. Or it may have some small virtue. A translation of Felipe d'Oliveira's "O Epitáfio que Não Foi Gravado" caused me to change "mouth" to "lips," a great improvement. Aubrey Fitz Gerald Bell's version of "Eno sagrado, en Vigo" by Martin Codax is really horrible, in spite of his erudition, but it has a useful rhyme scheme that I stole without compunction.<sup>39</sup>

It is obligatory to let a translation ripen. After making the first draft, I always put it away for at least three weeks and then look at it with reasonable objectivity. The only time I ever submitted a translation right after making it, because the editor was hurrying me, I spent the next two months sending changes. This is no way to work and I haven't done it again. "Making" is exact, for of course translations are never finished. As Paul Valéry said of poems, they are merely abandoned.<sup>40</sup>

The Hungarian-Brazilian translator and critic, Paulo Rónai, says that my work gives "the false idea that translating poetry is easy." This should be the translator's aim. To paraphrase Pessoa: The translator is a feigner. / So completely should he feign / that the pain he truly suffers / is never seen as pain. In moments of despair we can take comfort from

Valéry's statement that a good translator is both greater and rarer than an author who is free to choose his means.<sup>41</sup>

NOTES

1. "Translation, the Art of Failure," *Saturday Review* (7 October 1961), pp. 17–19.
2. *Manifesto on Translation* (New York: P. E. N. American Center, 1969), p. 1.
3. Briussov, tr. from the Portuguese version in *Revista de Letras* (Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Assis, Brazil), 16: 275 (1974); Nunes, note of Christmas 1975 to the author.
4. "Notes on Translation," *Review* (New York: Center for Inter-American Relations), 4/5:88–94 (Winter 1971/Spring 1972).
5. "Autopsychography" ("Autopsicografia") and "The Specter" ("O Mostrengo"), in Américo da Costa Ramalho, *Portuguese Essays*, 2nd ed. rev. (Lisbon: National Secretariat for Information, 1968), pp. 57, 69–70.
6. Fitts, "The Poetic Nuance," in Reuben A. Brower, *On Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 39; Frost, in William Jay Smith, "The Hardest Work," *Translation* 1:39 (Winter 1973–74).
7. Tr. Harold Morland, in Neville Braybrooke and Elizabeth King, *Translation, Second Series* (London: Phoenix Press, 1947), p. 47.
8. Elizabeth Bishop and Emanuel Brasil, *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1972).
9. *Poemas Escolhidos/Chosen Poems*, tr. Hécio Veiga Costa (Belo Horizonte, 1974), pp. 106, 107.
10. "Chicory coffee," verbal information from Erico Veríssimo in regard to one of his novels; "Creaking," in Eça de Queiroz, *Cousin Bazilio*, tr. Roy Campbell (London: Max Reinhardt, 1953), p. 17, cited in review by H. V. Livermore, *Atlante* (London), 2:49 (January 1954); "Child," in *Fernando Pessoa IV*, tr. Jonathan Griffin (Oxford: Carcanet Press, 1971), p. 15; Pessoa, *Selected Poems*, tr. Edwin Honig (Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1971), p. 166, original in his *Obras em Prosa* (Rio de Janeiro: Companhia José Aguilar Editora, 1974), p. 98; Humphries, "Latin and English Verse—Some Practical Considerations," in Brower, *On Translation*, p. 65.
11. Trask, speech at the American Translators Association convention, 1966; Gonçalves, "Casa do Lavrador—Aranjuez," in *Os Arquivos do Silêncio* (Lisboa: Portugália Editora, 1963), p. 117.
12. Bishop and Brasil, *Anthology*, p. 9.
13. Mário Dionísio, "Pintura Fácil Poesia Fácil," in *Memória dum Pintor Desconhecido* (Lisboa: Portugália Editora, 1965), p. 14.
14. Pessoa, in Ramalho, *Portuguese Essays*, original: p. 73; translation, p. 57.
15. Unpublished poem and translation reproduced by courtesy of Haroldo de Campos; poem will appear in his *Xadrez de Estrelas* (1976).
16. *A Gift of Joy* (New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 76.
17. Ovid discussed in Humphries, "Latin and English Verse," p. 65; Pessoa, "O Guardador de Rebanhos, VIII," tr. Andrée Crabbé Rocha in Isabel Meyrelles, *Anthologie de la Poésie Portugaise* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 147; Bandeira, tr. Manoel Cardozo, in José Neistein and Manoel Cardozo, *Poesia Brasileira Moderna; a Bilingual Anthology* (Washington: Brazilian-American Cultural Institute, Inc., 1972), pp. 54, 55.
18. "Vamos Caçar Papagaios," in *Vamos Caçar Papagaios* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1947), p. 32; omitted from his *Poesias Completas* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editôra, 1957).
19. "Belém do Pará"; complete translation to be published in *The Literary Review* (Brazilian issue).
20. "Papa John" tr. John Nist, *Modern Brazilian Poetry; An Anthology* (Bloomington: In-

- diana University Press, 1962), p. 49; "Old Joe" tr. Angel Flores, *American Prefaces* 7: 162–63 (Winter 1942).
21. Lima, "Papa John," in Nist, *Modern Brazilian Poetry*, p. 49; Cassiano Ricardo, *Poesias Completas* (cf. note 18), p. 67, translation to be published in *The Literary Review* (Brazilian issue); Paz, in David L. Gold, "On Quality in Translation: II," *Babel; Revue Inter-nationale de la Traduction* 18, no. 4:29 (1972).
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  23. Untermeyer, in Allen Tate, *The Translation of Poetry* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1972), p. 36; Smith, "The Hardest Work," p. 43; Wilbur, statement in *Translation* 2: 8, 7 (Winter 1974–75).
  24. P. E. N. American Center, *Manifesto*, pp. 1–2; "Craft Interview with Anne Sexton," *The New York Quarterly*, no. 3:12 (Summer 1970).
  25. *Poesias Completas* (Rio: Livraria-Editora Zelio Valverde, 1944), pp. 169–70.
  26. "The Complaint of Venus," lines 79–82.
  27. Wordsworth, "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways"; Hammerstein, "Bloody Mary," *South Pacific*, recording, Columbia ML 4180.
  28. *Songs by Tom Lehrer*, recording, Reprise R 6216.
  29. "Quem a Tem . . ." original and translation in Jean R. Longland, *Selections from Contemporary Portuguese Poetry* (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: Harvey House, Inc., 1966), pp. 47, 46.
  30. Da Cal, "Broadway, Very Late," in *Rio de Sonho e Tempo* (Vigo: Galaxia, 1963), p. 49; Vasconcellos, *Surdina do Contemplado* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editôra, 1958), p. 30.
  31. Unpublished poem, translation, and quotation from letter of 14 March 1965, reproduced by courtesy of Joaquim-Francisco Coelho.
  32. Nobre, *Só* (Lisboa: Guillard, Aillaud & cia., 1898), p. 39; Diniz, *Panorama; Revista Portuguesa de Arte e Turismo*, 4. série, no. 30: 26 (June 1969); Bandeira, cf. note 19.
  33. Original and translation in Bishop and Brasil, *An Anthology*, 62–63.
  34. Complete translation to be published in Orville Crowder Miller, *World Anthology of Living Poets*.
  35. Humphries, "Latin and English Verse," p. 63.
  36. "Milagre" in *Jornada* (São Paulo: Clube de Poesia, 1972), pp. 40–41; original and translation reproduced by courtesy of Cassiano Nunes; translation discussed by the poet in "Nossa Amiga Jean," *Correio Braziliense*, 3 August 1974, p. 4.
  37. Tchicaya U Tam'si, "Le Contempteur," original and translation by Gerald Moore in *Delos; a Journal on & of Translation* 3:55, 54 (1969).
  38. Drummond, *In the Middle of the Road*, tr. John Nist (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965), pp. 52–57; cf. translation by Jean R. Longland, *Chicago Review* 27, no. 2: 67, 69 (Autumn 1975); Bandeira, "Profundamente," in Nist, *Modern Brazilian Poetry*, pp. 23–24.
  39. Oliveira in Leonard S. Downes, *An Introduction to Modern Brazilian Poetry: Verse Translations* (São Paulo: Clube de Poesia do Brasil, 1954), p. 24; Bell, "The Seven Songs of Martin Codax," *The Modern Language Review* 18:166–67 (April 1923); Codax tr. Jean R. Longland in Angel Flores, *Medieval Age* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1963), pp. 254–55.
  40. *The Art of Poetry*, tr. Denise Folliot (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 140–41.
  41. Rónai, tr. from letter of 29 July 1968 to the author; Valéry (cf. note 40), p. 292.

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